

[Alum brews eco-conscious tea company](#)

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Spearheaded by Mike Ortiz and Tico Aran (in photo above), JoJo Tea is introducing international tea traditions to the Miami community. “We’re developing relationships with developing markets in tea,” says Aran. (Photo provided by Tico Aran)

People across the globe have sipped tea for over 4,000 years.

Based in Miami, [JoJo Tea company](#) aims to share the brewed beverage’s storied history one cup at a time, making modern tea culture accessible to a new generation.

JoJo Tea is co-owned by childhood friends Mike Ortiz and Tulane University alumnus Tico Aran.

A 2011 [School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) graduate, Aran worked to build wind turbines with Peru's [WindAid Institute](#) before joining Ortiz's business.

After concluding work in Peru for a job offer in New Orleans, Aran stopped in Miami to visit family. As Ortiz was working to establish JoJo Tea, he asked Aran for assistance with the company while he was in town.

Realizing that the blossoming business would become an opportunity to impact communities internationally without relying on grant funding, Aran eventually decided to stay in Miami.

"I had a moving van ready to head to New Orleans and called it off. That was three and a half years ago," says Aran.

Aran and Ortiz now regularly travel to tea-growing regions, like India and Nepal, to work one-on-one with farmers developing environmentally sustainable methods of producing quality tea.

Though the main source of Aran and Ortiz's business is selling wholesale teas — like masala chai collected from Assam, India — to restaurants and hotels, JoJo Tea also operates a unique tasting room.

Tucked away in a medical building located on the edge of Miami's Little Havana neighborhood, the tea speakeasy invites guests to drop in to sample a flight of teas and compare the exotic flavor profiles.

"The tasting room is a space to share how we see tea and how to drink it," says Aran.

Ortiz and Aran also use the space as an educational portal, connecting visiting tea-drinkers with the farmers who cultivated the crop.

"I can FaceTime with farmers, and they can speak directly to people in the tasting room about the flavors they're experiencing," says Aran.

"Tea follows history."

Tico Aran, co-owner of JoJo Tea