

Vendor Profile: Far West Tea Traders
James Allen
A Tea Escape

My hands wrap tightly around the warm clay mug. The steam rises from the amber colored liquid held inside. The scent of cinnamon and spice is tantalizing to everyone who happens to pass by. Somehow the warmth, smell and taste all lend to a feeling of security, calm and peace. It's like a genuine hug in a mug.

I take a deep breath and allow myself to pause. I have no interest in entertaining any stress from the day. This is a chance to detach and calm my body and mind. This time is mine and mine alone.

As I look around the room I notice that there are others like me, lost in their thoughts, soaking in the moment. There are also a few groups of people creating a low hum of chatter, but nothing too distracting. That is the magic of this place, of this tea house. There is a sense of calm and relaxation among the patrons. It feels like an escape.

It is this environment that James Allen, founder of Far West Tea Traders, is most passionate about. From his first exposure to the world of tea, fifteen years ago, in a part time job at a tea house in Tucson, AZ - he fell in love with the environment.

"The tea house in Tucson was like a sanctuary. People came to unplug at all hours of the day. They would come in for a cup of tea and a small snack and stay for hours. It was nothing like a coffee shop with the high turnover and hurried chatter. Rather it was slow and calm with no take out options. Students from a nearby university seemed to use the space as an escape, as almost a meditation room of sorts. That environment is what drew me to tea."

It was through this two year experience working and managing a tea house in Tucson that he realized the relaxing benefits of a tea ritual.

After working at the tea house, he continued to share his passion for tea and the great environment it created as a hobby. Soon however, he realized he needed to make it his full time focus. Tea had become his purpose.

After booking some tea ceremonies in Malibu, clients recommended he move to the area. In 2015, James made the move.

Since arriving in Southern California, James has been exploring tea opportunities. One of these opportunities is his excellent tea subscription box, the Far West Tea Club. With his subscription service he offers patrons high quality organic tea delivered to their door.

He continues to offer tea ceremonies, teach educational events and provide tea to places like Impact Hub Santa Barbara. He also offers some consulting services with local establishments.

One thing remains clear, he understands tea and offers only the best.

Interestingly, James shares with me that his passion is not in the commodity market of tea. Rather, his interest and passion lies in the experience of tea drinking. One of introspection, meditation and relaxation.

Thus, to further pursue his passion, James is now planning his next move.

This time, his love for tea is leading him to Maui, Hawaii where he will build a tea farm for tourism, education and tea cultivation.

His upcoming Hawaiian tea farm will be a place for people to experience the healing effects of tea. By creating this relaxing atmosphere in Maui, James hopes to create an even better environment than that he first fell in love with in Tucson. He also plans to grow his subscription box business and break into new tea frontiers. He will introduce peace seekers and tea drinkers to the magic and calm of a tea garden experience. He will also educate the public on tea drinking and the proper way to consume the beverage.

“Tea is the #1 consumer beverage in the world, yet it is also the least understood and most misunderstood. In Hawaii, there are more tea lovers than coffee lovers who visit the island, and this is who will be my market, at least initially.”

Not only is James interested in the tourism market, he also has an altruistic side. Understanding how hard life is for many locals, he plans to create stable jobs with his tea farm for the local community. He will also help bring food production back to the islands

by growing tea in-state. His farm will venture into the lucrative agtourism (agriculture tourism) and agucation (agriculture education) fields. This will help educate visitors and bring opportunity to the area.

As James stands up to leave, you see a passion alight in his eyes. It is clear this tea farm in Maui is where he should go next. His desire to offer an exceptional tea experience is clear. It is a dream that will lead him onwards and over the ocean to new adventures.