

# Assam, India Tea Adventure 2022

## J. Thomas and Company Auctioneers – Guwahati



J. Thomas & Company started in 1861 when India tea plantations were British owned. They are the world's largest tea auctioneer in the world with the most tea tasters and auctioneers. About one third of Indian tea auctions are operated by J Thomas & Company. They have more than 150 employees overall with more tea tasters and auctioneers than their competitors. Many of their employees are top in their fields. The company is one of nine brokers with the Guwahati Tea Auction Center.

In the process of tea auctioning the brokers play an important part. This massive responsibility they perform a variety of tasks starting with coordinating warehouse storage including security and preservation of the tea. Probably the most important task is tea tasting by evaluating a sample of each tea and making a price recommendation which helps in setting and modifying a reserve price for the sellers. The brokers are involved in promoting the teas by keeping abreast of current marketing trends and visiting the tea gardens to consult with growers. Once all the pertinent information has been gathered a catalog, now online, must be prepared. On the designated date, the broker conducts an auction and distributes post auction data and is responsible to see that timely payments are made, and the tea is picked up at the warehouse on time. Finally, it is the broker that must settle any disputes that arise. During growing season this occurs on a weekly basis. Along the way, the seller is responsible for some broker fees but both buyers and sellers pay a commission to the brokerage firm based on the selling price and quantity sold, respectively.



Our visit to J Thomas & Co., began in the Guwahati office of Sanjay Choudhury, Senior Vice President of the company. He welcomed us and offered a brief explanation of tea tasting. He showed us a fabulous poster listing tea tasting terms and the grades of tea. I wish I had that poster when



my sister Brenda and I took those online tea cupping courses with the World Tea Academy. It took me forever to understand that the grades of tea were not about quality per se but more about size and that each grade had a purpose. I wanted to keep it, but he actually found a nice new one that I could take home.



The next step was the tasting room which is known to tea tasters everywhere. Even though a small part has been walled off, I think it is still the longest tasting room in the world. The room is very white and bright which is an important element in the process. There were rows of windows to reflect the natural light throughout the room to reflect the most contrast when observing the tea. Once we were inside, the professionals were all set up for us and ready to share their expertise. They actually expected us to share our reactions, as well.



First up I sampled some green teas. Green tea is not my cup choice and most of the teas tasted grassy to me. But the last one had that smooth, savory taste which I recognized as umami. I was surprised and I think the taster was, too! The professional went through the various green teas making comments on the liquor, the infused leaves and the dry leaf. One of the teas in that group was a golden tips and the professional said that he liked that the best. Well, yes. Golden Tips tea is hard to beat for smooth sweet flavor.



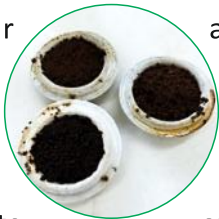
The experts pointed out the teas that were not so great and the ones that were superior. One of the black teas being tasted was from Hookmol and he gave it high praise. We had been to that factory and I mentioned that he did not use the roller so his CTC was flat shards rather than the typical pellets, You could clearly see that in the samples. The taster pointed out that Bhaskar Hazarika of Hookmol is always improving his tea and it always brings high prices at auction.



They had set up about twenty samples of black CTC tea for comparison. They were waiting for us to add milk to the samples. They taste the CTC with milk because that is how the Indians drink it and the buyers want to taste it like the consumers will. I moved down the row slurping but not spitting and selected the one I thought was best. Amanda and I agreed but the taster selected a different sample.



.They showed us comparisons of liquor and of good teas and better teas explaining tested the teas. They surprised us by saying the shelf life. They also showed us that the tea because they will add a quality of tea would be a waste



appearance and infused leaf appearance what they looked for as they tasted and quality of the tea actually affects the chaiwallahs buy the lesser quality CTC lot of milk and sugar and to use a high of flavor. At the end of the presentation the professional taster did all 20 cups in 3 minutes. He looked at the dry leaf made a comment and tasted the liquor and made a comment. I actually recognized some the terms he used. I know one was bakey. Another taster made notes during the quick tasting. Those pros can taste up to 900 cups a day. When the tasting is complete the experts will give a suggested price for each tea



Across the room several mismatched bags and boxes were stacked on a table. They were samples that planters had sent in for tasting. The experts will taste them and make comments to help the planters improve their teas. Nearby a young man was working with packets in a large drawer. He was preparing samples to send to the buyers for an upcoming auction. It seems that next to the growers, the brokers are responsible for much of the work in a successful tea auction.

We were at J. Thomas and Company for just about 2 hours but a lot of preparation on their part was required for our visit. We all thanked them profusely and reminded them to get my poster as a memento. In addition, I have several cell phone videos to help me remember that visit.

