

Afternoon

Ring for the butler. Crooking a pinkie over a lavish afternoon or high tea is back in vogue. Here's where to find the best around regional Australia. Illustrations by Sarah Hankinson.

delight

A pot of loose-leaf tea, a triple-tiered silver tray of dainty treats and scones with cream and jam. The "lost" art of taking tea has been found again thanks to a new generation enjoying its elegant charms. But – clutch the pearls – what many have come to know as high tea is, in fact, afternoon tea. The more upwardly mobile version, afternoon tea is a traditional spread of scones, cakes, crustless sandwiches and savoury pastries, said to have originated from a peckish Duchess of Bedford in 1840. High tea was for the hoi polloi, a more robust meal served "high" at the kitchen counter or table around 5pm as a stopgap before supper.

But must we stand on ceremony? These days, all bets are off. Afternoon tea might be served as brunch and that pot of Ceylon loose-leaf might come second to stronger libations such as gin or sparkling wine. Australians have embraced the occasion and a host of hotels, restaurants and cafés have come to the party. Here's your state-by-state round-up.

VIC

→ Mary Eats Cake, Montrose

Montrose, a pretty town at the foot of the Dandenong Ranges that could have been transplanted from England's home counties, sure looks like the spiritual home of afternoon tea and is an ideal location for the spin-off of inner Melbourne café Mary Eats Cake. Twee-with-a-twinkle décor (chandeliers, gilded mirrors and flowers galore) marries perfectly with a celebration of high tea conjured by professional pastry chef Jessica Hillbrick. Customise the event with gin cocktails or limitless French sparkling; you'll maximise your cake intake thanks to the bottomless scone policy. maryeatscake.com.au

→ Wombat Hill House, Daylesford

A caretaker's cottage inside Daylesford's beautiful Botanic Gardens transformed into the Platonic ideal of the country café, Wombat Hill House hosts what its owner calls a "casual country high tea". Of course, when that owner is Alla Wolf-Tasker of Lake House fame, that casual high tea might include a smorgasbord with poached-chicken sandwiches, wagyu pastrami, handmade chocolates and, naturally, house-made scones with seasonal jams and cream. There's also St. Ali Coffee, organic tea and local prosecco. Served from 2pm each day in the kitchen garden or inside by the crackling fire in the chill of the Central Victorian winter, it's an experience over which to linger. wombathillhouse.com.au



NSW

→ Cambewarra Estate, Bangalee

The South Coast region, recently devastated by bushfires, is home to many gems and this one – high tea at a winery – actually began by accident: owner Amanda Cole was setting up a tea party among the vines for a friend's birthday when a passing bride-to-be asked if she could book her hens' party high tea in that exact spot. Cole said yes and then scrambled to pull together a tea offering – now it's the business's most popular attraction. Not only can guests nibble macarons, sandwiches, sausage rolls and hand-blended teas but they can choose from three locations: a pretty tearoom with lace tablecloths and pastel chairs; out among the vines; or, for a VIP experience, inside a giant pink teacup. cambewarraestate.com.au

→ The Hydro Majestic, Blue Mountains

This historic hotel serves several types of extravagant high tea daily from its grand Wintergarden Restaurant, which overlooks the famous Megalong Valley. Delicate fancies like fresh-baked scones, pastries and finger sandwiches are served on three-tiered cake stands, accompanied by premium tea and coffee and, if the mood takes you, Australian sparkling wine or cocktails. For those without the means to read tea leaves, you can book a Mystic High Tea Tarot Reading with a clairvoyant to find out what the future holds. hydromajestic.com.au

SA

→ **Udder Delights, Hahndorf**

While the Adelaide Hills region was also heavily impacted by the January bushfires, there is still plenty on offer for visitors. Case in point: Udder Delights, one of South Australia's most lauded cheese producers. On the leafy main street of popular tourist town Hahndorf, this cheese cellar door offers café meals, tastings and a shopfront selling house-made and local delicacies. High tea can be served in the cool underground cellar room and the selection includes moreish fromage-inspired bites such as a bacon and cheddar tart, goat's curd and caramelised onion pastries. There's also Adelaide Hills brie served with quince paste, in addition to cakes and macarons plus, naturally, a pot of tea (or coffee) and a glass of sparkling.

☞ udderdelights.com.au

→ **Topiary, Tea Tree Gully**

At the foot of the Adelaide Hills, on the fringe of metropolitan Adelaide, is Topiary, a nursery-garden eatery which, over the past eight years, has been transformed by chef Kane Pollard into a destination dining venue. While Pollard's lunch menus feature a contemporary, innovative approach, he has maintained Topiary's long-standing tradition of daily high tea. What makes it unique is the servingware; guests each get their own two-tiered cake stand so everyone can have a taste of each morsel. Expect a range of sweet and savoury, with precision-cut sandwiches, baby quiches, muffins and tarts, petits fours and house-baked scones with homemade seasonal jams and double thick cream.

☞ thetopiarycafe.com.au

ACT

→ **Hyatt Hotel, Canberra**

It's been a meeting spot for MPs for decades but the locals don't come here to see what polities get up to after hours. No, they love it for the hotel's afternoon tea buffet. From traditional cucumber sandwiches and scones to more varied offerings such as feta and chive pastizzi or berry and sour-cream tarts, the Hyatt is the number one spot for high tea in the capital. Reserve a table in the Art Deco lounge or on the colonial-style verandah overlooking the courtyard on a weekend, then drink in the scene – and your complimentary glass of sparkling from nearby Lerida Estate.

☞ hyatt.com

QLD

→ **Spicers Peak Lodge, Maryvale**

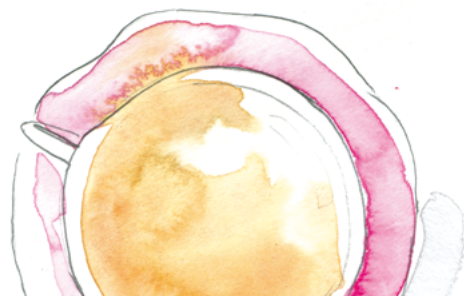
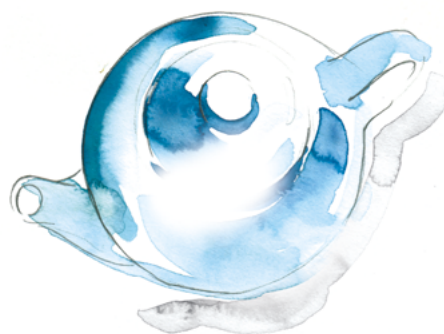
Your reward for negotiating luxury retreat Spicers Peak Lodge's 12-kilometre access road (you can also arrive by helicopter) is a bespoke tea experience on the terrace. Chef Dean Alsford's menu can include fresh scones with jams from the lodge's berry gardens, cheeses with house-made quince paste and charcuterie, such as duck bacon, that Alsford himself now makes. Sri Lankan Chamellia tea and coffee is included, with alcohol also available. Price is on application – just be sure to book a full day ahead.

☞ spicersretreats.com

→ **Aimee Provence, Buderim**

This refined tea parlour draws a young Sunshine Coast crowd with its slick service and diverse menus. Owner Aimee Russell's knack for elevated savouries such as prawn cocktails and chicken and chardonnay pies means this leans towards a traditional high tea, the effect driven home by a lavish fit-out and natty china. Book 24 hours in advance for the full experience but drop-ins are welcome for tea and scones.

☞ aimeeprovince.com.au



TAS

→ **Glen Derwent Tea Rooms, New Norfolk**

Drive 30 minutes north-west of Hobart for afternoon tea in a gorgeous sandstone heritage house built soon after the city's settlement (it's one of the oldest surviving buildings in the stunning Derwent Valley). Snare a table on the verandah or the lawns as peacocks parade by, then enjoy a range of sandwiches (roast beef, cucumber, smoked salmon), tiny quiches, sausage rolls and bite-sized cakes and tarts. Be sure to make a reservation, unless you're just after a Devonshire tea.

📍 glenderwent.com

NT

→ **Burnett House, Darwin**

Heritage-listed Burnett House bears the marks of a cyclone and a world war but behind the scars is an elegant tropical building ventilated by louveres, in a lush, flower-filled garden atop a seaside escarpment. The third Sunday of each month, March to November, its shady nooks are furnished with tables for proper old-school afternoon tea. It's run by National Trust volunteers, many of whom contribute their signature sweets to the affair: perhaps lumberjack cake, gingerbread or little lemon-curd tarts. But there are always freshly made scones with cream and strawberry jam, plunger coffee, a range of teas and ice-cream spiders. Book ahead to secure a spot.

📍 ntnationaltrust.org.au



WA

→ **Lavender Cottage Tearooms, Albany**

Owned by two local sisters each married to Englishmen, Lavender Cottage Tearooms is a piece of good old Blighty in the blustery, southern reaches of WA. Surrounded by an English cottage garden, it's a much-favoured place to take tea on Albany's crisp autumn days, whether it be the standard menu or the more supercharged offering, which includes a three-tier tea stand filled with sweet and savoury scones with jam and cream, sandwiches and house-made cakes and desserts. Teas are by T2, with the exception of jasmine green tea from China and "Proper Strong" Yorkshire Tea imported, for nostalgia's sake, by the tea-loving owners. Bookings are advisable.

📞 08 9842 2073

→ **Voyager Estate, Margaret River**

The lavish Voyager Estate is in the heart of Margaret River wine country and renowned for its rose gardens, impeccable Cape Dutch architecture and manicured lawn. Their high tea is for mornings (weekends only) rather than the afternoon, with finger sandwiches, cakes and the teatime trinity of scones, jam and cream, plus delectable treats from head chef Santiago Fernandez. Your high-tea stand could include chocolate matcha fudge and toasted brioche with duck-liver parfait and fig gel. Bookings are a must.

📍 voyagerestate.com.au

→ **Which comes first?**

It's a question that cuts to the very heart of British civilisation: which goes on the scone first – cream (as they do in Devon) or jam, Cornwall style?

Almost a millennium after the first recorded "cream tea", we are no closer to a resolution and the ultimate authority, Queen Elizabeth II, has been invoked on both sides.

Meticulously researched Netflix series *The Crown* caused a right royal fuss when it portrayed her as a cream first, jam second matriarch. A former royal chef, however, says it was always jam, then cream. Off with someone's head.

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