

London's Afternoon Tea



By Genevieve Northup

In the 19th century, wealthy Brits began having tea and refreshments as afternoon amusement. On my second excursion to London, my mission was to try this long-standing custom. I found that the ritual extends beyond a hot beverage and carb overload — catch up with travel buddies, map your next tourist stop, sample English specialties and observe London's locals at teatime.

My Tea Outings

I highly recommend the Sanderson London for a delightful detour or the Milestone Hotel for a conventional, classy experience.

Mad Hatter Tea, Sanderson London: My first afternoon tea was a trip to Wonderland. The Hatter's mischief began as we searched for menus in antique books and pondered riddles on our napkin rings.

The day's tea pairings were Strawberries 'n Cream, Rhubarb Custard and Mint Chocolate Chip. Each sandwich had unique flavors, such as spinach bread slathered with cream cheese and cucumber slices.

The sweets were magical, from marshmallows and meringue shaped like garden veggies to chocolate teacups brimming with green tea and white chocolate cream. The Hatter's final trick was hidden in seemingly typical (and delicious!) cheesecake. Our waiter warned that inside was a mango "yolk" that would burst and could leave a mess

on unsuspecting guests' clothing; we left with clean outfits and full bellies.

Traditional Afternoon Tea,

Milestone Hotel: We escaped the chaos of modern London and entered the Victorian era at the Milestone Hotel's lovely retreat, complete with an extensive tea list, excellent service and beautifully presented fare.

We lounged in the parlor's antique wingback chairs as three-tiered towers arrived bearing six types of sandwiches, scones with clotted cream and jam, mini carrot cakes, brownies and berry tarts. I often crave the tiny mason jars of creamy cheesecake and chicken salad garnished with chopped almonds. YUM!

More Tea Stops

Though I haven't vetted these worthy venues, I hope to visit on future holidays.

For Purists

The U.K. Tea Council's Tea Guild rates afternoon tea facilities "to ensure that standards of excellence are maintained." These destinations have received awards for preserving Britain's tea heritage.

Afternoon Tea, Claridge's: Rated among elite five-star hotels by Forbes, Claridge's has entertained the regal, rich and famous for more than 150 years. Glimpse the life of luxury as you take tea in the airy, art deco hall. More than 20 black, green, white and herbal teas are available, and all edibles are prepared daily onsite using regional and exotic ingredients from reputable suppliers.

Traditional Afternoon Tea, The Goring:

The family-owned Goring received the 2013 Top London Afternoon Tea Award. You're guaranteed to enjoy scones, petite sandwiches, colorful macarons, parfaits and custards at this London landmark.

For Nonconformists

Does traditional sound tedious? London's themed teas are far from dull.

Sushi Afternoon

Tea, Ichi Sushi: Skip the scones to appreciate the flavorful fusion of sushi rolls — seasoned rice, delicate fish, fruits and vegetables — dipped in wasabi-spiced soy sauce. Ichi Sushi's feast includes a sampling of nigiri and rolls, Japanese confections and fruity teas.

Not Afternoon Tea, OXO Tower Brasserie:

Rest your feet and catch stunning city views at this chic bistro. The Not Afternoon Tea features frilly cocktails and *gateaux* that will give you a sugar rush.

Chocololics Afternoon Tea, David Leslie:

Before indulging in a chocolate beverage and temptations by famed chocolatier David Leslie, watch the artist at work in the kitchen. Then, customize your chocolate treats by selecting truffle toppings and macaron fillings.



Guys, if you think afternoon tea isn't for you, think again.

continued on page 24

Prêt-à-Portea, Berkeley London: Also called the Fashionista's Tea, this scene is for trendsetters. The menu is updated periodically to ensure that the cuisine mirrors the hottest designer dresses, hats, handbags and heels.

For Busy Tourists

See London and squeeze in a spot of tea during these tours:

Afternoon Tea Bus Tour, BB Bakery:

Sip a steaming drink and nibble canapés while passing by London's iconic buildings in a double-decker bus. The 90-minute loop begins at the London Eye and passes Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace and other attractions.

Tea Cruise, City Cruises: Socialize over afternoon tea and watch for the Tate Modern, London Eye, Tower Bridge and financial district. This cruise gives an overview of monuments along the Thames so you can plan the day's itinerary.

For Him

Guys, if you think afternoon tea isn't for you, think again.

Gentlemen's Afternoon Tea, Athenaeum

Hotel: This posh hotel caters a swanky getaway for men. Mini beef Wellingtons, meat pies, sausage rolls and cheesy scones are followed by a short pour of whisky and booze-infused cakes.

Gents Afternoon Tea, Sanctum Soho:

Bring your hearty appetite to Sanctum Soho for lamb stew, two-bite burgers and meaty Yorkshire pudding. Finish with Jack Daniels Gentleman Jack and a cigar.

Great British Gentleman's Afternoon Tea,

Mandeville Hotel: Choose from a dozen teas and chow down on beef and escargot paninis, crispy fish with mushy peas, caramelized banana pudding and pastries.

For Kids

Afternoon tea isn't just for adults. Your family will feel comfortable at these locations:

Children's Afternoon Tea, Claridge's: This famous destination for grown-ups also spoils guests ages 5 to 10 years old. Food is prepared for picky eaters, and the menu card offers entertaining activities.

Little Princes and Princesses Afternoon

Tea, Milestone Hotel: Little ones (under age 12) join the chef to put the finishing touches on their desserts before having hot chocolate and tasty snacks.

Stupendous Afternoon Tea, Scoff &

Banter Covent Garden: This restaurant chain's Covent Garden location provides an affordable break from sightseeing. After sandwiches there's chocolate fondue, "extremely enormous cupcakes" and milkshakes.

Tips for Tea

You don't have to be British to fit in at tea, but you should bring your best table manners. For etiquette advice, watch the English Cream Tea Company's video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dq-1MLT3YDk.

Also consider these tips:

- Make reservations and note allergies or dietary restrictions.
- Follow the requested dress code (often "smart casual").
- Portions are usually large, so consider having tea as lunch or a light pre-theater supper.
- Tea can be pricy; find coupons and deals at www.afternoontea.co.uk/offers.

Today, afternoon tea is a routine, a pleasure and a worthy tourist activity. So before you pack your bags, book a table for tea. ■

