

A TEA SAFARI

The well-known Dutch tea drinking culture, and their charming tea rooms, call for an indulgent experience when visiting Amsterdam.

TEXT CINDY-LOU DALE

The window at the dramatic De Bakkerswinkel located on Warmoesstraat, one of Amsterdam's oldest streets, is a delirium of marzipan fruits, cream cakes and other frothy delights. I'm escorted to the mezzanine level from where I watch the tearoom below heaving with patrons, all wanting a little more of the cake action. It was like a scene from *Alice in Wonderland*. Everything about the Bakkerswinkel is just breathtaking – from the décor, the art, the lace table clothes, and even the lighting. I'm welcomed with a fruit-shake, followed by my order of Late Afternoon Royal – a pot of Jasmine tea, which arrives with a slice of quiche, a couple of finger sandwiches, a savoury tart,

This page: A delicious platter full of pies and finger sandwiches make for great tea accompaniments at De Bakkerswinkel.

TEA TRADITIONS



Clockwise from left: Enjoy a stroopwafel the traditional way, over a cup of tea; Bite-size tea time treats at the InterContinental Amstel Amsterdam; Locals and visitors to the city enjoy an afternoon tea.



The Michelin-star Bridges Restaurant contained in The Grand Hotel holds nothing back when serving the Grand Afternoon Tea. Delicious crostinis which the tea ambassador insists on serving with medium-strength Indian black tea, scented with lemon and lotus; followed by scones with a compote of berry jam, honeydew, and red onion, complete with Devonshire clotted cream, and served with Chinese green tea. This is followed by a selection of handmade pastries, a lavender and jasmine mini cake with lavender cream, a dark chocolate profiterole, a lemon pie with passion fruit and coconut meringue; and finally, raspberry macarons (made by angels, I think), paired with an exotic Pakistani black tea.

raspberry cheesecake, carrot cake, walnut-caramel cake, chocolate cake, sweetmeats, fruit cake and an elegant scone with pineapple/basil jam and clotted cream. An elegant 'doggy bag' is supplied for the cakes I couldn't eat.

Fruit cake reminds me of my late mother. Whenever she needed something to be done around the house she would bake a fruit cake and then set about serving it to my dad. You see, he was easily manipulated with fruit cake.

A fractious married couple at an adjoining table were having a quiet squabble. When their High Tea appeared, they fell silent as they set about the serious business of tackling the cake. There is nothing better than cake to facilitate agreement.

The InterContinental Amstel Amsterdam is one of the most prestigious hotels in the Netherlands. The elegant hotel, which overlooks the Amstel River, has great views from the Amstel Lounge. It's a long-standing tradition to take high tea in this lovely lounge. Their renowned Royal Afternoon Tea consists of an assortment of entrees, delicate finger sandwiches, followed by a bergamot macaron, a caramel and mango bombe glacée, a

TEA TRADITIONS

raspberry tartlet, a citrus and salted peanut butter panna cotta, a white-chocolate mousse with a Morello compote and a Dutch waffle made with liquorice. And to send me over the edge, a blueberry and coconut scone with clotted cream and lemon curd. It all comes in stages and is paired with a tea that complements the taste of each bite. Starting with Darjeeling, I progress to a Moroccan Mint, a white Assam, and a delicious Arabian Carcadet iced tea, which consists of hibiscus flowers, fruit peel and diced fruit. It's all simply exquisite.

When I bit into the pastry I had an epiphany. The custard cream filling cream oozed out of the sides (reminding me of my longstanding love affair with patisseries). This is the best strawberry custard glacée I've ever had – and I've had plenty of those. The hotel informs that their tea menu changes every three months.

Feeling the beginnings of a cake hangover, I set off to my next date, trudging past antique shops and trendy boutiques, to the brown-and-white striped awning which



This page:
Afternoon tea at the
Amstel Lounge at
the InterContinental
Amstel Amsterdam.





This page: Savour a picture-perfect traditional Grand Afternoon Tea on the tranquil garden terrace of Bridges restaurant.

MUST DO'S...

- ✦ To get around the cobbled streets with ease you need good walking shoes – it's the only way to see the city. You'll not find a street you wouldn't want to live on, a deli you wouldn't like to get to know, or a view you wouldn't like to call your own.

- ✦ Hire a bicycle and do a canal boat cruise.

- ✦ Go see the tulips in Keukenhof Gardens (mid-March to mid-May).

- ✦ Take a little tea memory home with you and buy your favourite from the designer Tea Bar. Should you have room for more tea, they'll let you sample some of their 60 varieties!

marked the entrance to the highly-acclaimed Chocolaterie Patisserie Tearoom, Pompadour Amsterdam. The 18th-century tearoom is quite a find. The interiors are snug and familiar, with only six tables. It's one of the most popular tea rooms in Amsterdam, crowded with locals, all checking out the exotic cake art on display. Some were eyeing the Valrhona chocolates, but most were ogling the four-inch-tall chocolate 'mini-cake' filled with fresh raspberries and chestnut puree. I decided on a wedge of apricot pie. Everything here is made on site in the traditional artisanal manner, using raw, unprocessed products. There's a



This page: A mouth-watering spread of chocolates, jams and more at Pompadour Amsterdam.

good selection of tea but I opted for a Catalan coffee instead. Items are individually priced, but in all, it's the cheapest by far.

Which is my favourite, you might wonder. Let's put it this way. When I die, I don't want to go to heaven, I want to go to Pompadour's! ■



Jet Airways now introduces a new direct flight between Bengaluru and Amsterdam, scheduled w.e.f. October 29, 2017. The airline also operates a daily direct flight from Mumbai and New Delhi to Amsterdam.

OTHER TEA ROOMS TO TRY IN AMSTERDAM...

- ✦ **PROMENADE** – Traditional old-world charm co-exists with classic design at De L'Europe's heart. De L'Europe Afternoon Tea is served from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
- ✦ **THE DUCHESS Tea Room** – This is where the scent of brewed teas blends with a bouquet of caramelized sugar, fragrant fruits and freshly baked cakes. Open Monday to Saturday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 11:30 p.m.
- ✦ **GARTINE** - This small but cozy lunchroom is a hidden treasure tucked away in the city's busiest shopping districts, the Kalverstraat. Do book in advance as they are always full. High tea is available between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.
- ✦ **CONSERVATORIUM** - Spend the afternoon lounging in the Brasserie's glass atrium surrounded by greenery while sipping on tea. The Royal Afternoon Tea here is available between 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. daily.

QUICK FACTS

ACCOMMODATION
Amsterdam offers a wide variety of stay options such as hotels, B&Bs, hostels, and more to suit all pockets.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Visit www.holland.com and www.iamsterdam.com