

Afternoon tea

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS LUCY CORNE

in Cape Town



From traditional tea stands to lavish buffets; from intimate teas in tranquil hotels to outdoor eats with the waves of the Atlantic crashing nearby, there's a tea time to suit every taste in Cape Town.



There are few hours in the day more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as Afternoon Tea," wrote Henry James in his 19th-century novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*. If James was alive today he'd no doubt be thrilled to spend countless agreeable hours exploring Cape Town, an infinitely beautiful city that excels in the art of afternoon tea. Here are some of the best spots to spend those sunny afternoons.

Facing page: Get your dose of sugary mouthfuls at The One&Only Cape Town.

Below: Gaze out at the sea on a sunny afternoon at The Twelve Apostles.



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THE MOUNT NELSON

Sandwiched between the slopes of Table Mountain and the hustle and bustle of central Cape Town sits The Mount Nelson, one of South Africa’s oldest hotels and the birthplace of Cape Town’s high tea movement. Taking tea at ‘The Nellie’ is like stepping back in time – the Cape Georgian interior is decked out in early 20th-century style and the ambience somehow manages to match. But little things help remind you which century you’re in – classical music is interspersed with classic rock or pop when the pianist plays an occasional Beatles tune. Over on the elaborate buffet table, alongside timeless treats like macarons and quiche, you’ll find chicken sliders and smoked salmon fajitas that look like sushi rolls and taste like a piece of neatly wrapped heaven. But high tea at The Nellie really puts the emphasis on the tea. The menu reads like an encyclopaedia of tea and for those who can’t narrow it down, a trained tea expert can recommend a suitable blend. Our waiter was Sydney, a high-energy tea aficionado who races around with perfect poise, advising the indecisive, instructing on how many turns of the timer are needed to bring out the best in each brew and somehow managing to get back to every guest before the sand had slipped through their hourglass. Elegant glass infusers are removed, teapots are wafted so that the intricate

Right: A delicious assortment of mini pastries complements a freshly boiled pot of tea at The Mount Nelson.

Below: Outdoor shot of the perfectly located Cape Grace.





Above: While traditional quiches and sandwiches are part of the usual fare, unusual additions make their way on to the tea drinker's table ever so often. Seen here is the Kirstenbosch Tea Room.

Right: A mix of both bite-size pastries and a few savoury accompaniments at The Cape Grace.

aromas emerge and finally your chosen tea is ready to accompany the cakes and savouries on offer. *Afternoon tea buffet ZAR165 per person; daily 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm*
www.mountnelson.co.za

THE CAPE GRACE

The ultra-refined Cape Grace is probably Cape Town's most photographed hotel, though many don't know that the building in the foreground of their perfect Table Mountain snapshot is a chic hotel harbouring a charming high tea experience. Served alongside a roaring fire (a delight in the chilly Cape Town winter) in the hotel library, the three-tiered stand is filled with treats both sweet and savoury. Traditional items take on a modern twist like the garlic aioli that spices up a standard egg mayo sandwich or the raspberry macaroon that brings a welcome splash of violet to the table. The concise menu showcasing an octet of loose leaf teas has been hand-chosen to reflect the nature of The Cape Grace – an intimate hotel that even offers tea for one, if you're looking for some solitary indulgence. Staff are all trained in tea know-how by the in-house tea master so you are guaranteed the leaves won't be scorched nor your tea stewed.

Three-tiered afternoon tea ZAR160 per person; served daily 12 pm to 6 pm
www.capecape.com

THE KIRSTENBOSCH TEA ROOM

Afternoon tea might break a few diet rules, but it doesn't have to break the bank. The delightful tea room tucked inside the borders of the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden offers a scrumptious tea for two in stunning surroundings. Enjoyed inside the quaint tea room or outside with the magnificent backdrop of the Table Mountain Range, the mini feast features traditional sandwiches on a range of home-baked breads, melt-in-the-mouth spinach and feta quiches and scones so light you fear they might float away before you get a chance to slather them in cream and locally produced jam. And then there's the cake. With eight to choose from, you'll likely spend a good chunk of your time gazing at



the glass case wondering which to try. The honey cake with caramel cream is divine and you can always splurge on an extra cake or two if you're feeling truly hedonistic. Speaking of hedonism, don't even think of leaving without tasting the renowned French Hot Chocolate. Failing to sample this thick, decadent blend of chocolate topped with milk foam would be a culinary crime. And don't worry about the calories – a gentle stroll (or a hardcore hike if you're game) around the gardens will at least counteract a few of the sweet treats on your tea stand!

Three-tiered afternoon tea ZAR140 for two people
www.ktr.co.za

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

There are two essential elements to outdoor life in Cape Town – Kirstenbosch gives you a taste of the mountain, The Twelve Apostles Hotel offers a slice of the sea. Sitting in an utterly unrivalled location just inches from the Atlantic, this is the prime spot to take 'Tea by the Sea'. The chocolate high tea comes on an extravagant triple-tiered stand and features a perfect combination of familiar treats and a few unexpected extras. The chicken-mayo sandwiches encrusted with almonds make a fine addition to the cucumber or smoked salmon versions and the scones are refreshingly fluffy. Their strawberry cupcakes feature real strawberries in the homemade frosting, but it's the gorgeously gooey chocolate brownies that will really have your mouth watering. If you can't drag yourself away from the vista, linger longer over a cocktail or two – this is the spot for sundowners. If the weather doesn't behave, take your tea in the cosy confines of the Leopard Lounge – ocean views are still a part of the package.

Chocolate high tea ZAR185 for two people sharing; served 2 pm to 6 pm
www.12apostleshotel.com

THE TABLE BAY

Offering vistas of the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront with Table Mountain as a backdrop, high tea at The Table Bay is already a winner. Served as a three-course banquet, taking tea here is a real experience, enjoyed to a soundtrack of live harp music each afternoon. Course one features a trio of sandwiches and the grilled Mediterranean vegetable wrap is exquisite along with a selection of quiches. When you know that there's so much more to come you want to leave plenty of room, but not overindulging in the simply perfect salmon and asparagus quiche is a tall order. After a round of scones served with cream both fresh and clotted, strawberry jam and superb homemade lemon curd, it's time for the main event. The buffet offers a selection that could daunt even the hungriest diner but many portions are bite-sized to allow the range to be sampled. The white-gloved buffet expert is a lovely touch, with each platter explained before you delve in. The selection not only offers a divine array of shapes to make our plate look pretty – it also presents some refreshingly original options. The white chocolate mojito is dangerously moreish and the hot chocolate mousse is excellent – that's hot as in chillies, not as in temperature.

Chocolate high tea buffet ZAR160 per person; daily 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm
www.suninternational.com/Destinations/Hotels/TableBay

THE ONE&ONLY CAPE TOWN

As if the usual teatime buffet wasn't blissful enough, The One&Only is also offering a pot of

perfection for friends or lovers to share over the winter months. Delving into a pot of Lindt chocolate fondue is one of the finer ways to escape the winter showers that intermittently pelt Cape Town between sunny days. The chocolate is served with an array of sugary mouthfuls displayed in an exquisite manner redolent of a Japanese bento box. It's almost too pretty to eat, but as the aromas of milk and dark chocolate hit, aesthetic appreciation gives way to hunger. Joyously, there's more to the dippers than fruit – try out homemade marshmallows, nougat and magnificent bite-sized *koeksisters* (a local pastry) that you'll want to taste both dunked and plain, just to get every flavour combination. Those seeking the full-on tea experience can enjoy a staggering range of cakes, cookies, candies and even the occasional savoury on the buffet table. Or if you're feeling extravagant you could always opt for both the buffet and the fondue!

Afternoon tea ZAR145 per person; daily 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm
Chocolate fondue ZAR145 for two people sharing
capetown.oneandonlyresorts.com ■

Below: Enjoy an elaborate tea experience at The Table Bay.

Left: High tea at the One&Only Cape Town.



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QUICK FACTS

GETTING THERE

Jet Airways has regular flights from Mumbai to Johannesburg, from where connecting flights to Cape Town are available via our codeshare partner Kenya Airways.

ACCOMMODATION

Cape Town, being one of Africa's most important cities, offers all types of accommodation to the tourist. Take your pick from apartments, villas, holiday homes and five-star resorts. Taj Cape Town is an excellent luxury option located in the city centre.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Log on to www.tourismcapetown.co.za or www.southafrica.net