

## EXPERIENCES

### BEVERAGES



consumption through a panel of tea experts who have extensive knowledge of all things tea. There is an in-house nursery which has tea plant cuttings that are planted in the field.

As part of the tour that takes you through the tea gardens there is also a tasting session where Anup Mehra, Estate Manager explains, “Fermenting gives body and colour to the tea. We add 100 ml of water and five grams of tea and leave it to brew for five minutes and pour it out for tasting. The aroma, liquor and taste is better in orthodox teas as compared to CTC. Also, tea is best had without milk.” The tea tasting session has three grades each of orthodox and CTC teas and the process is to slurp a sip, allow it to coat your taste palate and then spit it out.

This tea trial was organized by Novotel Guwahati GS Road in association with Wild Mahseer. Back at the hotel after a packed couple of days of all things tea, there was more in store with a foot reflexology session aptly called ‘Walk on the air’. This session uses handpicked green tea leaves mixed with honey and apple vinegar which acts like an excellent scrub.

My therapist Plistina from Shillong started the session with a warm towel massage of my feet and then used circular strokes as well as her knuckles especially behind my foot to massage my feet with the mix. She also pressed the back of my feet with her thumbs that felt like an acupuncture massage. The half hour session was completed using a hot towel to neatly wipe off the scrub leaving my feet completely rejuvenated.

Following this was a tea-themed dinner designed by Executive Chef Sujit Chakraborty based on his research on different flavours of tea. The meal itself was a three course affair with non-vegetarian tapas like Jasmine Green Tea Chicken Tender, Lemon tea Grilled Prawns and vegetarian tapas like Chamomile Hummus with Sesame Lavash and Earl Grey Polenta Bites with Mushroom Ragout. The Masala Chai flavoured thupka (or soup) in chicken or vegetarian options served were also an excellent interpretation of the local flavours of the region.

The main course had options like Chai Spiced Chicken Supreme with Tartar Potatoes and Cajun Vegetables and Green Tea Crusted Baked Tofu with Soba Noodles and Lemon Tea Sauce each of which had a light flavour of tea that never overpowered the dish. Ending the meal on a sweet note we sampled the Orange Spiced Earl Grey Cake with Mix Berry Sorbet and all I could think was that tea is certainly a great leveller.

I also instantly connected with William Ewart Gladstone’s words as well: “If you are cold, tea will warm you; if you are too heated, it will cool you; if you are depressed, it will cheer you; if you are excited, it will calm you.” The entire tea experience was certainly all about understanding this very ethos and my tryst with Assam tea could certainly not have been better.