



The Home of Afternoon Tea

There is perhaps nothing considered more quintessentially English than drinking tea; indeed tea drinking has influenced much of what is regarded throughout the world as British culture and features strongly in nursery rhymes, fairytales and folklore. It has influenced social etiquette and even furniture and fashion design through the decades. And you may be surprised to learn that the most English of occasions – Afternoon Tea – has its roots right here in Bedfordshire.

The Home of Afternoon Tea



Yet as a nation we were relative late arrivals to the proverbial tea party; the drink becoming popular in the mid-1700s when the East India Company began trading in tea. Clipper ships like the Cutty Sark, which could travel at an incredible 18 knots, as fast as a modern cruise ship, were designed to halve the transport time from Asia. Heavy taxation inevitably led to tea smuggling but did nothing to dent its popularity, indeed its importance led to the growth in other industries such as pottery manufacturing where names like Wedgwood and Royal Doulton became synonymous with fine tea ware. It was a prized commodity and usually it was only the lady of the house that held the key to the tea store.

Tea drinking even led to changes in social etiquette with the opening of tea gardens and tea shops, since these were places where unchaperoned young ladies could meet her friends and socialise without harming her reputation. But the single most lasting of these traditions is without question the invention of afternoon tea and here Bedfordshire can lay claim to being the home of afternoon tea.

By the mid-19th century tea consumption had perhaps reached the peak of its popularity and it was about this time that Anna Maria Russell, the 7th Duchess of Bedford, complained to her butler at Woburn Abbey of "having that sinking feeling" during the late afternoon.

At this time it was customary to take only two main meals a day; breakfast and dinner at around 8 o'clock in the evening. The solution for the Duchess was a pot a tea and a light snack, taken privately in her boudoir during the afternoon. Later friends were invited to join her in her rooms at Woburn Abbey and this summer practice proved so popular that the Duchess continued it when she returned to London either at her Belgrave Square house or in one of the Royal Palaces when she was in attendance to Queen Victoria as Lady in Waiting. She sent cards to her friends asking them to join her for "tea and a walking the fields." Other social hostesses quickly picked up on the idea and the practice became respectable enough to move it into the drawing room. Before long all of fashionable society was sipping tea and nibbling sandwiches in the late afternoon.

Since then afternoon tea has spawned various derivatives including high tea, low tea and even cream tea. Today up and down the country countless hotels, tea rooms and coffee shops offer their version of afternoon tea but traditionally it would consist of a selection of delicate sandwiches (originally these would have been filled with cucumber, watercress, ham, smoked salmon or perhaps fish paste) along with a selection of fruit and other homemade cake and pastries or the more modern addition warm scones served with jam and clotted cream; of course accompanied by lots of hot tea served in china cups, traditionally served between 3pm and 5pm.

Why not explore 'Bedford and Beyond' and discover a few places where you can enjoy tea with a twist?



Moggerhanger House

A Grade 1 listed Georgian Country House designed by Sir John Soane and set in 33 acres of parkland originally landscaped by Humphry Repton. Tearooms, bistro, visitor and conference centre open all year.
 Park Rd, Moggerhanger, Bedfordshire MK44 3RW
 Telephone 01767 641007
enquiries@moggerhangerpark.com
www.moggerhangerpark.com
 Visitor Tip: Discover the connection between Moggerhanger and the anti-slavery movement & lookout for seasonal guided woodland walks.



The Inn at Woburn

In the heart of the Georgian village of Woburn, the Inn at Woburn is the perfect place to rediscover the tradition of afternoon tea. Enjoy the special Duchess Anna Maria Afternoon Tea.

George Street, Woburn, Bedfordshire MK17 9PX
 Telephone 01254 290441
admissions@woburnabbey.co.uk
www.theinnatwoburn.com



Visitor Tip: Pop in to Woburn Heritage Centre, Old St Mary's Church to discover more about the town's history (open Easter-Oct 2-4.30pm 10am-5pm weekends and bank hols)

Danish Camp

Riverside Visitor Centre
 (See Tales of the Riverbank p24 for more information) Open 9am - 5pm Tuesday-Sunday.

Chapel Lane, Willington, Bedfordshire MK44 3QG
 Telephone 01234 838709
info@danishcamp.co.uk
www.danishcamp.co.uk



Visitor Tip: Whilst in Willington go and see the Tudor Dovecotes (National Trust)



For a free listing of the Tastes of Bedfordshire Food Directory which includes cafes, tearooms and restaurants where that produces and sells local food, call 01234 276063 or visit www.tastesofbedfordshire.co.uk

Wild Britain

Tropical house, nature trail, puppet theatre, animal encounters and children's arts & crafts. Tea rooms open 10am -4.30pm
Renhold Road, Wilden, Bedfordshire MK44 2FX
Telephone 01234 772770
www.wild-britain.co.uk
enquiries@wild-britain.co.uk
Visitor Tip: Look out for Urchin the hedgehog on the themed nature trail.

Thurleigh Farm Centre

Children's Farm and adventure playground. Open year round 0930am -5.30pm (closed Mon & Tue Jan-Easter). Homemade cakes and jams
Cross End, Thurleigh, Bedfordshire MK44 2EE
Telephone 01234 771597
info@thurleighfarmcentre.co.uk
www.thurleighfarmcentre.co.uk
Visitor Tip: Take home some locally produced jams or chutneys or locally grown asparagus!

The Swan Hotel Bedford

Historical 18th Century hotel on the banks of the River Great Ouse in the heart of Bedford. Afternoon Tea served daily.
The Embankment, Bedford MK40 1RW
Telephone 01234 346565
www.bedfordswanhotel.co.uk
info@bedfordswanhotel.co.uk
Visitor Tip: View the river from the top of the Castle Mound or take a relaxing stroll through the medieval gardens and along the river to stimulate your appetite!

Stockwood Discovery Centre

The home of the Mossman Carriage Collection.
Farley Hill, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 4BH
Telephone 01582 738714
museum.gallery@luton.gov.uk
Visitor Tip: Don't miss the Dutch Garden, Hamilton Sculpture Garden, Winter Garden, Period gardens and National plant collections.



Luton Hoo Hotel, Golf & Spa

Five-star hotel with 18 hole golf course, set in more than 1,000 acres of parkland and gardens created by Capability Brown. Open year round. Traditional Afternoon Tea served in the Pillared Hall & Italianate Lounge between 3pm & 5.30pm. Strawberry and champagne specialty tea also available for that special occasion.
Luton Hoo, The Mansion House, Luton, Bedfordshire LU1 3TQ
Telephone 01582 734437
www.lutonhoo.co.uk
reservations@lutonhoo.com
Visitor Tip: Take a look at The Wernher Restaurant, remodelled in the early 20th century by the architects of the London Ritz. It's exotic marble panel work and richly coloured fabrics are reminiscent of the Palace of Versailles. Advisable to book particularly at weekends.

The Rose Garden Tea Rooms

Set in the tranquil surroundings of 13th century grade II Priory House. Open Mon-Sat 10am-4pm serving afternoon tea.
Priory House, 33 High Street South, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 3RZ
01582 890279
www.dunstable.gov.uk
Visitor Tip: Take a look around the Priory Church and discover its connection with Henry VIII

Haydens Café & Tearooms

Open daily 0930-5.30 (Sunday 10am-5pm). Serving homemade cakes and specialty teas.
The Olde Water Mill Shopping Village & Garden Centre, Barton Mill Lane, Barton Le Clay, Bedfordshire MK45 4RF
0845 450 2012
info@oldewatermill.com
www.oldewatermill.co.uk
Visitor Tip: Enjoy a walk on Sharpenhoe Clappers just a stone's throw away



The Embankment, Bedford

The Embankment is an imposing mock-Tudor landmark building in the heart of Bedford, with wonderful views out over the River Great Ouse and award winning Embankment gardens. Join us for afternoon tea served daily between 3pm and 6pm and watch the world go by from our lovely vantage point. The Embankment is also a great place to enjoy breakfast, elevenses, lunch and dinner too, serving fresh seasonal food every day of the week.
6 The Embankment, Bedford, MK40 3PD
01234 261332
www.embankmentbedford.co.uk
www.peachpubs.com
Visitor Tip: Ask about Peach Pubs policy on sourcing the very best local ingredients and their community programmes to encourage healthy eating in local schools.

Lakeside Café

The Forest Centre
Conservation centre, walking & cycling, children's adventure playground. Open daily 10am-6pm.
Marston Vale Millennium Country Park
Station Road, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire MK43 0PR
01234 767037
www.marstonvale.org/forestcentre
info@marstonvale.org
Visitor Tip: The wetland conservation area is particularly worth visiting

Tea-Zels

Serving homemade cakes and specialty teas. Open daily 9am-4pm (5pm in summer & at weekends).
Harrold-Odell Country Park Harrold MK43 7DS
01234 721525
Visitor Tip: Look out for bats at dusk and the elusive otter frequently passing through the park!

Emmaus Village

Inspirational charitable organisation providing work and support for the homeless, enabling them to help themselves and others. Serving teas and light lunches at reasonable prices.
School Lane, Carlton, Bedfordshire MK43 7LQ
01234 720826
office@emmausvc.plus.com
www.emmausvillagecarlton.org.uk
Visitor Tip: Pick up a bargain in the village furniture, craft and bric-a-brac shops and help a worthwhile cause along the way!



Woodlands Manor Hotel

Secluded grade II listed manor house in Clapham village just outside Bedford town centre. Afternoon tea served daily in the paneled lobby and bar. All cakes and pastries prepared freshly each day on-site.
Green Lane, Clapham, Bedfordshire MK41 6EP
01234 363281
www.woodlandmanorhotel.co.uk
Visitor Tip: The Glenn Miller Museum or 306th Bomb Group Museum are just 'over the hedge' why not pop in for a visit (open weekend Easter-October)

The Duchess' Tea Room

Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire MK17 9WA
Telephone 01525 292148
admissions@woburnabbey.co.uk
www.woburnabbey.co.uk
Visitor Tip: Don't forget to view the Blue Drawing Room where the Duchess first took afternoon tea.



Menzies Flitwick Manor

Nestling in acres of tranquil gardens and wooded parkland, Menzies Flitwick Manor is a classic Georgian country house hotel located near the historic village of Woburn. Traditional afternoon tea is served from 2pm till 5pm. This can either be taken in the lounge or if the weather permits on our terrace over looking the landscaped gardens and the beautiful Bedfordshire countryside. £10 per person for the traditional tea with a selection of sandwiches, homemade cakes and scones.
Address for Flitwick Manor here
01525 712242
email@flitwick@menzieshotels.co.uk