

Per Oscar Brekell on a visit to an organic tea estate in Shimizu City, Shizuoka Prefecture

Sharing the Charm of Japanese Tea with the World

Swedish-born Per Oscar Brekell is a Tokyo-based certified Japanese Tea Instructor conducting activities to promote the spread of Japanese tea.

SATO KUMIKO

“I think the 2022 harvest of Japanese tea will be of very good quality. Please give it a try,” says Swedish-born Per Oscar Brekell with sparkling eyes. Brekell is a certified Nihoncha (Japanese Tea) Instructor¹, having earned a qualification that is difficult even for a Japanese person to obtain, and has continued to work out of his base in Tokyo to communicate the appeal of Japanese tea.

Brekell developed an interest in Japan while studying world history as a high school student, and began to read books on Japanese culture. As he read, what captured his interest was *sado*

(or *chado*), the art of the tea ceremony that involves serving guests in a special space and specific manner.

“I wanted to know what this Japanese tea, which as a source of tea ceremony culture even came to represent Japan, tasted like,” explains Brekell. He found and bought some Japanese *sencha* tea from a tea specialty store and tried it out. His first impression was that it tasted bitter. But over the course of four or five cups, he began to notice the appeal of Japanese tea as it gave off a fresh, forest-like aroma.

“Strangely, I felt as if it refreshed the inside of my body, producing a calm-

ness. From that point on, I wanted to drink Japanese tea every day,” he recounts.

Although he entered university as a philosophy student, Brekell switched to the Japanese language department so that he could learn Japanese first, and in 2010 gained the opportunity to study abroad at Gifu University.

At one of the Japanese tea cafés that Brekell visited on a trip to Tokyo during that time, he encountered a special tea that would change the direction of his life.

“It was tea from Tobetto, a tea estate located on mountain slopes at an altitude of around 800 meters in Shizuoka City, Shizuoka Prefecture. With just one sip, it produced a vivid image of a mountainous landscape in my mind. That was followed by a deep and lingering aftertaste.”

The store not only carried blended teas but also distinctive teas from single tea

1. A qualification administered by the NPO Nihoncha Instructor Association. (Reference: <https://www.nihoncha-inst.com/english.html>)

- 1 Per Oscar Brekell at a matcha tea café in Nihonbashi, Tokyo
- 2 Brekell inspects new-growth tea leaves at Uji City, Shirakawa, Kyoto Prefecture
- 3 Brekell explains tea-tasting methods to a group of foreigners (2018)

producing regions around Japan or single varieties, and it was here that Brekell realized the true depth of Japanese tea.

“Just as there are sommeliers for wine and baristas for coffee, there should also be experts with proper knowledge about Japanese tea who can convey its charm to others. Japanese tea is an indulgence that has a special value on par with such beverages,” says Brekell.

It was at this point that Brekell decided to make a job involving Japanese tea his lifework, and in 2013 he returned to Japan. In 2014, he passed the Nihoncha (Japanese Tea) Instructor examination, which requires broad knowledge about Japanese tea, on his second attempt. He went on to study hard as a trainee at the Shizuoka Tea Center located in Shizuoka Prefecture, one of Japan’s leading tea producing regions, and began activities to popularize Japanese tea at home and abroad.

In particular, Brekell has conducted workshops where participants make and drink Japanese tea under his guidance. These workshops were held all over the world prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and proved increasingly popular especially with people from Europe and the United States. Brekell has also seen a significant response from his activities on social media, and in 2018 he even began selling Japanese tea based on his own selections. Each brand is accompanied by introductory descriptions from Brekell about its distinctive taste, encouraging consumers to enjoy finding a Japanese tea that suits their preferences.

In 2021, he fulfilled his dream to publish his book *A Beginner’s Guide to Japanese Tea* in English along with its French counterpart, *Le guide du thé japonais*. As Brekell explains, when he first wanted to know more about Japanese tea back in Sweden, there was almost no information available. “I wanted to make a comprehensive guidebook for people around the world who are interested in Japanese tea or who wanted to try it out,” says Brekell, explaining how he managed to accomplish one of those ambitions.

“I have one more big dream,” he says.



That is to one day serve Japanese tea at the dinner following the Nobel Prize Ceremony that is held in Sweden each year.

“Japanese tea is a drink packed with wisdom that condenses Japanese culture. I think it is perfect for an event that

honors those who have contributed to a peaceful and prosperous future for mankind,” explains Brekell.

It is a dream full of thought and worthy of Brekell as someone who knows the depth and flavor of Japanese tea. 



Per Oscar Brekell’s book *A Beginner’s Guide to Japanese Tea* and its French counterpart, *Le Guide du thé japonais* (both published in 2021)