



Afternoon Tea





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Afternoon Tea in Switzerland

A Short History of Afternoon Tea

(See Afternoon Tea in London, below)

Zurich

Afternoon Tea in and around Zurich

There is a craze for Afternoon Tea at hotels in London and the heavy competition is the driving force behind many a beautiful idea. In Zurich, there is much less demand for Afternoon Tea. Hence, you could be thinking there is little need to excel. The following places, however, do a job that ranges from fairly decent to seriously impressive.

Carlton

(Bahnhofstrasse 41, 8001 Zürich; 044 227 19 19)

<https://www.carlton.ch/>

<https://www.carlton.ch/de/english-afternoon-tea/>

From September to May, i.e. all year round with the exception of 3 months during summer, the Carlton offers a nice Afternoon Tea, and for 2022, it has been re-designed to include scones, cake, egg liqueur, petit four, lemon tart, coconut praline, salmon on toast, cucumber canapé, avocado on crispbread, egg salad on brioche, liver sausage, spinach-banana cake, and – I must admit I had to look it up – a slice of a Queen Alexandra sandwich. (Alexandra of Denmark married Edward VII, eldest son of Queen Victoria, in 1863, and one of her favourite sandwiches is reported to have contained poached chicken, mayonnaise, mustard butter, cress and a slice of boiled tongue. What a treat !).

The tea menu is varied and all teas, well-known ones and rare ones alike, are explained. The Carlton prefers the runnier crème Gruyère over the firmer clotted cream typically served in England. Most importantly, ask for someone to show you how to remove the sieve with loose tea before the time is up and your tea has turned bitter. The Carlton pots are cleverly designed, heated prior to filling with tea leaves, and are accompanied by an hourglass that is turned the minute the water goes into the pot, i.e. before the tea reaches your table. Now this is attention to detail !



Park Hyatt

(Beethovenstrasse 21, 8002 Zürich; 043 883 10 15)

https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/switzerland/park-hyatt-zurich/zurph?src=corp_lclb_gmb_seo_zurph

<https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/switzerland/park-hyatt-zurich/zurph/area-attractions>

The Afternoon Tea at the Park Hyatt Zurich is a bit of a find. On their website, it hides well among the 'Area Attractions' such as a visit to the Kunsthaus, shopping in Bahnhofstrasse, or a boat cruise on the Limmat. However, if you do find it and manage to place a reservation at least 48 hours in advance, you'll be more than happy with your discovery.



The presentation of the three-tiered stand is one of the best in Zurich. A lot of work has visibly gone into creating all these mouth-watering cakes, sandwiches and confectionaries. The scones have become pleasant, bite-sized cubes – two bites when laden with jam and lemon-mascarpone mousse – and both the variety with as well as the one without raisins are on offer.

What is equally impressive is their choice of tea and how it is served. Gone are the days of tea bags. Loose tea by the world-renowned French tea merchant Mariage Frères can now be found throughout the extensive tea menu. It comes in clear glass pots so that you can appreciate the colour of the tea, and all you need to do is to push down the piston after the desired brewing time. This will separate the leaves from the water and thus avoid rendering the liquid in the tea pot a bitter drink.

Work is under way so that guests can have a matcha freshly whisked up at their table, I wrote at least three years ago. In the meantime, I would advise you keep to all their other, most wonderful teas if you know what matcha is – or order one if you've ever had a ceremonial matcha and you're feeling like having a little bit of fun ;-)

YuLu Teahouse

(Zürichstrasse 10, 8610 Uster; 043 557 53 54)

<https://www.yulu.ch/>

https://www.instagram.com/yulu_teahouse/

YuLu Teahouse is a place that has made itself a name in Switzerland for procuring Chinese tea of exceptional quality and it is run by a most knowledgeable owner, who is only too happy to let you in on the secrets to enjoying good tea. Among the numerous seminars offered at YuLu can now be found an English Afternoon Tea coupled with explanations on the history of Afternoon Tea (which dates back to 19th-century England) and tea in general (which of course starts in China, possibly as early as 2737BC with emperor Shennong).

All the sandwiches, scones and dessert-like bits & nibbles are home-made and – like the teas served at YuLu – of outstanding quality. Even the clotted cream is home-made, and with both its smooth creaminess and subtle sweetness it easily beats all the substitutes such as double cream, crème Gruyère and whipped cream that many 5*-hotels use instead. It is no exaggeration to say that the Afternoon Tea at YuLu Teahouse comes with the best clotted cream to be had in Switzerland.

There are plans to serve Afternoon Tea every last Saturday and Tuesday of the month all year round, but only on prior reservation. What's more, once you've also tasted their excellent hand-made Dim Sum or the delectable Chinese Noodle Soup, you will be hard-pressed to cast a choice.



The Dolder Grand

(Kurhausstrasse 65, 8032 Zürich; 044 456 60 00)

<https://www.thedoldergrand.com/>

<https://www.thedoldergrand.com/en/special-offer/afternoon-tea/>

Afternoon Tea at the Dolder Grand is a little tricky to book as it is only served from November to February, and only on Friday/Saturday/Sunday, and on each of these days there are never more than four slots (sometimes only one), most of which are already sold out. The reason for this restriction is beyond me as I am sure visitors would be more than happy to nibble away what the hotel has dubbed Art Afternoon Tea throughout the year.

The English three-tiered stand has made way for a Dolder D, which staff elegantly place on your table in the lobby. It contains perfectly assembled miniscule nibbles such as beef tartar, egg sandwich, herb crêpe, tuna sandwich, and a duck liver macaron that takes you by surprise if you are in the middle of a conversation and have forgotten that what comes in the disguise of a raspberry macaron is actually not one ! This is followed by a second D, filled with a variety of sweets that showcase more of the kitchen's outstanding abilities: black rice macaron, blood orange tartlet, pâte à choux, chocolate ganache, Dulcey mousse.

In addition to the mini scones, one set with raisins and one with cinnamon, there is a well-written tea menu. It comprises white Bai Mu Dan, Jasmine tea, well-known Chinese and Japanese teas such as Long Jing, Keemun and sencha, but also classic black teas including Darjeeling and Assam. All teas are listed with additional information (All of which is correct ! This is extremely rare !) and brewing parameters. The last part is where the only flaw lies: If a tea requires 3 minutes steeping time, and you do not know how long it has taken for the pot with the tea leaves to arrive at your table, then the remaining time is guesswork. This notwithstanding, the Dolder provides a small container to hold the steeping basket, and thus guests can remove and re-steep the leaves until the desired taste has been reached.



Widder Hotel

(Widdergasse; 044 224 25 26)

Afternoon Tea at the Widder Hotel has been on quite a journey. It used to be served stylishly in their library. From there, it was removed and had a short stint in their cosy upstairs restaurant. Then it went two floors down, and the last time I sampled it was in the famous Widder Bar (Entry through Widdergasse 6).

Along this journey, the originally English invention has received not just a new twist but but a visually stunning Japanese look and comes complete with chopsticks (in addition to European cutlery for those less acquainted with eating using hashi):



The Afternoon Tea Bento that used to be listed on the website in the events section was a wonderful feast for tongue and eyes, but only lasted from November 2018 to March 2019 and then made a seasonally restricted reappearance from mid-October 2019 to end of March 2020. Then came a time during which people would think twice about going out to be merry and sharing dishes. It is thus with great regret that I have to announce that the Widder Hotel is pausing any Afternoon Tea plans for 2023.

Les Gourmandises de Miyuko

(Bärengasse 20, 8001 Zürich; 044 350 21 43)

<https://www.miyuko.ch/>

<https://www.exploretock.com/miyuko>

Sara Hochuli's cosy little place has moved from Stampfenbach to a new location near Paradeplatz. I used to point out that this is one of a few restaurants to serve afternoon tea all year round. From their website, I glean that they still do, and they may have entirely moved away from a traditional afternoon tea to a purely vegetarian version as their website specifies:

“Miyuko Tea Time ist unsere Interpretation des britischen High- und Afternoon Teas. Die vollständige vegetarische Mahlzeit wird in drei Gängen auf einer Étagère serviert. Von Nahrhaft Salzigem über luftig-knusprige Scones hin zur Dessertauswahl. Eine kulinarische Miyuko Reise”

Booking ahead is still essential.



(I have not had a chance yet to take a new picture)

Baur au Lac

(Talstrasse 1, 8001 Zürich; 044 220 50 64)

<https://www.bauraulac.ch/en/le-hall.html>

Under the new general manager, Christian von Rechenberg, The Baur au Lac has completed its renovations and is back with an impressive three-tiered Afternoon Tea. The dessert plate was correctly placed at the top and contained three extremely tasty patisseries – executed to perfection and with a blue Lion imprint as a nod to Zurich. The scones, placed on the middle tier and still radiating a degree of warmth (not to be underestimated if you like to devour them the Cornish way), clearly stood out from underneath their insulating napkin and proudly displayed their break line. In addition to this, they were soft, nice to the touch, and appropriately moist; in short: some of the best scones to be had in Switzerland. What's more, the Baur au Lac now also provides real clotted cream, which they specifically import. The finger sandwiches were delicate but erred maybe a little too much on the side of children's fingers, however, seconds would have been possible and were generously offered.

For many people, champagne is important in such a surrounding and the Baur au Lac has several different kinds on offer. Admittedly, they have always had an exquisite wine cellar. What has dramatically improved over the years is their tea service. The TWG teas have made way to a well-rounded selection of teas from across the world and supplied by Länggass Tee in Bern, and staff are noticeably much better versed both in discussing various aspects of tea as well as the serving of tea. The loose-leaf teas are served with a mesh filter in an adequately-sized pot and together with an hourglass, so that the leaves can be separated at the point of time desired by the guest. A tiny dish to place the dripping filter on (one of the greatest sources of mistakes in hotels worldwide) is infallibly provided with each pot. This is quite impressive.



The interior and the design of Le Hall, where Afternoon Tea is served, continues to mesmerize – once you are inside and have settled down in the hotel's superbly comfortable chairs that is. To

reach this stage proved tricky in the past and continues to do so: Afternoon Tea is only served from October onwards, and only from 13:30 onwards. Guests arriving a quarter of an hour early, need to wait 15 minutes; guests arriving 15 minutes late, will lose their table. Valet parking is for guests with room reservations only; for those without, there is neither valet nor hotel parking, and parking in the city of Zurich is notoriously tricky. (You might easily miss your Afternoon Tea slot by the time you've found a parking slot). Walk-ins are turned away, and the reservation system requires you to place your reservation at least 48h in advance. Couples are heartily welcomed by the reservation system, and so are groups of four. Singles cannot put in a reservation online and are requested to call the concierge desk. Really ? London's Savoy Hotel provides an extra guest, called Caspar the Cat, specifically for groups of 13, but singles ? Parties comprising more than 4 people also need to politely enquire with the concierge. We are yet to try what happens to groups of three. Maybe the Baur au Lac just finds odd numbers a little odd.



Eden au Lac

(Utoquai 45, 8008 Zürich; 044 266 25 25)



Addendum 1: [...]

Addendum 2: [...]

Addendum 3: [...]

Addendum 4: [...]

Sadly, neither this Afternoon Tea nor their Chinese Afternoon Tea are available any longer. This probably constitutes two mistakes 😊

Bern

Bellevue Palace

(Kochergasse 3/5, 3011 Bern; 031/320.45.45)

<https://www.bellevue-palace.ch/>

A short walk from the Swiss Bundeshaus, you enter the Bellevue Palace with the help of a most friendly doorman, only to be swept off your feet by the lobby ceiling on the other side of the revolving door. Here, under the glass dome, the hotel's afternoon tea is usually served, but in summer you will have the pleasure of nibbling on neatly trimmed finger sandwiches and other treats outside on the terrace with a view over the river Aare and Bern.

The fact that my camera concentrated so much on the sandwiches and the sweets (and managed to bring them into focus) must be testimony to the kitchen's ability. Rest assured that everything will be served on a solid two-tiered stand, not the fractured version accidentally pictured here, and that the quality at this hotel exceeds that of my camera lens.



Basel

Les Trois Rois

(Blumenrain 8, 4001 Basel; 061/260.50.50)

<https://www.lestroisrois.com/en/restaurants/afternoon-tea>

The Les Trois Rois is one of those rare hotels that understands how to subtly but perceptibly elevate the afternoon tea experience. Here, it starts with a warm welcome on the doorstep. Then, you are lead through an impressive entrance hall into the hotel bar or outside onto the balcony, where you sit down with a view on the river.

The Afternoon Tea was a feast, too:



Particularly worth mentioning are the sandwiches. In addition to a ham-and-cheese sandwich, a traditional approach would include an egg-and-mayonnaise sandwich as well as a cucumber sandwich. Here, the chef decided to amalgamate the two. His invention has a light green top layer and nestles beautifully between a pink salmon sandwich and a yellow pastrami sandwich. (The grill marks on the pastrami sandwich and all the perfectly clean cuts noticeably contribute to the visual appeal of the starter tier).

The scones were marketed as 'Basler Scones', and while they were piping hot, they were flat, which brought with it a remarkable problem: The strawberry jam was outstandingly delicious, hats off, but it was impossible to get enough of it onto the scones because the latter could not be split and thus did not offer enough surface area for jam or clotted cream, let alone a combination of both.

English scones are split horizontally, and Basler Lächerli are flat. Not the other way round.

Cham

Teehaus Umami

(Schulhausstrasse 1, 6330 Cham; 041/780.20.78)

<https://www.teehaus-umami.ch/>

Teehaus Umami provides an utterly harmonious, spacious, relaxed and comfortably quiet atmosphere. In this most attractive environment, Mrs. Bachmann, the owner, and her team perfectly fill the positions of enormously attentive hostesses.

The tea menu is excitingly varied, and so is the selection of freshly-made cakes. Here you can spontaneously enjoy a light breakfast with tea, sandwiches with tea, scones (with clotted cream) and tea, as well as cake(s) with tea. For Afternoon Tea, you should place your reservation at least one day in advance, and the excitement that comes with the anticipation will be well rewarded with an exquisite three-tiered stand (and tea).

Another highly notable item on their menu is the East Frisian tea. Nowhere else in Switzerland is it served as expertly as here. The East Frisian blend is served in the traditional crockery (Blue Dresmer / Prussian Blue, peony or rose pattern / Rood Dresmer) with a pot placed on the stövchen, complete with kluntje and cream, and, to top it all off, it will even come with the tiny rohmlepel to create the much revered wulkje. If you have been to East Frisia before, you will feel very much at home. If, however, you don't know that out of politeness you should drink at least three (admittedly small) cups or that the use of the spoon is not to stir your tea, don't hesitate to ask your hostesses for the full set of instructions to be followed with this particular kind of tea. It will be both a feast for your eyes as well as for your tongue.



Luzern

Mandarin Oriental

(Haldenstrasse 10, 6002 Luzern; 041/588.18.88)

<https://www.mandarinoriental.com/en/luzern/palace/dine/mozern>

In the wake of intense and successful renovation, the Palace Hotel has now reopened under Chinese ownership as the Mandarin Oriental Palace Lucerne. With approximately 36 sister hotels in 24 different countries with more than abundant experience in providing high-class afternoon tea (cf. Mandarin Oriental Knightsbridge, London), the bar was set high for this hotel to perform equally well. Having visited and marvelled at what and how the royal nibble was presented, it is no exaggeration to say that the MO Signature Afternoon Tea has made a phenomenal entrance in Lucerne and right at the very top.

Afternoon Tea at the MO Lucerne is served on the veranda with seats in pairs so that all guests enjoy a good view of the waterfront promenade, the lake and the panorama of mountains behind. Right at the outset of the multi-course experience, the man-high tree-like frame gives away the fact that the forthcoming spectacle will be similar to the one at MO London, which immediately heightens expectations and increases levels of happy serotonin. Indeed, even before the first course is served, guests are pampered with a starter cocktail and two Swiss traditional dishes dexterously reduced to bite-sized dimensions but without the least of compromises on their quality. (I was so impressed with the miniature Luzerner Pastetli that I have forgotten what the other part was).

Admittedly, they had a few more treats up their sleeve even before the sandwiches started to make their appearance: The selection of teas is pleasantly extensive and varied. It covers white tea (There is a rare tea called 'Antlers' from Malawi on the menu, which is "tea" from tea leave stems instead of tea leaves), green tea (both Chinese and Japanese) as well as a number of black teas and infusions (herbal tea) sourced not directly from China but from Paper & Tea. (This is a Berlin-based company that now also has a shop at Rennweg 36 in Zurich). It is unclear to guests how far away the kitchen is where all the delicacies are prepared. To circumvent the problem of over-brewing (A serious and in Switzerland frequently observed difficulty), the tea is prepared in the kitchen and is only carried to the table when it is ready (and without unhappy tea leaves still lying in the hot water rendering the drink bitter as time continues to go by). Many of their teas allow for a second or third brew, and so it was another, yet all the more pleasant surprise to observe that tea was served in drinkable portions. It will be interesting to see whether the hotel will keep the kind of



pot they currently use. Its handle is cleverly designed to hold back the lid should you forget to secure it with the finger while pouring. While the less experienced are thus prevented from accidentally dropping and damaging lids, I made the experience in my tea courses that the very same handle is not tightly enough fastened to the glass belly of the pot, and so it is more often the handle than the lid that cracks. (You may refer to this article [here](#) if this should happen to you).

Instead of the usual three-tiered stand, the MO Signature Afternoon Tea comes in three stages, and each time a two-tiered stand is attached to the metal branch to look similar to a bird cage. The first course consists of a Silserli that is accompanied by finger sandwiches (egg salad, coronation chicken, smoked salmon, Gruyère cheese with walnuts and apple chutney). The clever allusions to Swiss and British iconic food items are most distinct, and the sensational quality of each individual piece is best illustrated by the close-up of the Silserli on the right. It is Silser bread topped with soft whole grain mustard, cured slices of meat, and decorated with micro greens with tweezer precision.

This is followed by a set of lovely scones with Crème Gruyère (Now, this is interesting. I would normally argue that it is a serious mistake to use Crème Gruyère. People usually first come into contact with Afternoon Tea in the UK, and when they crave this meal here, they either expect the same experience or wish to see how well chef can reproduce the original. Devonshire clotted cream is a little tricky to obtain in Switzerland, and so is Cornish clotted cream, but using Crème Gruyère consistently invites complaints from guests – behind the back, of course ! The hotel will not hear it, but I swear, the majority of guests notice the difference. Having said this, because the Mandarin Oriental Lucerne is a Chinese hotel with a kitchen that openly declares it is keen to showcase Swiss-British ties in its Afternoon Tea, this is probably the only place to get away with the use of the slightly runnier Swiss double cream), strawberry jam and marmalade.

The meal is rounded off with hand-made pastries including pavlova, Paris-Brest, black forest gâteau, chocolate candies and more of their exquisite teas.

This is one mighty Afternoon Tea !



Rapperswil-Jona

simongarden

(Johannisbergstrasse 25, 8645 Rapperswil-Jona; 044/923.71.67)

<https://www.simongarden.ch/der-garten-und-der-afternoon-tea>

Imagine the scene: You are standing on a hill overlooking the city of Rapperswil-Jona, which itself is situated on the lake of Zurich. Then, you turn around and through a gate enter a private garden with a collection of 80 different kinds of roses plus other hardy perennials. It is in this stunning surrounding that you will be served Afternoon Tea by Margrit Simon (Her husband, a tea sommelier, can be booked extra to advise on tea) outdoors on a sunny day and in an indoor venue exclusively reserved for your group should it rain.

Margrit will aptly guide you past her impressive roses to your place and expertly impart her profound garden knowledge, and just when you are musing what a wonderful treatment you are receiving here, she will bring out her sensational Afternoon Tea. The three-tiered stand comes complete with sandwiches, scones with jam and clotted cream, as well as an array of sweets. Attention to detail here is second to none. Not only can you see Margrit's talent for decoration, but you can also taste her outstanding cooking skills. This is Switzerland's best private Afternoon Tea – and the level of perfection drives tears into the eyes of many a professional chef.

The roses are usually in peak bloom from the beginning of May to the end of June. (The selection of snowdrops is well worth admiring in February, too, but both visits need prior arrangement). Afternoon Tea is served all year round from Wednesday to Saturday for a minimum of 4 people.



Afternoon Tea in London

Like Cream Tea, Afternoon Tea is a treat. The English habit of drinking tea, it is said, goes back to Catherine de Braganza, a Portuguese princess who married King Charles II (around 1660, when Oliver Cromwell's body was exhumed, post-humously hanged and his head mounted on a spike above Westminster Hall. Prior to this time, there was little water that was safe to drink and so even children often consumed alcoholic beverages. When coffee became fashionable, coffee houses were mostly the reserve of men. The places were deemed too rough for women!). Back then, tea was such a precious commodity that only small portions were available and they were kept in small tea chests with a lock. Usually, the lady of the house was the only person with a key to it, and she would only give a small quantity of tea to the servants when the preparation of tea was required.

It was only in 1840 that 7th Duchess of Bedford, Anna, introduced the concept of Afternoon Tea. Meal times are reported to have been at 8-10 for breakfast, around 12 for lunch and around 8 p.m. for dinner. Some reports claim that only breakfast and dinner were usual. In any case, Anna would feel a hunger pang in the afternoon and needed sustenance. Her afternoon meal then developed into a social gathering to which one would invite friends. This in turn gave rise to the opportunity to show your wealth (which included a small chest of green and black tea from "exotic countries far away", and it was thus that Afternoon Tea became an elaborate feast.

Today, traditional Afternoon Tea is served on a three-tiered stand. It usually comprises crustless sandwiches (including the famous cucumber sandwich; luckily, the private chef to the Earl of Sandwich had invented the snack that could be devoured without cutlery – albeit with a good slice of meat – during a game of poker around 1750. The invention of the sandwich was then followed by a period during which the edges were cut off for refined diners because the bread crust was thought to contain unhealthy particles, and this very fashion is still continued today when serving Afternoon Tea), scones, strawberry jam and clotted cream (i.e. one section of the tier is reserved for a meal that is called cream tea today if served on its own), and sweet treats.



(Afternoon Tea in London as imagined by AI. It ticks quite a few boxes!)

The Dorchester Hotel

(53 Park Lane, W1K 1QA; +44 20 7629 8888)

<https://www.dorchestercollection.com/en/london/the-dorchester/>

The Dorchester has been serving Afternoon Tea for more than 80 years, it claims undoubtedly rightfully. With this kind of experience at its hand, it does a wonderful job. Expect plush sofas in stunning surroundings, and don't forget to admire the chandelier.



The Savoy

<https://www.thesavoylondon.com/experience/afternoon-tea-london/>

(Address: The Strand – yes, this is a road in London. It's a rather long stretch of road, but people who go to the Savoy know where it is. What most don't know is that the name of the road dates back to a time when there was water here. Foreigners should google the post code WC2R 0EU; +44 20 7836 4343. You are advised against driving to the Savoy yourself. The English drive on the left-hand side, but the law is such that on that little stretch between The Strand and the hotel entrance you have to drive on the right. The fact that usually the left is the right side and that here you unexpectedly but rightfully drive on the right, even confuses many a taxi driver).

At the Savoy, afternoon tea is served in the Thames Foyer under a glass dome. (Visitors are accepted. Hold your head high, walk through the main entrance, go straight ahead down the stairs as if this was the most natural thing to do. The lady in the picture on the right will kindly ask you for your name. This gives the hotel a chance to discreetly charge guests directly to their room without openly asking for the room number. If you are a guest, you will soon realise that the staff have learnt your name). They have a very nice selection of teas, and just before you leave through the main entrance, you will see a sweets and tea shop inside the hotel on your left. It is well worth a visit.



The Landmark Hotel: The Winter Garden

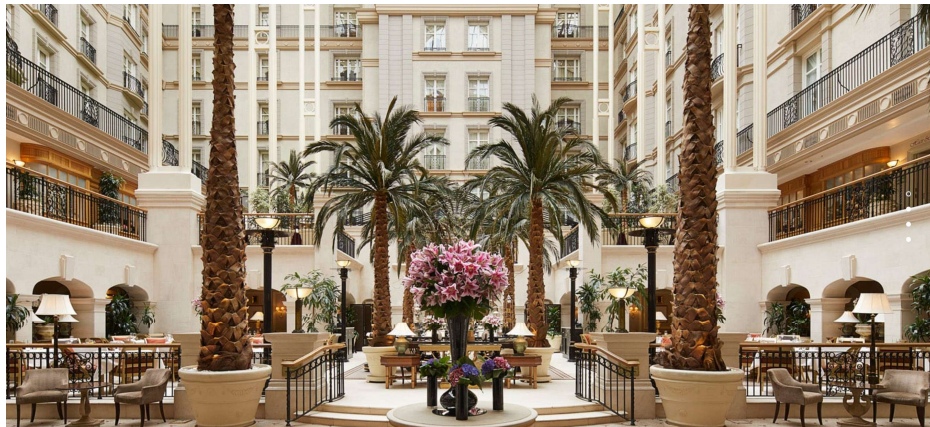
(222 Marylebone Rd, NW1 6JQ; +44 20 7631 8000)

<https://www.landmarklondon.co.uk/dining/high-palms-high-tea/>

This is one of those hotels where on looking back you would have loved to arrive in style in a taxi at the hotel main entrance, because it has its own drive and a doorman to open doors into another world. Sadly, the traffic along Marylebone Rd will drive you insane before your arrival most of the daytime. Alternatively, you can take the Bakerloo line to Marylebone Station (It is also a small station with only 6 platforms and the last one to be built since 1899) and comfortably stroll across the road under a canopy should it rain. If it does not rain, it is well worth to walk around the hotel and enter from the opposite side, i.e. from Marylebone Rd. (Google the name if you are unfamiliar with the unexpected pronunciation). The Winter Garden, where Afternoon Tea is served, is mightily impressive through either approach, but it is even more breath-taking when you walk through the lower lobby entrance and discover the setting with huge palm trees as you climb up the stairs.

Afternoon Tea is served here on a separate silver-plated stand that is positioned next to your table. This way, it will not be in between you and your dining partner when you discuss the wide choice of excellent tea. The sandwiches cover the classic flavours enhanced to the high standard the kitchen consistently shows from breakfast to dinner, and the collection of sweets is regularly adapted to give visitors something new every time. Of course, you should not order more finger sandwiches than you can eat, but if you accidentally do, you may ask whether you can take them with you. Instead of a shabby doggy bag, you will be equipped with a dainty little carton handbag that will make you walk back to the station most proudly. The hotel has a number of such wonderful tricks up its sleeve !

Since it was originally designed as a hotel for the then Great Western Railway Company and has since 1899 always been a hotel, you may also choose to book a room here. You will be pleasantly surprised by the size of the rooms, let alone the service.



The Rotunda at Ten Trinity Square (Four Seasons)

(10 Trinity Square, EC3N 4AJ; +44 20 3297 9200)

<https://www.fourseasons.com/tentrinity/dining/lounges/rotunda-lounge/afternoon-tea/>

The Rotunda is not just any hotel lobby. Here, you sit down to Afternoon Tea where the Romans started building Londinium in 47AD. In around 1060, William the Conqueror built the Tower of London down by the Thames, and in 1666, the Great Fire of London started barely half a mile far away. In 1922, Ten Trinity Square became the headquarters of the Port of London Authority and in its heydays, more than a 1'000 people per day would flock to this building to pay their duties for boats and ships with cargo often from far East arriving in London.

Step out of the Rotunda and you will inadvertently cross the defence perimeter of the Tower of London, embossed into the stone ground near the entrance to the Four Seasons and to this day still beaten by the Beefeaters every three years. In the distant past, anyone caught within this area would have risked being shot at by the Tower's archers, but guests nibbling at Afternoon Tea today are seated on the safe side and can enjoy the hotel's offerings to their fullest.

Currently on offer is "The Crown Jewels Afternoon Tea", which constitutes more than an appealing nod to the precious stones heavily guarded by Yeoman Warders at the Tower situated less than a 4-minute walk far away. For the Afternoon Tea pastries, for example, the kitchen has taken inspiration from Royal jewels, coins, the Sovereign's orb and even the crown of St. Edward the Confessor. (Guests are bound to recognise it as this particular crown makes its appearance during the coronation ceremonies. It was last used for the late Queen Elizabeth II and again had a role during the coronation of Charles III).



Anyone going for The Jewels Afternoon Tea at Ten Trinity Square will encounter an admirable abundance of historical hints and references. They range from nautical, decorative elements on the building's façade (including Father Thames pointing East as a reference to intensive tea and spice trade with the East) to the Tower of London's safety zone. Indoor, you will find carefully restored

Roman stonework and the Rotunda's glass dome reminisces of the not-far-away dome at St.Paul's, while the offerings on the three-tiered stand skilfully allude to Victorian times. This is an incredibly well thought through Afternoon Tea, albeit it with one tiny caveat: Clotted cream served as "Yorkshire Cream" – and I could swear it was not 😊



The Pan Pacific: Straits Kitchen vs. Shiok!

(80 Houndsditch, EC3A 7AB; +44 20 7118 6888)

<https://www.panpacific.com/en/hotels-and-resorts/pp-london/dining/straits-kitchen/afternoon-tea-at-pan-pacific-london.html>

The Pan Pacific Hotel has two entirely different kinds of Afternoon Tea on offer (and for special occasions such as Easter the theme may vary even more). Fear not: You do not have to cast your choice when making the reservation. The Straits kitchen can miraculously cater to your spontaneous on the day.



The Traditional Afternoon Tea comes with the customary finger sandwiches (Salmon, cucumber, egg, Coronation Chicken), supplemented by a crab finger sandwich, scones (one plain, one with exotic fruits), and sweets.





(There are not many places, even in London, where you have the chance to photograph two London double decker buses while admiring the intricate details of your sweets).

For those who look for a slightly uncommon variation, the Kopi Tiam Afternoon Tea is an excellent choice. (The term, which – surprisingly – translates as ‘coffee shop’, probably goes back to the Singaporean origins of the pastry chef who had a skilful hand in the creation of afternoon tea here when the Pan Pacific opened in 2021). The scones (which are exceptionally soft and break well along a predefined horizontal line) and the sweets are the same as in the Traditional Afternoon Tea, but instead of the finger sandwiches, a variety of Dim Sum are served.



Either Afternoon Tea starts with a nice choice of tea and the question whether you desire champagne. If you do, and some people don't shy away from ordering an entire bottle, then you probably don't care for the finer details of drinking tea. If, however, you are presented with a beautiful assortment of tea leaves to smell at and choose from at the outset, then you will be surprised to notice that this hotel of Asian origin serves tea the London style: Wait for three minutes, then pour a cup. Relax with your first cup of tea, safe in the knowledge that the tea leaves in the pot will continue to overbrew (or even turn bitter), and when you are ready for a second cup, you can always order hot water to dilute the ruined flavour.



Sarcasm in London aside, here at the Pan Pacific you can ask for the first and correctly brewed pot to be poured into a second pot in order to separate the leaves from the liquor, and you will find staff who understand the idea behind this request.

If you don't have time for an extensive traditional or Kopi Tiam Afternoon Tea, you will find a small café called "Shiok!" adjacent to the hotel with croissants from an incredibly talented French baker. Already the first bite will make you think you are sitting in the heart of Paris; that's how evocative these croissants are !



Marianna's twist of the *Shiok! Exclusive Blend* tea deserves a special mention, too. This black tea is normally served hot, but she can turn it into ice tea in no time and if you like this particular blend hot, you will discover a surprisingly similar flavour profile in the cool thirst-quencher. Although it is available with milk, it is well worth a try without.



Addendum 2025: After only three years and offering what was widely considered sensational sweets and by far the most amazing croissants in the city, Shiok! has closed. So has Silverleaf, the bar above the eatery, which was described as "widely recognised as a leader of the London bar scene [...], creating forward-thinking cocktails and innovative menus" (Classbarmag.com). The entire house, Devonshire House, was sold, but it will undoubtedly prove hard for the new owners to find someone who can make such classy croissants.

Fortnum & Mason: The Diamond Jubilee Salon

(181 Piccadilly, W1A 1ER; +44 20 7734 8040)

<https://www.fortnumandmason.com/afternoon-tea>

Fortnum & Mason are not exactly a hotel, but because you want to pay Mr. Hilton in their tea department a visit anyway, you may also be interested in Afternoon Tea served in their Diamond Jubilee Salon on the 4th floor. Surprisingly, it's not rated among the top 10 on Tripadvisor (or the top 100, or 200, or 300, or 400 places to have tea). Nonetheless, with 82 different and select teas on the menu, this is an interesting place. After all, they have been serving tea since 1707. (Twinings established the first tea parlour on the Strand in 1706).



The Berkeley

(Wilton Place, Knightsbridge, SW1X 7RL; +44 20 7235 6000)

With so many places to offer classy Afternoon Tea, you have to go a long way to beat your competitor hotels. This is why the Berkeley have invented a special Afternoon Tea with a pun: Prêt-à-Portea. Your three-tier stand will come complete with garments, shoes and handbags. Like in fashion, the theme changes every 6 months.



The Ampersand

(10 Harrington Rd, SW7 3ER; +44 20 7591 4414)

At the Ampersand, too, they do special themes that change on a regular basis. Often, you have the choice between classic, vegan or science Afternoon Tea.



One Aldwych

(1 Aldwych, WC2B 4RH; +44 20 7300 0400)

Based on Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, the One Aldwych serves an Afternoon Tea with drink-me bottles, candy floss and other mini surprises. Don't forget to order the scrumdiddlyumptious Cocktail Charlie (available both in alcoholic and non-alcoholic versions).



St. James's Hotel

(7-8 Park Place, St. James's, SW1A 1LS; +44 20 7316 1600)

Sadly, the Queen's guards that used to guard the entrance to St. James's Palace – the main royal palace before Buckingham Palace – have retreated. Fortunately, the plush St. James's Hotel is still there and it still serves an imaginative afternoon tea. The theme changes from time to time, but their "It's all in the game" tea appears to be quite popular. The menu includes snakes and ladders, Monopoly top hat, chess board, dice, Scrabble, and Dominoes



Sunborn Yacht Hotel

(Royal Victoria Docks, E16 1AA; +44 20 3714 8111)

Space in London is rare whether it be in hotel rooms or in the street. With so many now unused docks left from colonial days, there is enough room at the Royal Victoria Docks for a luxury yacht hotel with 120 rooms and afternoon tea.



The Sanderson Hotel

(50 Berners Street, W1T 3NG; +44 20 7300 1400)

The prevailing theme at the Sanderson Afternoon Tea is the Mad Hatter tea party from Alice in Wonderland. On your three-tiered stand, you will find drink-me potions, little bugs and worms, the playing card soldiers, and resizing mushrooms for the daring eaters. It even comes with a biscuit watch, but you are advised not to follow the example of the Mad Hatter: Eat your watch, do not dip it into your tea.



Brown's Hotel

(33 Albemarle St, Mayfair, W1S 4BP; +44 20 7493 6020)

Brown's is a much distinguished hotel where staff will unpack your suitcase and a chauffeur will drive you to the airport in one of the hotel's own Rolls-Royces (Yes, they have several – just in case they need more than one. So much for thoughtful little extras). Here, they serve a classic classy Afternoon Tea as well as a healthier option called Tea-tox.



The Mandarin Oriental

(66 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7LA; +44 20 7201 3828)

In the Mandarin Oriental's Rosbery Lounge, the Afternoon Tea hangs on a tea tree. What an original idea ! The Afternoon Tea menu is in parts a little difficult to understand (Chicken shawarma sandwich, confit tuna with piquillo pepper), but in their Rare & Limited Teas section you will find tea from the Tregothnan Estate in Cornwall. This is the only tea estate in England (though surprisingly not the sole one in the UK!) and it manages to produce only a small quantity. So small, in fact, that often even Fortnum & Mason will not have any. (World tea production: about 3-6 million tons. Tregothnan: 10 tons).



Rubens at the Palace

(39 Buckingham Palace Rd, SW1W 0PS; +44 20 7834 6600)

The Palace in question here is Buckingham Palace, but the insider, who happens to know that the post code for Her Majesty's London residence is SW1W 1AA, readily notices that you should not tell your taxi driver to take you to Buckingham Palace – unless you wish to walk the distance to the Rubens.

The Royal Afternoon Tea is served in the hotel's Palace Lounge, where some seats have view over the entrance to the Queen's Mews. You may spot some horses while you linger over your choice of PMD tea (Taxis are far more likely), and you also have the option of switching to the Vegetarian Royal (Afternoon Tea), the Vegan Royal, the Gluten-free Royal, or the Prince & Princess Royal. Watch out and order carefully: The Times (newspaper) journalist Valentine Low tried out their exclusive "Golden Tip" tea leaves in 2019, served with golden tweezers and weighed manually on golden scales, which he found comes at the most royal price of £500 per pot – finger sandwiches, scones, savouries and sweets will be charged separately ! (When booking, you should check whether 20% VAT and 12.9% optional service charge are included as there is no mention of this in their menu; and bring your gold credit card).



The Drawing Room at The Kensington

(109-113 Queen's Gate, South Kensington, SW7 5LP; +44 20 7589 6300)

Walking up to the hotel, you pass a number of similar-looking houses, all painted white and adorned with stately columns at their entrances. It is only upon entering The Kensington that the secret to what lies behind these stucco-fronted façades of Victorian and early-Georgian townhouses is revealed to you. Once inside, you are swiftly guided to the elegant Drawing Room, complete with an open fireplace, comfortable seating and artful décor, where Afternoon Tea is served. Although available daily, it is well worth visiting The Kensington website before making a booking, as the theme of the Afternoon Tea varies throughout the year. It may be 'Let us eat cake' (a powerful pun on Marie Antoinette's alleged comment of around 1740), or you may leave with an illustration of yourself with cake fork in hand, created by a live illustrator.

Attentive, warm-hearted staff and wonderfully light, warm scones deserve a special mention. The tea menu has been written with great care and is highly informative for beginners and advanced tea drinkers. Sadly, some guests find the selection somewhat limited. Also, while an excellent, rare and highly commendable tea from a boutique tea estate in India, Lakysiew, is listed, one cannot help but wonder whether this justifies copy & pasting the purveyor's company description that "many of their teas are rare with only a few kilos produced each year".



London Heathrow, T5: Tea 5

(Terminal 5, LHR, TW6 2GD; +44 20 8757 7777)

<https://www.sofitelheathrow.com/restaurants-bars/tea-5/>

Just a few minutes' stroll from London Heathrow's most prestigious terminal, T5, and down one floor with a lift to the 5-star Sofitel will take you to a spacious and classy tea salon ingeniously called "Tea 5". If you're feeling peckish before or after a flight, here you have a choice of sweets from a dessert trolley, but only if you can resist the intriguing cuboidal croissants.



Alternatively, you can opt for an afternoon tea, dubbed "Travel around the World", which features quite a number of destinations such as Paris (crème brûlée), New York (cheese cake), Tokyo (green tea tartlet), Belgium (chocolate) and many more.

What is particularly notable is how the English scones split: horizontally and perfectly. This is an art and shows the work of an excellent pastry chef. Fly abroad from Tea 5 or T5, and you will find that many places struggle with this detail (or even with clotted cream).



Tea 5 serves more than a dozen different kinds of tea from Jing Tea. The tea pots are rather large, but the staff are extremely forthcoming and understand that Jing's one-cup tea-ière (preferably only about half filled) is a better choice as otherwise the remaining tea leaves will overbrew while you're sipping on your first cup.

The salon is open from 07:30 to 16:30, and because afternoon tea is served from 11 a.m., you could also enjoy a last iconic meal here before leaving the UK. On weekends, a Sunday Roast and a vegan Wellington are available. What you cannot do here, however, is to order a five-o'clock tea – for obvious reasons.

More Places

Wells, Somerset, England

Stoberry House & Garden

(Stoberry House, Stoberry Park, Wells, Somerset, BA5 3LD)

Stoberry House lies at the end of an impressively long drive-way leading through Stoberry Park. I highly recommend you stay there for a night or two and have Afternoon Tea in the garden. (Well, in one of the three, complete with pond and two duck houses, and with a superb view over the city of Wells). You can also visit for just the Afternoon Tea, but afterwards you will wish you had stayed there. Besides the fact that their excellent scones and cakes are homemade, they also have a very good selection of teas. They have even asked a tea company to produce a signature blend for them, and their house tea is indeed very appealing. On a good day, you will see Glastonbury Tor at the horizon. At the foot of the hill, there is a monastery where King Arthur was (or possibly was or may have been) buried, when most of the flat area was still under water and the Tor on an island. The City of Wells, its Cathedral as well as the Bishop's castle are well worth a visit too.



Tu Hwnt i'r Bont

(Address: Llanrwst LL26 0PL, North Wales, United Kingdom)

On the west bank of the River Conwy resides the award winning, family run Tu Hwnt i'r Bont (Whatever the pronunciation, it probably translates as “Beyond the Bridge”), which is actually considerably older than the bridge it stands beside. Originally built as a residential dwelling in 1480, it was later used as the courthouse for the surrounding area. From here, the most serious offenders were taken to Tan y Craig in Llanrwst where they would be hanged outside the old gaol! (Llanrwst is not to be mixed up with the 30-mile far away Llanfair. The latter place is more famous for its full name, Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogo-gogoch, but lacks an equally beautiful tea house).

Over the centuries Tu Hwnt i'r Bont has fallen into disrepair several times and has been restored through the generosity of the townsfolk. During the last century, Tu Hwnt i'r Bont was acquired by the National Trust, which have since leased the building for over 50 years.

The decision made by the original leaseholder, over half a century ago, to turn Tu Hwnt i'r Bont into a traditional Welsh Tea Room has proved to be a success. To this day, the recipe for the scones remains true and continues to be a well-kept secret, they say.

Their menu lists a “Full Welsh Afternoon Tea”, which includes a pot of tea, a warm scone with fresh cream and jam, a slice of cake, a slice of Bara Brith, wholemeal bread and butter. As it is still on my to-do list, I couldn't possibly comment on the Bara Brith.





Ritz Carlton: The Lounge

(Potsdamer Platz 3, 10785 Berlin, Germany; +49 30-33.777.54.50)

<https://www.sevenrooms.com/landing/theloungeberlin>

The Lounge is an excellent find – and the Afternoon Tea at the Lounge, skillfully presented by head pastry chef Moritz M. Müller, is a truly sensational one. Actually, more than one as there is a choice between three: “Vegan Tea Time Berlin Style” (This includes carrot cake, Kalter Hund [aka cold dog, cold snout, radiokaka in Swedish or hedgehog slice in English], as well as scones with homemade marmalade), “Glamorous 1920’s Afternoon Tea” (in-house made snickers bar, richly-filled profiterole, open salmon sandwich), or “The Ritz-Carlton Classic Afternoon Tea” (Forget the word ‘classic’ though and look forward to a series of items with flavours that will take you on a wonderful journey, which can, for example, start with a well-executed ‘interpretation of a club sandwich’ to replace a more common ham & cheese finger sandwich. The scones have been transformed into lemon and blueberry scones, and are accompanied by the Ritz’s own blueberry jam. Finally, the desserts plate tempts with delicacies such as a Raspberry Blondie and other sweet seductions).

Oliver takes extremely well care of the teas. It is rare to find someone like him who knows that tea can change its flavour in the pot, and often will go bitter, if you keep it warm. It is strongly recommended that you listen to him carefully and heed his expert advice. He has a delightful selection of teas ranging from ‘normal’ to ‘highly interesting’. While the Rosenthal teapots used here themselves display outstanding craftsmanship, they feel a little over-sized, and so it may be preferable to choose a tea that you are inclined to share. Having said this, the pots retain the heat remarkably well and thus are themselves testimony to the Rosenthal expertise in the making of outstanding China. This is attention to detail, and the Ritz Carlton has chosen its crockery well.



The Ritz-Carlton's Vegan Afternoon Tea was nothing short of a triumph either. Every element of the experience reflected a remarkable level of care and consideration for vegan guests, with the kitchen presenting a series of exquisitely crafted delights that were as beautiful to look at as they were to devour.

Among the highlights was a sandwich filled with perfectly grilled seasonal vegetables and mushroom cream. The sweet offerings were equally impressive: Among others, there were a light and airy tiramisù, a berry mousse bursting with fresh flavour, and a show-stopping pecan-chocolate bomb with a stunning sheen.

The scones, delicious in their own right, were served with a generous helping of vegan clotted cream. The subtle hint of coconut, lending it a delicate sweetness and smooth texture, paired wonderfully with the accompanying preserves.

Our hats off to the kitchen at Ritz Carlton Berlin.



Regent Berlin

(Charlottenstrasse 49, 10117 Berlin, Germany; +49 30.20.338)

<https://www.ihg.com/regent/hotels/us/en/berlin/berct/hoteldetail/dining/tea-and-lobby-lounge>

The Regent's Tea & Lobby Lounge is a cozy place that not only offers Afternoon Tea with and without champagne, but also Cream Tea (There is a difference between afternoon tea and cream tea) as well as Cake Trolley and Tea. If you need any assistance, you are well placed in the hands of Swiss Barbara Hanimann, a Ronnefeldt Gold Tea Master who will guide you through your experience. The setting is Regency style (with a piano, silver tea pots, open fireplace, piano from 3 o'clock) and thus very much in line with the traditional Afternoon Tea concept that evolved from the time of Anna, 7th Duchess of Bedford. There are plenty of tables, the service is unobtrusive, and thus the entire Afternoon Tea pleasantly. Here, you can hear yourself think and the members of your party speak.



Anantara Palais Hansen: Theo's Lounge and Bar

(Schottenring 24, Wien 1010; +43 1 236.1000)

<https://www.anantara.com/en/palais-hansen-vienna/restaurants/afternoon-tea>

Vienna boasts a remarkable abundance of palatial-style residences, many of them built purposely near the Hofburg – and each seemingly more impressive than the other. In 1683, as the Ottoman army retreated from the city, several sacks of what was initially mistaken for camel feed were left behind. The contents turned out to be coffee beans and, thus, this unexpected discovery laid the foundation for Vienna's deeply-rooted coffee culture – one so enduring that tea never managed to dispel it. Nevertheless, during a time when tea remained a luxury commodity reserved for the aristocracy, the tradition of afternoon tea quietly made its entrance. Today, tucked among the city's countless coffeehouses and Schnitzel-serving establishments, there is a single Palais that offers afternoon tea – and what a majestic one it is.



Served in an impressive neo-renaissance reception hall, the Anantara's two-tier stand comes with an abundance of lovely treats. Among them stand out the apple strudel pouches that are served still hot.

The above-mentioned delicacies are accompanied by Jing tea – and an interesting conundrum: The tea is prepared expertly. There can be no doubt about this, even though, for example, Silver Needles are served with three different types of sugar sachets, but this is a typical hotel standard and only fulfils misguided guest expectations. The tea is elegantly showcased in a small glass pot with separator, it comes complete with a 3-minute hourglass and a miniature Madelaine cake. You lift the Jing one-cup tea-ière from the Jing wood board to pour the Jing tea into the ready Jing glass cup – only to find that about 25% of the brewed tea will not fit into the cup. The remainder will continue to steep in the branded pot, growing the bitterer the longer you sip from your branded cup.



Needless to say that tea is not considered important enough in Europe for a problem like this entirely to make its way from guest to waiting staff to management and back to Jing. As a result, two guests should maybe consider ordering one pot of tea and two cups; the second cup will not fit onto the Jing branded board, but that would be a true lesser evil than watching tea turn evil in its confined see-through pot.

Alternatively, order a phenomenal looking drink from their well-stocked bar – free from such mundane tea drinker problems. After all, 350 years after Europe's introduction to tea, it still appears easier to serve alcohol:



The Strings

(Shinagawa East One Tower 26-32/F, 2-16-1 Konan, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8282, Japan; +81.3-5783-1111) <https://intercontinental-strings.jp/offers?updatelang=yes> ; <https://intercontinental-strings.jp/jp/offers/autumn-chinese-afternoontea> ; <https://intercontinental-strings.jp/offers/autumn-dimsum-afternoon-2022>

The Strings by Intercontinental (The hotel is only a short walk from Shinagawa station with Bullet Trains to Yokohama, Osaka and Kyoto; 15 minutes to Haneda airport) is situated in one of those luxury high-rise buildings with a most impressive entrance and a stunning reception hall. It has rooms and restaurants with a commanding view over Tokyo, all of which mark a perfect start for a perfect Afternoon Tea, served on cute little tables on your table. With much attention to detail, the chefs create a lovely Afternoon Tea that is served with loose leaf TWG tea. There is even a takeaway version available that comes with a TWG tea bag.

Any strings attached ? Yes, several ☺

- The Afternoon Tea menu changes regularly (From Ruby Rouge Afternoon Tea, pictured below, to Chocolate & Caramel Afternoon Tea to White Sparkling Christmas Afternoon Tea to Chinese Afternoon Tea to Sakura-scented Strawberry Afternoon Tea and so forth. Recommend one to your friends, and the hotel will probably already be working on the next variation).
- Some Afternoon Teas are heavily restricted. The Chinese Afternoon Tea, for example, is restricted to a maximum of 10 people per day.
- The hotel has so many attractive offers, you may have to go back several times, but this is probably what the hotel wants you to do. The Chinese Afternoon Tea and the Dim Sum Afternoon Tea, to highlight just one of the mouth-watering temptation problems, are not the same.
- You are further spoilt for choice as The Strings Omotesando also offers sensationally beautiful afternoon teas and is conveniently connected to exit B5 at Omotesando station. (<https://www.strings-hotel.jp/omotesando/>)

