



# **TEA MASTERS CUP OFFICIAL RULES & REGULATION**

**Approved by TMC Board of Directors**

**2015**

## 1. General Provisions

1.1. Tea Masters Cup (hereafter “the Cup”) is an international competition among tea industry professionals (hereafter “Masters”).

1.2. The Cup aims to:

- foster the development of high cultural traditions involving tea consumption;
- raise the prestige of careers in the tea industry
- identify promising tea industry professionals and aid their career growth and professional development
- foster professional development and exchange of ideas among specialists in the hospitality industry, the specialized retail/wholesale industry and the tea processing industry
- improve product and service quality in establishments where tea is consumed
- develop and promote new approaches to preparing and serving tea
- raise the status of tea culture among consumers

1.3. The Cup comprises events in three categories: Tea Preparation, Tea Pairing, and Tea Tasting.

1.4. The owner and organizer of the Cup is Tea Masters Cup, Ltd, Rooms 05-15, 13A/F, South Tower, World Finance Centre, Harbour City, 17 Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong (hereafter “TMC”).

1.5. The Cup is held once annually and consists of national qualifying competitions and the final competition. The final competition is held after the completion of national qualifying competitions in countries that have organizations authorized to hold such competitions by TMC. If the number of participants in the national competitions is sufficiently large, multiple competition rounds may be conducted as necessary.

1.6. In referring to the final stage of the Cup, the following format is used: “Tea Masters Cup International”. In referring to the national qualifying competitions, the following format is used: “Tea Masters Cup + *country name*” (for example, “Tea Masters Cup Russia”). If necessary, a year may be appended to the designation of a final competition (for example, “Tea Masters Cup International 2015”).

1.7. National organizations authorized by TMC (hereafter “national bodies”) coordinate national qualifying competitions, establish and maintain communication with the Masters and promote the Cup in their countries.

1.8. When designating a national body, TMC gives priority to organizations that:

- conduct operations inside the country
- are ready and willing to hold competitions in accord with these Official Rules and Regulations
- are prepared to take other necessary actions and fulfil their obligations to TMC, as specified in the relevant agreements.

Other factors taken into consideration:

- absence of conflict of interest with market participants in organizing industry-wide events
- availability of material and human resources
- previous experience organizing similar competitions
- the organization’s level of expertise and reputation in the country

Additional factors may be considered if deemed necessary by TMC.

1.9. English is the designated language of the final stage of the Cup and of the official correspondence by TMC. National qualifying competitions and relevant intra-country correspondence may be conducted in any language convenient to the organizers and participants.

1.10. To conduct the final stage of the Cup, at the beginning of each annual competition cycle TMC forms the Principal Organizing Committee (hereafter “the Committee”) and appoints a Head Judge of the Cup who automatically becomes a member of the Committee.

1.11. To conduct national qualifying competitions, a country’s national body forms a national organizing committee and appoints a Head Judge of the national competition. National organizing committees and national Head Judges coordinate their activities with the Committee and the Head Judge of the Cup.

1.12. The start date of each annual competition cycle is determined by TMC. As a rule, the final stage of the Cup must take place before the end of the current competition cycle.

## **2. Rule violations and the appeals process**

- 2.1. Adherence to the Official Rules and Regulations (hereafter “the Rules”) by organizers and participants at every stage of the Cup is mandatory.
- 2.2. A Master who violates any provision of the Rules may be disqualified, except in cases where such violation was unavoidable due to special circumstances.
- 2.3. A decision to disqualify a Master is made by the organizing committee of the competition during which the violation took place. Such a decision, together with reasons for disqualification, including a detailed description of the violation, should be communicated to the Master within 7 business days of the decision. If the decision to disqualify was made by a national organizing committee, a copy of the decision must be submitted to the Committee within 7 business days of the decision.
- 2.4. Potential violations of the Rules by the judges are also investigated by the organizing committee of the competition during which these violations took place. If a violation is sufficiently serious, a judge who commits it may be removed from the competition and barred from further service as a judge, temporarily or permanently. A decision to disqualify a judge, together with reasons for disqualification, including a detailed description of the violation, should be communicated to the judge within 7 business days of the decision. If the decision to disqualify was made by a national organizing committee, a copy of the decision must be submitted to the Committee within 7 business days of the decision.
- 2.5. Masters and Judges have the right to appeal the decision to disqualify before the Committee. To do so, an appellant must submit a written statement to the Head Judge, explaining in detail his or her decision to appeal. The statement must include the name of the appellant, his or her contact information, date and time of the alleged violation, a detailed description of the situation and the action/decision that was taken by the appellant. The appeal must be filed before the Committee within 7 business days of the date on which a written copy of the decision to disqualify was received by the appellant. The appeal shall be decided during a session of the Committee, and a written decision signed by the Head Judge shall be delivered to the appellant no later than 30 business days after the date of the appeal.

2.6. Any other decisions concerning competition rules, judging and outcomes can also be appealed by any participant in the competition. To do so, an appellant must submit a written statement to the organizing committee of the competition during which the disputed situation took place. The statement must include the name of the appellant, his or her contact information, date and time of the incident, a detailed description of the situation and the action/decision that was taken by the appellant. The appeal must be decided within 7 business days and a decision delivered to the appellant. If the decision is made by a national organizing committee, a copy of the decision must be submitted to the Committee within 7 business days of the decision. The decision of a national organizing committee may be appealed to the Committee. To do so, the appellant must submit a request to the Committee within 30 business days of the decision by the national organizing committee.

2.7. Any decision by the Committee is final and cannot be appealed.

2.8. These Rules and any national provisions concerning the conduct of the national qualifying competitions may be changed by TMC and by the national organizing committees respectively at any time; however, any such changes must be announced and come into effect no later than 30 business days before the start of a competition.

### **3. Participation in the competitions**

3.1. A Master may compete in any of the three categories, and in several categories at once. A Master who wins in one category shall be declared the champion in that category and shall receive a commemorative trophy. A Master who wins in all three categories shall be declared absolute champion.

3.2. To be eligible to compete in the final stage of the Cup, a Master must pass the qualifying competition in his/her country of residence.

3.3. To be eligible for participation in a qualifying stage of the Cup, a Master must have citizenship or permanent residence of the country in which the competition is taking place, submit an application and fill out a personal data form approved by the national organizing committee of his or her country of residence. Participation in the qualifying competition more than once during a single competition cycle is not allowed. Additional

requirements for participation may be established by national organizing committees and may vary from country to country; however, such requirements shall not contradict these Rules and must follow the guiding principles of the Cup, such as openness, transparency and involvement of the maximum feasible number of interested participants.

- 3.4. Rules of national qualifying competitions can also be altered and/or supplemented by national organizing committees in accordance with any country-specific requirements and preferences; however, such changes shall not contravene the general principles of the Cup. Any differences between the rules of national qualifying competitions and these Rules must be announced to national qualifying competition participants.
- 3.5. Participation in a qualifying or final stage of the Cup implies that a Master is familiar with and agrees to comply with these Rules. A violation of the Rules at any stage of the competition may result in disqualification.
- 3.6. A Master who has secured the right to compete in the final stage of the Cup by winning a national qualifying competition but who is unable for any reason to participate in the final stage cedes that right to the Master who came in the second place in the relevant category of the qualifying competition. This rule shall be applicable at every stage of the competition.
- 3.7. If a country fails, for any reason, to hold a national qualifying competition, but has a number of participant slots reserved for its representatives at the final stage of the Cup, then that country's quota of participants shall be distributed by lottery among competitors from other countries who have come in the second or third place in their national qualifying competitions and are interested in competing in the final stage of the Cup.
- 3.8. The rules for assigning quotas may be changed by the Committee. If possible, such changes shall be put into effect no later than six months before the date of the final stage of the Cup.
- 3.9. Any expenses necessary for competing in the Cup at any stage are the sole responsibility of the Masters, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the Rules, decisions of the Committee, decisions of national organizing committees or other bodies authorized to make such decisions by TMC.
- 3.10. Organizers of the Cup and their authorized representatives have the right to use the name, likeness, publicly available information and

competition scores of any participant in any stage of the Cup in any format, without monetary compensation, for any purpose related to the promotion of tea, tea culture and the Cup.

3.11. As a rule, the number of participants in the final stage of the Cup in each category is set by the Committee prior to the start of the competition cycle. It is determined by the number of national bodies, taking into account other circumstances that may limit the number of participants. In any case, the number of participants in each category shall not be less than 5. The number of participants in national qualifying competitions is determined independently by national organizing committees, taking into account country-specific circumstances.

#### **4. Competition in the Tea Preparation category**

4.1. A Master competing in this category is given 15 minutes to demonstrate the skill of tea preparation by brewing and presenting two beverages:

- A tea from a set of samples selected in advance by the organizing committee of the competition
- A Master's Tea, a beverage prepared according to the Master's own recipe using any type of tea, pure as well as flavored. In preparing this beverage, the Master is allowed to use any legally available ingredients; however, the primary component of the beverage must be tea proper, i.e. a product made from leaves and buds of the species *Camellia Sinensis*.

4.2. Both beverages must be prepared in front of the jury, sequentially or in parallel.

4.3. In preparing the beverages, the Master may use any brewing method and any equipment for heating water and brewing tea. For preparing tea from the organizing committee's samples, all Masters use the same water provided by the organizing committee; for preparing the Master's Tea, Masters may use their own water.

4.4. The amount of prepared beverage must be sufficient to allow each judge to adequately evaluate its quality. The beverages must be served to every judge and, if possible, simultaneously.

4.5. The preparation and serving of beverages may incorporate a commentary or narrative by the Master, as well as any other forms of

entertainment (singing, music, dance), as long as these are performed solely and personally by the Master.

- 4.6. The Master's performance is scored in the following rubrics: aroma, taste, aftertaste, technique, beverage presentation, personal charisma and time. Judges record their scores in the corresponding scoring forms.
- 4.7. If a Master takes more than the allotted amount of time to complete the performance, he or she receives a penalty. For each full extra minute the judges deduct 10% of the final score (rounded down). For example, given the final score of 86, one extra minute results in the deduction of 8 points (10%) and 2 minutes 30 seconds result in the deduction of 17 points (20%).
- 4.8. Before the start of the competition, the Head Judge announces the types of tea included in the set of samples selected for the performance by the organizing committee. Masters have 20 minutes to familiarize themselves with the teas included in the sample, to select brewing methods and to plan their performances. During this time, Masters can brew and taste the teas from the sample.
- 4.9. Before the start of his or her performance, each Master informs the judges about the type of tea he or she is going to use to prepare the Master's Tea.

## **5. Competition in the Tea Pairing category**

- 5.1. A Master competing in this category must demonstrate the skill of presenting tea in combination with a light food/snack. The Master has 10 minutes to prepare his or her composition and 10 minutes to present it to the judges.
- 5.2. The Master may use any type of tea proper (i.e. a product made from leaves and buds of the species *Camellia Sinensis*), any brewing method and any flavorings. The tea must be presented to the jury ready for consumption, with the amount of food/snack sufficient to evaluate the combination.
- 5.3. The Master's performance is scored in the following rubrics: neatness, visual appeal, taste, presentation, reproducibility, modifiability and time. Judges record their scores in the corresponding scoring sheets.



5.4. If a Master takes more than the allotted amount of time, he or she receives a penalty. For each full extra minute the judges deduct 10% of the final score (rounded down). For example, given the final score of 27, one extra minute results in the deduction of 2 points (10%) and 2 minutes 30 seconds result in the deduction of 5 points (20%).

## **6. Competition in the Tea Tasting category**

6.1. A Master competing in this category must demonstrate the skill of degustation by being able to identify beverage samples. Competition in this category may have one of two formats: identification of single varieties of tea and identification of multi-component beverages. In working with single tea varieties, the Master has to identify the name or the variety of the tea; for multi-component beverages, each component of the beverage must be identified, along with that component's unique taste and flavor characteristics.

6.2. The decision to use both formats in this competition category is made by the appropriate organizing committee no later than 2 months prior to the competition, to allow Masters sufficient time to prepare.

6.3. Competition in the single variety format will consist of two stages: the preliminary tasting stage and the final competition stage.

6.4. During the preliminary tasting stage, competitors will have a chance to taste ten different samples of tea, labeled with a unique identification code and the country of origin (additional information may be included at the discretion of the organizing committee), and memorize their taste and flavor characteristics. If necessary, Masters may write this information down on their personal degustation forms.

6.5. All ten tea samples presented to Masters at this stage of the competition must be close in their level of fermentation and free of any flavorings.

6.6. The teas for the preliminary stage of the competition are prepared by representatives of the organizing committee (volunteers) under uniform conditions (water, temperature, brewing time, equipment) specified by the Head Judge.

- 6.7. During the final stage, competitors must identify five samples of tea selected randomly by the Head Judge from the ten samples presented during the preliminary stage. Each of the five samples is brewed by volunteers under the supervision of the Head Judge at a location inaccessible to the competitors; the quantity of tea shall be sufficient to allow for simultaneous careful degustation by all competitors. The prepared teas are strained and poured into an intermediate container for uniform mixing, and from there – into teapots, so that each competitor has five teapots, one with each of the tea samples. Each teapot shall be marked with an identification code unknown to the competitors. Sets of five teapots with five identical teacups will be brought out onto the competition floor and given to the competitors.
- 6.8. When a Master is ready to begin the degustation, he or she says, “Ready!” and a representative of the organizing committee starts the timer. The time limit for the single variety degustation is 5 minutes. If the Master finishes in less than 5 minutes, he or she raises a hand and says, “Ready!” The representative then stops the timer, collects the participant’s degustation form and records on it the time elapsed. Any changes made by the Master to the degustation form after the timer is stopped will not be considered by the judges.
- 6.9. For every correctly identified tea sample the Master is awarded 1 point. The competitor with the largest number of points becomes the winner.
- 6.10. If the scores are tied (several competitors have the same number of points), then the competitor who has completed the identification in the least amount of time becomes the winner.
- 6.11. If two or more Masters have completely identical results (number of points and time in seconds), then special additional rounds of the competition between them shall be conducted following the same format (for each round, the Head Judge will select a new set of 5 tea samples for identification from the original 10), until the winner is determined.
- 6.12. Competition in the multi-component beverage format will also consist of two stages: the preliminary tasting stage and the final competition stage.
- 6.13. During the preliminary tasting stage, competitors will taste ten different components (teas, herbs, pieces of fruit and berries, oils, etc.) and memorize their taste and flavor characteristics. If necessary, Masters may

brew/submerge samples in hot water and write any necessary information down on their personal degustation forms.

- 6.14. During the final stage of the competition, Masters will need to identify all components in a 5-component beverage prepared from components selected by the Head Judge after the completion of the preliminary stage and blended by volunteers according to the Head Judge's recipe. The blend is prepared by volunteers under the supervision of the Head Judge at a location inaccessible to the competitors; the quantity of the beverage shall be sufficient to allow for simultaneous careful degustation by all competitors. The prepared beverage is strained and poured into an intermediate container for uniform mixing, and from there – into teapots, so that each competitor has his or her individual teapot.
- 6.15. When a Master is ready to begin the degustation, he or she says, "Ready!" and a representative of the organizing committee starts the timer. The time limit for the multi-component beverage degustation is 3 minutes. The Master shall write down on his or her degustation form all the components of the beverage. If the Master finishes in less than 3 minutes, he or she raises a hand and says, "Ready!" The representative then stops the timer, collects the participant's degustation form and records on it the time elapsed. Any changes made by the Master to the degustation form after the timer is stopped will not be considered by the judges.
- 6.16. For every correctly identified component of the beverage the Master is awarded 1 point. The competitor with the largest number of points becomes the winner.
- 6.17. If the scores are tied (several competitors have the same number of points), then the competitor who has completed the identification in the least amount of time becomes the winner.
- 6.18. If two or more Masters have completely identical results (number of points and time in seconds), then special additional rounds of the competition between them shall be conducted following the same format (for each round, the Head Judge will select a new set of 5 components for identification from the original 10), until the winner is determined.
- 6.19. To ensure accurate timing, each Master shall be timed by a separate representative of the organizing committee.

## **7. The conduct of the competition**

- 7.1. Before the start of the competition, the Head Judge conducts a lottery to determine the order in which the Masters will perform. The precise method of the lottery must be announced in advance, and the lottery must be conducted with all interested parties present.
- 7.2. Depending on the number of competitors, the competition may have to be conducted in several rounds. The starting time of each round and the duration of intervals between rounds are determined by the organizing committee of the competition.
- 7.3. In addition to the time allotted for performance, each Master is given 5 minutes before and 5 minutes after his or her performance to set up/clean up the performance area, unless specified otherwise by the competition rules.
- 7.4. The performance area will include a table 75-90 cm in height, a working electrical outlet and a waste container. If requested, a Master will also be provided with a device for boiling water and a container for storing fresh water. All other equipment for the performance, including tea, accessories and teaware, is the sole financial and logistical responsibility of the Master. If necessary, the organizing committee may designate a special area for washing teaware and equipment and for storing equipment, ingredients and accessories brought in by the Masters; such an area may include a refrigerator and/or a freezer. The organizing committee is not responsible for any items stored in the area.
- 7.5. Any non-standard equipment used by a Master during performance (including musical equipment, equipment that constitutes a fire hazard and equipment that uses large amounts of electricity) must be approved in advance by the organizing committee. Musical/vocal accompaniment must not be offensive and must not violate any applicable copyright laws. Any additional equipment and decorations for use in the performance area must also be approved in advance by the organizing committee.
- 7.6. Only competitors, judges, designated volunteers, members of the organizing committee or accredited members of the press are allowed to enter the competition area.

- 7.7. A Master must be present within the performance area prior to the start of his or her performance. Any Master who is late for his or her performance shall be disqualified.
- 7.8. The competition may be videotaped and shown on a screen in the vicinity of the competition area. Internet broadcasts of the competition are also allowed.
- 7.9. The competition is facilitated by a host whose primary task is to introduce the Master, to signal the beginning of the timed portion of the competition, to issue time warnings (at 2 minutes and at 30 seconds before the end of the performance) and, if the Master wishes, to engage in a conversation with the Master in order to have a more rounded and authentic performance. In the Tea Preparation and Tea Pairing categories, Masters signal the end of their performance by uttering the phrase "Tea is ready"; in the Tea Tasting category, Masters signal by raising a hand and saying, "Ready!"
- 7.10. Any form of advertisement and/or product promotion during performances is prohibited. The mentioning of any brand names is permitted only in cases where such mentioning is unavoidable. For any violation of this provision the judges may reprimand the Master and deduct points from his or her score. For repeated violations, a Master can be disqualified. A decision to disqualify may also be made by an authorized representative of the organizing committee.
- 7.11. If a performance is interrupted due to the failure of equipment provided by the organizing committee, the timer shall be stopped. After the equipment has been fixed, the Master may choose to continue the performance or to start over.
- 7.12. If a Master needs additional equipment during performance, he or she may retrieve such equipment from the designated storage area. In this case, the timer will NOT be stopped. A Master is prohibited from receiving any assistance with bringing, installing or operating any additional equipment during the performance.
- 7.13. After the performance, the Master must clean up the performance area with the help from designated volunteers.

## **8. Performance Evaluation**

- 8.1. The Head Judge of the competition is responsible for coordinating all evaluation-related activities and for calculating the scores during the final stage of the Cup; he or she is also responsible for overseeing the work of the judges during national qualifying rounds.
- 8.2. As a rule, judges shall be selected from among individuals who have extensive professional experience related to tea and a strong positive reputation in the industry. Occasionally, specialists from other areas whose expertise will enhance the quality of the evaluation may also be invited to serve as judges.
- 8.3. The Head Judge shall determine the total number of judges and appoint individual judges in coordination with the organizing committee of the competition. The number of judges, including the Head Judge and the Technical Judge, must be even. The Technical Judge shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Rules and with any additional competition rules set forth by the organizing committee of the competition; however, he or she does not participate in performance scoring. Persons affiliated with any of the competitors are prohibited from serving as judges, with the exception of the Technical Judge. If necessary, several groups of judges may be formed.
- 8.4. Judges must be impartial in assigning scores, entering their evaluations on the designated scoring forms.
- 8.5. The scoring rules and the format of scoring forms, including rules for deducting points for violations, must be established by the Head Judge and must be made public no later than 30 business days prior to the start of the competition.
- 8.6. The judges must be present in the immediate vicinity of the performance area. They may sit, stand or move around as they wish.
- 8.7. The judges are responsible for the quality of the evaluations and for the confidentiality of the scoring process.
- 8.8. If two or more Masters competing in the Tea Preparation and Tea Pairing category have identical scores, the Head Judge shall determine the winner by lottery.

8.9. After the end of the competition, Masters have the right to see their scores.

8.10. Generally, judges perform their duties on a *pro bono* basis. At the discretion of the relevant organizing committee, judges may be compensated for any reasonable work-related expenses.

## **9. Work by members of organizing committees**

9.1. Generally, members of an organizing committee perform their duties on a *pro bono* basis. At the discretion of the relevant organizing committee, committee members may be compensated for any reasonable work-related expenses.

## **10. Concluding provisions**

10.1. A Master has a duty to be respectful to other competitors, spectators, supporters and judges, as well as to the sponsors and organizers of the competition.

10.2. A Master who wins the first place in a category has a duty for one year following the victory not to avoid contact with the press, to do his or her best to promote tea and tea consumption and to abstain from any unfair competition, including intra-industry competition.

10.3. Any questions/issues that are left unresolved by these Rules shall be decided by the organizing committee of the relevant competition, by the Committee or by TMC.