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THE MAGAZINE

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FOOD + DRINK

LOW TEA

LONDON'S REVITALIZED AFTERNOON TEA TRADITION



The Mandeville Hotel



London, June, 2013

England's now-famous afternoon tea tradition is said to have begun with a mere whim, when Anne, the seventh Duchess of Bedford, repeatedly found herself suffering a certain familiar "sinking feeling" as the day wore on. Today, the duchess's prescribed afternoon pick-me-up — characterized by finger sandwiches, scones with strawberry jam and clotted cream, assorted cakes and, of course, tea — lives on, especially in the capital, where irreverent takes on the old form have revitalized the tradition.

For a proper orientation, start at one of the classic high houses of "low tea." The discreet and oh-so-British **Goring Hotel** is a one-stop education in classic English tea service. The Queen herself has endorsed the place, issuing a royal warrant, while the standard-bearing Tea Guild awarded the hotel its top prize. Served by waiters in waistcoats and bow ties, **afternoon tea** here is truly a delight — taken alfresco on the verandah during the summer, or by a roaring fire in the colder months. Just around the corner from Buckingham Palace, in Belgravia, the hotel has acted as a royal annex since its inception over a hundred years ago, and the tea itself, sourced from the foothills of the Himalayas, is fit for the royal clientele.

If you're looking for something a little more unusual, London is steaming with eccentric venues. The Paramount Restaurant at Centre Point boasts the **highest afternoon tea**, served thirty-two stories above the buzzing streets of Soho. Then there's the **Berkeley Hotel**, where fashionistas can enjoy bite-size accessories to the catwalks' hottest pieces. This season's eye-catching, mouth-watering **Prêt-à-Portea collection** is inspired by Oscar de la Renta, Jonathan Saunders, Dolce & Gabbana, Balenciaga, Prada and Alexander McQueen, among others. My teenage daughter, who loves fashion as much as she does sugar-filled fancies, was in seventh heaven. And while the girls are nibbling on edible slingbacks, biscuit bikinis and honeycomb dresses, the boys can saunter over to the **Gentleman's Tea** at the **Mandeville Hotel's** Reform Social & Grill restaurant by Marylebone High Street. Dark leather banquettes, Scotch whiskey and a manly menu complement

CHEAT SHEET

WHERE

Southern England, the capital of the United Kingdom, a short hop by plane, ferry or train from the European continent.

WHY GO

The sun has set on the British Empire but London remains one of the world's most influential cities — it's not only a major financial center but one of the world's great capitals of culture as well.

HOW

London is served by no fewer than five airports, from the very major Heathrow to the small and central City — but the most humane way to travel remains the high-speed Eurostar train from Paris or Brussels.

TABLET TIP

It's a legendarily expensive city, but London offers a few budget-friendly rewards. Most of the state-run museums are free to enter, and there are few better no-cost cultural itineraries than a morning tour of Tate Britain, a nice walk along and across the Thames, and an afternoon browsing the collection at Tate Modern.

OUR HOTELS

The Goring

those finger sandwiches and scones. My son loved pigging out on the Welsh Wagyu beef burger, sausage roll and hearty pork pie.

For the baby of the family, it was down the rabbit hole to the [Sanderson Hotel's Mad Hatter's Tea](#) in Soho. Menus are hidden in vintage books, linen napkins are wrapped with a riddle, bespoke china is decorated with kings and queens, and the fare comes right off the pages of a storybook: a "tick-tock" Victorian sponge clock, a melting mango cheesecake, "drink me" potion served with a straw, and a host of other whimsical delights.

And then for the grown-ups, cabaret and burlesque hotspot Volupte offers "[Voluptea](#)" every Saturday afternoon. The tea includes the traditional finger sandwiches and buttery scones, plus rather untraditional teapots filled with heady cocktails — and provocative performances to match.

Elena Bowes

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The Mandeville Hotel
The Berkeley
Sanderson
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