

## CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER

# The Houston Tea Festival Debuts Next Weekend

From Lewis Carroll to Japanese Lolita fashion, this love letter to the cuppa has something for every tea lover.

By [Sara Samora](#) • 2/9/2016 at 8:00am

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IMAGE: [COURTESY OF THE HOUSTON TEA FESTIVAL](#)

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**HAVE YOU EVER MET A TEA SOMMELIER?** Amanda Vermillion, director of the [Houston Tea Festival](#), is one. She began her honeyed journey when she earned her tea master certification in early 2013. In that same year, she started her own business, the [Tea Mistress, LLC](#), and attended the World Tea Expo in Las Vegas—the country’s largest tea industry convention—for the first time.

“I was totally blown away by the sheer amount of tea everything that was there,” Vermillion recalls. She was captivated, not only from a tea industry perspective, but from that of a tea lover.

Now she’s kicking off a tea festival of her own in Houston. Vermillion is using her event planning skills to bring together tea fans for talks, shopping and tastings. For those who didn’t attend the inaugural Lone Star Iced Tea Festival last August, which Vermillion also helped to organize, the question may remain: “What exactly is a tea festival?”

First of all, though sweet tea is known as “the house wine of the South,” the Houston Tea Festival focuses mostly on hot drinks. According to Vermillion, she’s enlisted several “celebri-teas”—people known nationally and internationally as tea authorities—to teach guests about the tasty leaves. “I really wanted to come across to the people who are getting into tea or who love tea, but don’t know a lot about the people behind it,” Vermillion says. “This is a great chance to see some people who are really, really respected and you may not know who they are right now, but believe me, you should!”

Topics of tea talks will range from health, cooking and beauty to teas from around the world and Texas. Since the festival’s theme is *Alice in Wonderland*, a speaker will be on hand to address the literary meanings behind the Lewis Carroll classic. But Carroll’s influence doesn’t end there. Look for *Alice in Wonderland* costume contests for both children and the adults. The author’s more outré side would surely be taken with the music and entertainment that includes a belly dancer, a flamenco dance group and a DJ spinning goth and new wave tunes.



Samples from the Tea Mistress herself.

IMAGE: [COURTESY OF THE HOUSTON TEA FESTIVAL](#)

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And knowing Carroll's predilections, he'd likely be especially in favor of a Lolita fashion show, followed by a "Lolita 101" talk, explaining the origins of Japanese style modeled on turn-of-the-century pinafores and petticoats. "They're really into the whole *Alice in Wonderland* theme, because that's one of the things they like to dress up as," Vermillion says.

On the Sunday of the event, at 1 p.m., a harpist will provide accompaniment to a three-course British-style high tea. That same morning, those who prefer their tea with a side of austerity can participate in a classic Japanese tea ceremony. Afterward, kids can take in a Japanese dance lesson. If that's all a bit too staid, an interactive "Mad Hatter Murder Mystery" will bring guests right into the case.

With so many offerings, Vermillion says she is still in need of volunteers and sponsors. What better way to sip the day away than as a part of the action?

***Houston Tea Festival***, University of Houston, Clear Lake campus, 2700 Bay Area Boulevard. Feb. 20, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Feb. 21, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$13.65 - \$53.74. Children 12 and under get in free. For more information about volunteering or sponsoring, email Amanda Vermillion at: [festival@houstonteafestival.com](mailto:festival@houstonteafestival.com).

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