

We saw hands-on tea blending at the Dugar Consumer Products Factory, which is a successful, but smaller operation. In comparison, Jakes next took us to a huge tea blending factory owned by McLeod Russel which dates back to 1869.



Information from their websites states that the company operates 31 tea gardens in Assam and two gardens in Alipurduar, Bengal. Further, it has gardens in Africa and Vietnam. The company employs over 73,000 people across tea estates and produces about 73 million kg of tea every year. At one time this was the largest tea production company in India. However in the past 5 years they have been selling off tea estates to stay solvent and is currently involved in a take-over bidding war. They do still own the world's largest tea garden -



Monabarie Tea Estate, At any rate, McLeod Russel is an enormous operation working with tea from the tea bush all the way to worldwide shipping of a final packaged bulk product. That's the "whole enchilada" as we say in Texas. Once selling wholesale only, McLeod Russel is now offering packaged tea for retail directly to the public on their website.



On one level of the building is the necessary tasting room, but we did not see it. But for a tour of the blending unit in Guwahati we had to complete a detailed information form and "suit up" to go into the blending room. We wore special shirts, hair coverings, booties, and masks but no gloves???. Gary looked like he was ready to perform surgery. There were not many workers around, but the room was huge and the loud machines were grinding away. We were told that tea in the blenders was an order from Starbucks! From the company website: *The blending unit has a daily blending capacity of up to 40 tons of tea. It houses two separate bulk blending lines that can blend Orthodox and CTC teas. The facility blends exclusively for McLeod Russel's Western European, Asian Middle East and North American clientele.*



About the Guwahati blending factory. The bulk blends created are packaged in various bulk packaging options as per the customer's requirements. It also has a Multi Highrise Storage Racking System for warehousing of teas which can stock the equivalent of a hundred 40ft containers of tea. The Guwahati blending unit commenced operations in mid-2017 and has ISO-22000 accreditation. We adopt a comprehensive quality control program that guarantees our blend standards are coordinated to the exacting level required by our clients.



Currently the blending unit is managed and certified by SGS (Standard Global Services) to make sure the blended tea complies with all international standards. SGS started as grain inspectors on the docks of Rouen, France and today SGS monitors consignments from the “tea leaf, flavor additives and herbs worldwide through crop monitoring, fumigation, pre-production hygiene inspections, initial and during production checks, final random inspection (pre-shipment), container inspection/temperature monitoring and loading supervision up to the time the bulk tea is loaded for shipment.” In addition to monitoring and testing, they provide various certifications and training – both face to face and online courses. SGS is also committed to continuing sustainability and social accountability. They offer support on every issue of food safety, including new technology and ever-changing governmental regulations.



The attached warehouse is enormous and fully automated (But not temperature controlled and very hot). The blending unit is located near the Inland Container Depot where most of their teas are exported.

The concept of portable shipping containers dates to 1956. **An Inland Container Depot (ICD)** is a container storage facility situated in the interior, away from major ports. They are used to store and move containers before and after transporting them to the seaport. Because they are not located near ocean or river routes, Inland Container Depots are also sometimes called the ‘Dry Ports’. However, they are more than storage facilities for containers. They are inland ports able to handle all customs needs for the import and export of goods. Services offered by the ICDs include receiving and dispatching of cargo, document clearance, temporary storage of cargo, servicing and repair facilities of containers and lower transportation costs. ICDs also offer optimal safety and security benefits and relieve congestion in the port areas. In 2022 there are 129 Inland Container Depots in India.



The Guwahati Inland Container Depot was built by the North East Frontier Railway in 1986. The depot is located at Amingaon, about 10 miles from Guwahati and is the only dry port in the region. This particular inland container depot is basically a seasonal Inland Container Depot that mainly handles tea containers for export during the tea season. The bulk tea is loaded in containers and transported by rail to Haldia and then the port of Kolkata. A 40-foot container holds 1200 bags of bulk tea. The current facility Manager, Captain Tridib Phukan, formerly served as a submarine captain in the Indian Navy.

