



Seattle Refined

Judging Seattle Tea; By A Brit

By Paola Thomas | Published: May 20, 2015



As a Brit, afternoon or high tea is deeply embedded into my DNA, right next to the Queen and cricket. It's a fabulous meal, the love child of lunch and an afternoon snack, and when done right has a festive air, which makes it perfect for a special occasion or celebration, or just as a decadent treat.

VIEW GALLERY:



Traditionally high tea is comprised of three courses – dainty savory sandwiches and nibbles; scones served with jam and cream; and a selection of sweet cakes, cookies and pastries. Scones in Britain are usually served with sumptuously thick clotted cream, which for

some reason (much to my eternal sadness) is not available in the US.

The teas are also a crucial component. There should be a selection of different black, green and herbal teas to choose from, though it's perfectly OK to choose coffee or bubbly if you're not a tea drinker.

We visited three Seattle area hotels, and one in Victoria, for afternoon tea, and after recovering from our sugar high, came up with the best one for every occasion.

Tea at the Heathman in Kirkland (\$32 per person)

Best for: a treat after shopping with girlfriends

This was the cheapest tea, but also the most generously portioned, with six different savory treats and no fewer than nine different sweet bites. The huge American-style cherry apricot scones were of a perfect tenderness – Chef Brian Scheehser says not overmixing the dough is key – and were served with a good blackberry jam and sweetened crème fraiche. These were almost unnecessary as the scones themselves were so full of flavor. Other highlights included the curry chicken open-faced sandwich, the smoked salmon mousse and the excellent biscotti.

The Heathman offered an excellent selection of teas, brought out beforehand in a box, so you could sniff them and make your choice. The patio at the Trellis restaurant where tea is served is laid back, relaxed and very pleasant, making it the perfect stop after a shopping trip.

Tea at Salish Lodge and Spa overlooking Snoqualmie Falls (\$39 per person and \$18 per child ages 6 to 10)

Best for: a family afternoon out

In my experience children absolutely adore afternoon tea. No knives and forks are required, there are lots of different things to try and yes, a lot of sugar is involved. Salish Lodge is a great place for afternoon tea with the whole family – young and old alike. They offer a special children's tea (my daughter particularly approved of the PB&J made with banana bread), the tableware is not too dainty and delicate and there is always the option of a family hike down to the Snoqualmie River to round out the afternoon.

This tea offered a smaller selection – four kinds of sandwiches, three dainty scones each and five kinds of sweet – but the portions were still substantial. The platter of savory sandwiches, including egg salad and English cucumber sandwiches, were the most traditional of any we sampled – Chef Steven Snook is British – and were filling and delicious. Other highlights included the frangipane tart and opera cake and the fresh dainty scones.

A real treat was the extensive use of truly delectable honey from the 122 hives the hotel has scattered throughout the Snoqualmie Valley. It appears in the honey-cured smoked salmon sandwich, in the honeybee-shaped cookies and even in the roast beef sandwiches and a big pot was brought to the table to eat with the scones. It was so good we ended buying more in the hotel shop.

Salish Lodge is comfortable, relaxed and not too formal, again perfect for kids, though truly here you won't be looking at the décor, as it's all about the breath taking views out over the Falls to the valley beyond.

The Georgian Tea at the Fairmont Olympic in downtown Seattle (\$39 per person)

Best for: a special celebration or decadent treat

Being Canadian the Fairmont Hotels take their afternoon tea very seriously. The tea menu is extensive – all their teas are specially sourced for the Fairmont chain – and each hotel has its own trained ‘tea sommelier’.

The bites and treats here were the most dainty – four savory bites, four sweet treats and two scones – but were also the most intricate and refined of all we tried. Chef Gavin Henderson, who is also English, loves to play with his flavors and changes the menu seasonally. We were treated to such delights as Lemon Poppy Seed Raspberry Cake with injectable raspberry sauce and little choux puffs stuffed with brie and morels and dipped in honey pollen.

The scones here are closest to British scones – less sweet and more floury than their American counterparts – and flavoured with apricots and pistachios. They made the perfect vehicle for a perfect raspberry jam and thick cream, which came the closest to British clotted cream. Special mention must also be made of the salmon savory, which featured some of the most buttery smooth smoked salmon I've ever tasted. Chef Gavin has spent some time with Native American tribes learning how to cure and smoke his own salmon and it shows.

Afternoon tea here is served in the stunning Georgian Restaurant – all crystal chandeliers, huge mirrors, high ceilings and gorgeous floral decorations – and it feels like a special occasion before you even sit down at the table set with white linens, exquisite china and silverware.

Tea at The Fairmont Empress in Victoria, BC.

If you've got the afternoon tea bug, then Victoria, BC is your kind of town. 100,000 visitors a year enjoy the Pacific Northwest's most famous afternoon tea in the magnificent Tea Lobby of the Fairmont Empress.