

Elegant Tea Rooms

TEA time used to be more than time taken off from heavy work schedule for hurried sips of the brew from plastic or paper cups. It used to be a time of elegance and leisure. In tastefully done up tea rooms or lounges, where liveried waiters – dignified and courteous to the hilt – would serve you tea from and into exquisite china accompanied by freshly baked scones, cup cakes, muffins, tarts and wafer thin sandwiches. It was a time for low decibel tete-a-tetes or even high level business deals struck with a touch of class.

Despite the jet age rush and hardly any time for lengthy communication beyond sms texts, some of the traditional tea rooms still exist in different corners of the world in all their resplendent glory. Even if only as tourist attractions, they are worth visiting simply to experience the style and grace.

CONTEMPORARY TEA TIME brings forth some of the best tea rooms in England, where it all began

London's ten best afternoon teas

Claridge's afternoon tea

Afternoon tea at Claridge's Hotel is always busy but the atmosphere of genteel refinement is unsullied by the crowds and continual clink of cups on china. That's partially due to the service, which is attentive and agreeably affable rather than fusty, and the sense of occasion. Guests book up to three months in advance, so often time their visit to celebrate something special. The experience is worth the wait. There is a selection from the 40 teas on offer – summery, pink-hued elderflower tea or smoky Lapsang Souchong tea from China to be matched with platters of dainty finger sandwiches and crumbly French pastries that are presented for inspection. Traditional and uncomplicated, the choices are fuss-free but flawless. The Tea Guild named it 2011's 'Top London Afternoon Tea'.

Top treat: freshly baked raisin and apple scones, served warm with spiced Marco Polo jam and silky dollops of clotted cream, scooped into a tumbler like ice-cream.

Address: Claridge's, Brook St, Mayfair, London W1K 4HR

Days and times: tea is served daily at 3pm, 3.30pm and 5pm or 5.30pm

Cost: £38; champagne afternoon tea £49-£62



Brown's Hotel's Tea-Tox

Every bite of Brown's Hotel's sugar-free, low-fat, low-carb afternoon 'Tea-Tox' is healthy and tasty. Spelt and rye breads and lettuce and chicory leaves provide the bases for imaginative open sandwiches (smoked mackerel and quail's egg are super), delicious fruit skewers with a honeyed yoghurt dip stands in for scones and delightful patisseries using xylitol instead of sugar and low-fat creme fraiche in place of cream – indistinguishable from their full-calorie equivalents. Served (by wonderful staff) in the elegant environs of the English Tea Room,

the Tea-Tox can even be enjoyed with or without tea – various fruit and herb infusions are available alongside ten black and seven herbal blends.

Top treat: a sugarless chocolate cup with yoghurt and berries.





Address: Brown's Hotel, Albemarle Street, London W1S 4BP

Days and times: Mon-Fri 3pm-6pm; Sat-Sun 1pm-6pm

Cost: £39.50; champagne afternoon tea £49.50

The Berkeley's Prêt-à-Portea

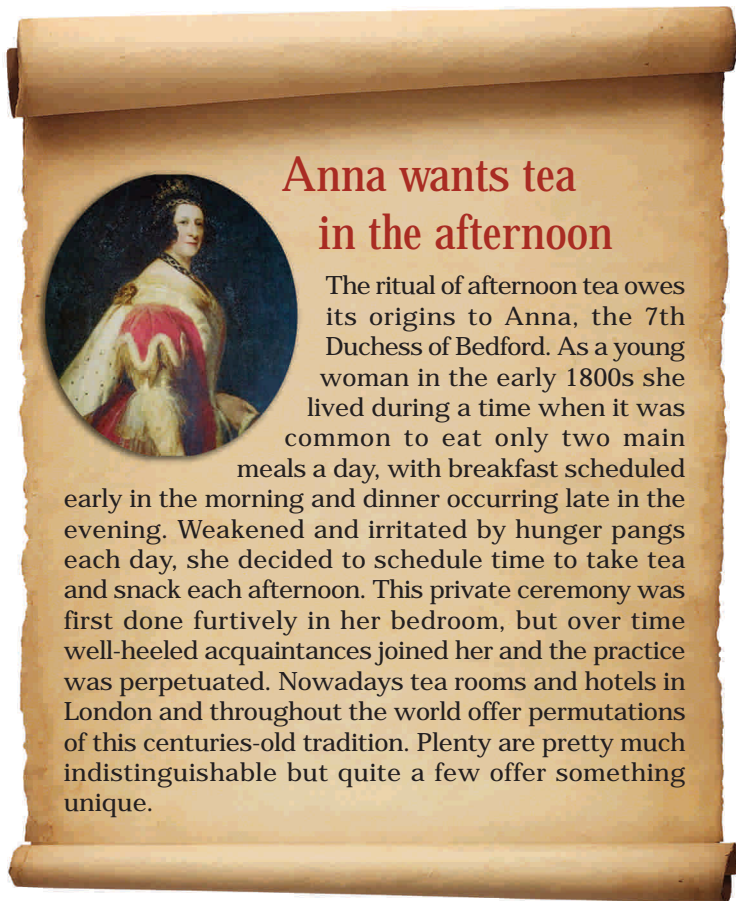
The Berkeley hotel has craftily targeted its afternoon tea at London's diehard tea-takers: the fashion pack, who rarely conduct meetings over any other mealtime. Its Prêt-à-Portea offers everything you'd expect from a traditional afternoon tea but with a twist: each of the sugary fancies is styled after a key fashion look of the season. There is a white Burberry trench coat chocolate biscuit, a Stella McCartney polka dot sponge cake and even a miniature Valentino orange and ginger cake handbag.

Top treat: the brightly coloured Lanvin cassis bavarois with crème de mûre jelly topped with folded meringue.

Address: Brown's Hotel, Albemarle Street, London W1S 4BP

Days and times: daily 1pm - 6pm

Cost: £37.50; champagne tea £47.50 - £54.50.



Anna wants tea in the afternoon



The ritual of afternoon tea owes its origins to Anna, the 7th Duchess of Bedford. As a young woman in the early 1800s she lived during a time when it was common to eat only two main meals a day, with breakfast scheduled early in the morning and dinner occurring late in the evening. Weakened and irritated by hunger pangs each day, she decided to schedule time to take tea and snack each afternoon. This private ceremony was first done furtively in her bedroom, but over time well-heeled acquaintances joined her and the practice was perpetuated. Nowadays tea rooms and hotels in London and throughout the world offer permutations of this centuries-old tradition. Plenty are pretty much indistinguishable but quite a few offer something unique.





Tenamu Chaya Teahouse

Within moments of stepping into Pei Wang's relaxing Notting Hill Tenamu Chaya Teahouse, it is apparent that tea, and the meticulous ritual around creating the perfect brew, is top of the agenda. With no less than 18 teas to choose from – and that's not counting the bespoke tisane infusions one can mix and match – it's hard to know where to start, but the black lychee variety is a

delightful and tasty choice.

The self-boiling kettle on each table is essential when you consider the tiny size of the traditional tea pots and drinking cups, but the Chinese ethos is based around having just enough to drink at the present moment.

Pei's extensive knowledge and fresh, preservative-free snacks (who could resist the healthy-sounding citrus, yuzu soft-set marshmallow dusted with green tea) make this an educational and altogether less gluttonous

experience than the traditional English afternoon variety. Even better, those taken with their newly discovered brew can buy packets to take away to recreate the magic back home.

Top treat: The lo mai fan lotus leaf rice parcel – a sticky, tea-infused rice with braised mushrooms and sweet azuki, £3.

Address: Tenamu Chaya Teahouse, Coach house, 14a St Luke's Road, W11 1DP

Days and times: Saturdays and Sundays: 12pm - 6pm.

Cost: Tea or tisane, £3.50; snacks £2-£3; minimum charge per head, £10.

Grand Imperial's Oriental Afternoon Tea

Cucumber sandwiches are all very well but why limit afternoon tea to triangles of bread and butter? At the Grand Imperial restaurant at the Grosvenor Hotel, chefs are offering Chinese afternoon tea and specially created dim sum as a light afternoon treat best tackled with chopsticks. The tiny sweet and savoury dumplings look just as pretty on a three-tier cake stand as traditional teatime snacks. Crispy noodle rolls of black cod and plump, steamed barbecue pork buns can be followed by shredded duck delicately layered onto prawn

crackers. But the highlight of course will be the unlimited refills of delectable Chinese tea, from floral varieties to a fermented option from Yunnan. Oolong Cha Wang has a heavenly white-blossom scent and a tea made from Osmanthus flowers is a hit – it's not only delicious but apparently good for the complexion too.

Top treat: the unusual rich chocolate dim sum creations, a deliciously different dessert.

Address: Grand Imperial, 101 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0SJ

Days and times: daily midday-5pm

Cost: £20; £28 with a glass of sparkling rosé

Sanderson Mad Hatter Tea

It is impossible not to be charmed by the idea of a Mad Hatter Tea. And what better place to have it than the Sanderson hotel, whose décor is every bit as surreal as Alice's 'tumble down the rabbit hole.' And Sanderson's website makes it clear: no fancy dress. Instead, it is the menu which takes its lead from Lewis Carol's topsy turvy tale. Dainty sandwiches



(ham, egg, cucumber and salmon) are made from a rainbow of breads baked with beet root, spinach and saffron. There is 'Eat Me' strawberry and cream mousse, 'Drink Me' elixirs made from layers of passion fruit, coconut panna cotta and 'exotic foam' sipped out of an apothecary bottle, and freshly baked scones served with clotted cream and jam. The perfect place to bring one's Mum and 12-year-old kid who can enjoy an afternoon tea that combines glamour with a bit of magic.

Top treat: the scones themselves are perfect. Light, fluffy and freshly baked – still warm when they

arrive at the table. Served with lovely thick clotted cream and divine Alain Milliat strawberry jam.

Address : Sanderson, 50 Berners Street London, W1T 3NG

Days and times : Mon-Fri 2pm - 5.30pm, Sat-Sun 1pm - 5.30pm

Cost : £35 each

Chesterfield Hotel Mayfair, tea poet readings

On the second Saturday of every month, afternoon tea in the Chesterfield Hotel Mayfair comes with a distinctly lyrical twist.



Among the gleaming brass and looming portraits of the hotel's venerable conservatory dining room, Elizabeth Darcy Jones, the Chesterfield's "tea poet", is on hand to deliver an intimate rhyming tribute to anyone with an occasion to celebrate, from birthdays, to anniversaries to Mother's Day. It's an eccentric idea that in the wrong hands could be toe-curling, but Darcy Jones, who has composed poetry to cover a range of special events, is an engaging and welcome guest when she joins tables for recitals, and has taken care for her accessible compositions to appeal even to those suspicious of verse. She will also tailor rhymes to the beverage of one's choice – her ode to green tea has a particular zing to it. And the scones, cupcakes and pastries (which received a Tea Guild Award for Excellence) are pretty good too.

Top treat: The delicious chocolate scones, spooned with clotted cream and home-made jam (only with the chocolate afternoon tea).

Address: The Chesterfield Mayfair, 35 Charles Street, Mayfair, London, W1J 5EB.
Days and times: Served daily from 1.30pm to 5.30pm. Elizabeth Darcy Jones will also appear this Mother's Day (Sunday March 18).
Cost: £27.50 (£30.94) Chocolate afternoon tea; £25.50 (£28.69) for the Chesterfield Traditional afternoon tea; Champagne tea from £33.50 (£37.69). Figures in brackets denote price including discretionary service charge.

Sanctum/CSDR gentlemen's afternoon tea

Sanctum Soho is a rock star's boutique hotel and their Gentleman's Afternoon Tea is a heart-stoppingly unwholesome line-up of red meat, carbs and saturated fats topped off with high-octane booze and premium nicotine. One sits on shiny snakeskin upholstery to imbibe English Breakfast tea in smart china. This washes down snacks



sufficient for an army of rock titans: oysters, rabbit pasties, stonking steak sandwiches, burgers and miniature hotpots, followed by a comparatively subtle chocolate fudge cake and Jack Daniels ice cream. The culmination, schedule and liver permit, is a choice of three varieties of JD in silver tankards, with complimentary cigars to take up to the roof terrace. The food is terrific, the surroundings swanky and the service spot-on.

Top treat: the poached oyster with Bloody Mary relish is an ideal jumping-off point.

Address: Sanctum Soho Hotel 20 Warwick Street, London W1B 5NF
Days and times: daily 2pm-6pm
Cost: £50

Fan museum

Taking afternoon tea in the Orangery of a Georgian townhouse is almost as indulgently nostalgic as the eclectic collection of intricate fans, or "trifles" as history has often described them, on show at the Fan Museum. Perched in the heart of Greenwich, it is a short but sweet little trip through history, displaying an assorted handful of its 4000-fan collection. Ranging from a 13th century Chinese fan leaf to a bladeless Dyson, the exhibits tell the story of how fans are a reflection of cultural change – having even been used to disperse evil spirits at one stage –



as well as frivolous cooling devices associated with incessantly fainting ladies in corsets. A jaunt through this unpretentious and playful gallery is followed by a generous afternoon tea, with home-made cakes and two scones complete with liberal amounts of cream and blackcurrant jam made by the museum's owner, for a fan-tastic £6.

Top treat: a satisfyingly hefty hunk of chocolate brownie, moist and filled with white chocolate chunks, will banish the evil spirits even if the fans don't.

Address: Greenwich Fan Museum, 12 Crooms Hill, Greenwich, London, SE10 8ER
Days and times: Tues 3pm-5pm; Sun 3pm-5pm
Cost: £6: two scones, jam and cream, two cakes, pot of tea

The Tea Rooms

The Tea Rooms in Stoke Newington is a delightful venue for a homely afternoon tea. Bedecked with bunting, vintage china and knitted knick knacks, one is instantly transported from the hustle and bustle of London life to somewhere else, a quaint village perhaps where the WI would provide the condiments. The staff is charming, the tea list is extensive and the vast array of cakes on offer is enough to tempt any dieter off the straight and narrow. For just £15, their afternoon tea is more than a bargain. The finger sandwiches are more rustic than dainty, but no less tasty, and the miniature cakes and pastries are not only exquisitely presented but scrumptious to boot. The tour de force, however, is the light and fruity scones.

Top treat: Their fresh, homemade raspberry jam for the scones is quite possibly the finest jam in London.

Address: 153-155 Stoke Newington Church Street, London, N16 0UH

Days and times: Mon-Fri 11am-6pm; Sat-Sun 11am - 6.30pm

Cost: £15 or £17 including a glass of prosecco. A special Mother's Day tea costs £20

Courtesy: The Daily Telegraph

The best places for tea and cakes across England

English Breakfast or Darjeeling? Warm scone or slice of lemon drizzle? The places that do best what Brits do best – tea and cake.

The Fourteas, Stratford-upon-Avon

Decked out in union flags and bunting, the 1940s is brought to life in this place by waitresses in delightful period dresses and headscarves. Lovely details include green crockery and newspapers from the 1940s. The menu is designed as a wartime ration book. Fortunately the food reflects modern tastes, including carrot

cake and iced cupcakes.

Northern England

Greystoke Cycle Cafe, Penrith, Cumbria

The most delicious cake and welcome cup of tea on a cool and wet day at Annie's kitchen table will bring a smile to anyone's face. Set up as a cycle cafe, it has a garden for those rare non-rainy Cumbrian days. The lunches are worth recommending.

Jumping Jenny, Coniston, Cumbria

Every cake mouthful here melts you instantly to have more. Be it a cool or warm day, a cup of tea in proper china hones the tastebuds for more delicious cake. Enjoy while watching the vapour trails from the National Trust's steam yacht Gondola at the jetty below. The view of Coniston and the Lake District mountains is awesome.

Parkhead Station Tearoom, Stanhope Moor, Cumbria

This converted station offers a warm welcome. It's at the point of the C2C cycle route where you begin the downhill swoop to Consett. It's a haven for those who want to rest sore muscles. They serve excellent homemade cake, or broth, if it's cold.

Gillam's tearooms, Ulverston, Cumbria

Ulverston is a pretty market

town at the southern tip of the Cumbria Way in the south Lakes. Gillam's Tea Rooms in Market Street is a sanctuary for the damp and disorientated on a wet day. Gillam's serves the best selection of afternoon teas and the most indulgent Welsh rarebit you can imagine. But best of all is the children's afternoon tea, served on its own tray with a small-person-sized tea set.

Baldry's tearoom, Grasmere, Cumbria

After a day spent being a literary tourist tracing Wordsworth's footsteps, a visit here is thoroughly recommended. One can understand why its lemon meringue pie is world famous: it is a glutton's dream. The Victoria sponge (also delicious) is served on a vintage bone china tea plate, and the lemon meringue pie is so huge it has a cake plate all to itself.

Tea and cake at Barter Books, Alnwick, Northumberland

At Barter Books in Alnwick, one of Britain's largest secondhand





book shops, in a restored Victorian railway station, the old buffet and waiting rooms are the cosiest place imaginable for a light lunch or comprehensive tea. The biggest, moistest slab of carrot cake is served here besides scones, cupcakes, traybake, and various homemade cakes (from £1.90) including fruitcake (£2.80) made to a secret family recipe.

Lulabelle's catering, based in Harrogate, North Yorkshire

Rather than going somewhere for tea and cakes, why not have Lulabelle come to you? She is a pink 1959 VW camper van, which, with the help of her owner, will bring delicious tea and cakes to you with a real vintage feel and flair. Her delicious cakes, such as chocolate and Guinness, draws foodies in great numbers.

Falling Foss tea garden, near Whitby, North Yorkshire

A tea garden located in a forest by a waterfall, Falling Foss is one

of the most enchanting settings you could experience. Ginger cake, carrot cake and old-fashioned fairy cakes line the counter, all freshly baked. The baking is so consistently good that the only problem is whether to have a scone or a slice of luscious ginger cake.

Francis Tearooms, Scarborough, North Yorkshire

Francis Tea Rooms are redolent of a more elegant era, when women wore lace gloves and indulged in afternoon fancies. On a quiet back street behind Scarborough's Esplanade you will find 1930s wood-panelled booths (the tea room was once a barber's), vintage mismatched china and embroidered lawn tablecloths. A full range of Taylor's teas are served by the pot with lemon or milk, and there are savoury dishes and home-baked cakes to tempt the taste buds. The rarebit is particularly good. So are the lemon meringue and the cream teas.



The Midland Hotel, Morecambe, Lancashire

Restored to its former art deco glory, the Midland Hotel is a stunning place for a really special afternoon tea, served in the sun room, which overlooks Morecambe Bay. The Champagne Afternoon Tea (£22.50) includes freshly made finger sandwiches, a scone with jam and clotted cream, chocolate éclairs, strawberries (or fruit tart) and cake, as well as a glass of champagne and pot of high-quality tea – all to be savoured along with the magnificent view.

Central England

Jodrell Bank Observatory Cafe, Macclesfield, Cheshire

Inside the cafe at Jodrell Bank, the decor includes clocks telling you what the time is on Mars, Venus or in a black hole. It has an appetising array of cakes, with lots of gluten-free options. They serve you a huge pot of tea with whole milk from the local farm.

Rocke Cottage Tearoom, Clungunford, near Ludlow, Shropshire

This deliciously quaint tearoom is in a delightful cottage garden. Should the weather be less clement, the inside of the tea room is every

bit as lovely, with plenty of art nouveau oddities and old games to examine. The decor is matched with unobtrusive 1920s and 1930s music. They've won awards from the British Tea Guild for the selection and quality of their teas. The scones and rhubarb cake are mouth-watering.

David Mellor Design Cafe,
Hathersage, Derbyshire

This cafe is a quintessentially British place for a cup of tea and cake. The cafe is simple, modern and stylish. The food – soups, sandwiches and cakes – come in delicious combinations of flavours. The white chocolate and cranberry scones are a particular favourite.

South of England

Fanny's Farm Shop, Merstham,
Surrey

Yummy sandwiches, cakes and scones up in a treehouse! Fanny's Farm Shop has several quirky tea sheds and a delightful treehouse. The huge slices of Victoria sponge



and the thrill of high dining between the branches make it worth the trip.

The Dwelling House, Fowey,
Cornwall

With eclectic decor, wonderful service and fantastic food, The Dwelling House is a little slice of bygone Britain. The amazing array of cakes and scones are freshly cooked in the homely kitchen and served on vintage crockery in the quirky tearooms. The hardest part is deciding what to choose but the scrumptious Victoria sponge is a must!

The Bridge Tearooms, Bradford
on Avon, Wiltshire

A beautiful Victorian tea room set in a building dating back to 1675 and serving wonderful traditional afternoon tea on three-tier stands. The choice of tea is fantastic, all loose leaf and served in beautiful bone china. From the china and the paintings to the Victorian costumes the staff wear, it really does feel like you've stepped back in time. They also serve delicious homemade cakes, pastries and sandwiches.

Touching Souls Tearoom,
Tewkesbury Abbey,
Gloucestershire

This tearoom is run by volunteers from the parish and wider community as part of their Benedictine Hospitality. They serve

homemade cakes and scones, as well as delicious homemade soup and baked potatoes. On Sunday, between 1.30 and 4pm you might find local Girl Guides serving the teas.

Hudson and Bridges, Brighton,
East Sussex

This delightful corner cafe is off the beaten track, just off the seafront in Kemp Town. The foodie treats greet you as you walk in. Wonderful French macaroons, delicious cakes of all types, tarts, lots for choc-lovers and gluten-free slices, all presented beautifully. Tea is served in pretty china, and there's lots of choice.

Wimborne St Giles Village Hall,
Wimborne, Dorset

Forget the county's twee teashops – this is the real thing. The afternoon tea is lovingly prepared by the ladies of Wimborne St Giles, each Sunday raising money for a different charity. Enjoy freshly made petite sandwiches and homemade cakes at a surprisingly low price.

The Tenth Hole tearooms,
Southsea, Hampshire

Opened in 1914 this place has great breakfasts and a stunning and mouthwatering range of cakes, large and small. High chairs for kids, biscuits and drinks for dogs, plenty of outdoor seating – they even provide blankets and hot water bottles for those sunny but chilly days – and great staff make the Tenth Hole a Southsea institution.

The Station House, Holmsley,
Hampshire

At New Forest, this is a sympathetically restored train station in use as a tea room. One can sit outside on the restored platform looking over the beautiful forest while enjoying a delectable millionaire's shortcake. Treats range from a healthy lunch menu to the irresistible afternoon tea and cake selection. There is also a delightful-looking supper menu.

