

## **The Benefits of Rooibos Tea**

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Sometimes, a particular food or beverage can bring back memories of a special occasion. For me, this is true for a blend of tea that I first tried about nine years ago in South Africa.

It was the last day of a two-week business trip and my host had taken me to Pilanesberg National Park north of Johannesburg. After a morning of seeing various animals in their natural habitat, we took a break at an old stone inn, which had been converted to a restaurant, but had been recently destroyed by fire. The enterprising operators set up tents outside the remaining walls and positioned patio tables and chairs on what was formerly the front lawn.

My host suggested that we have Rooibos tea (pronounced “roy boss”) along with our light snack while we watched the giraffes coming into the area for the salt licks. He explained that Rooibos meant “red bush” in Afrikaans and gave me a bit of background on the tea. Meanwhile, I was busily taking photos of the giraffes, and the brightly coloured birds flitting in for the crumbs on the table, as well as the guinea fowl running amongst the chairs.

The needle-shaped leaves of the Rooibos bushes are harvested in South Africa’s Western Cape area where the mountains provide a suitable location for their growth. As with many types of teas, the leaves are allowed to oxidize or “ferment”. This brings out the rich red colour and helps develop its distinctive, somewhat grassy, flavour. Once dried, the tea is distributed to markets around the world.

Rooibos tea has a number of significant health benefits. In addition to being naturally caffeine-free, it is rich in polyphenols, which are anti-oxidants. This fact is vigorously promoted in claims made by the leading producer of Rooibos tea in South Africa saying that consuming their product leads to “vitality, well-being, and health”. They go on to tell us that simply drinking six cups per day for six weeks could help to increase your level of anti-oxidants by up to 35%.

You may wonder about all the hype regarding anti-oxidants. During their normal activities, the cells in our bodies consume oxygen and generate by-products called “free radicals”. These potentially harmful molecules can also come from a number of other sources such as smoking. However, anti-oxidants can react with the free radicals and reduce their negative effects. It’s then up to us to consume foods and beverages which are rich in anti-oxidants to keep up the continuous fight against the free radicals.

There are several ways in which to enjoy Rooibos. Personally, I prefer to brew a “cuppa” in the same old way we do with the usual black tea that we drink by the boatload. Although I don’t drink six cups a day, a cup or two is not only healthy, but brings back pleasant memories of my visit to South Africa. Those with tastes that are more diverse may find “Cape Town Fog” to their liking. This is a substitution of Rooibos in “London Fog” made with tea, steamed milk, and vanilla syrup.

The next time you are looking for a new hot drink to try, who knows, you may find that Rooibos is “your cup of tea”.



**Rooibos tea in my favourite mug**