

Time for tea

From the Duchess of Bedford to Jozi, this custom survives, still boasting class

WHEN it comes to gossip with girlfriends, there's no better way to do it than over tea and treats in a fancy hotel. A few years ago, there were only a handful of places that served high tea, but today, almost every five-star hotel in Joburg has a high tea offering.

For those not in the know, what makes high tea different from normal tea is the fact that there's a wide array of miniature sweet and savoury treats for you to enjoy along with your cuppa. You definitely won't find a bain marie of malva pudding accompanied with a bowl of custard. Instead, take your pick from intricately designed tartlets, mini quiches and tiny cucumber sandwiches with the crusts cut off.

The traditional English custom of taking afternoon tea is thought to have been started in the 19th century by Anna, the seventh Duchess of Bedford. In those days, lunch was served early in the day and dinner was not served until late in the evening.

Anna became quite hungry between lunch and dinner and so started the English tradition of taking afternoon tea and light refreshments. I have to say, I'm very thankful to her. I would recommend having a very light meal, if anything, at lunch so that you can do justice to the spread. Here are the top three spots in Jozi to enjoy

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high tea.

1. THE SAXON

Forget about how good the high tea is, the fact that you're at the Saxon alone is guaranteed to make your gathering memorable. With true silver service, your waiter will be at your beck and call while you linger at the buffet table. The Saxon serves Yswara tea, an exclusive artisan collection made up of teas grown in the finest African tea estates, presented by the hotel's qualified tea sommeliers, trained in the art of brewing and food pairing.

Using only natural methods, each rare leaf is hand-picked, sundried and processed on the tea's individual estate. Each and every delicate indulgence uses only the finest imported and local ingredients, from Valrhona chocolate and gold leaf from France, to clotted cream (for the scones) that originates in the Cape.

High tea is priced at R395 a person and is served from 11am to 4pm from Tuesday through to Saturday. Reservations are essential and can be made at 011 292 6000 or by e-mailing reservations@saxon.co.za. Address: 36 Saxon Road, Sandhurst.



Buffet spread at the Saxon in Sandhurst.

PICTURES: RISHAV NAIR



54 on Bath lobby, where high tea is served.

2. 54 ON BATH

If you haven't been to this hotel yet, you're missing out. A few years back, the dated Grace hotel was transformed into a trendy, modern hotel that oozes opulence. From the grand piano in the lobby to the velvet couches, high tea at 54 on Bath is a real treat. In terms of value for money, this is a great option. For R165, you'll get an unlimited amount of tea, plus refills of the sweet and savoury platters brought to your table. The tea on offer is Dilmah, served with a range of whole spices to complement your drink, including mint, orange,

cloves and lemongrass. You are then given a tea timer, which will show you how long you need to let your tea brew, depending on preference (anything from 3-5 minutes). Rather than a buffet, you'll have a cake stand brought to you, overflowing with decadent treats such as carrot cake, scones with cream and jam, and lemon meringue tart. If you can stomach it, end off with a glass of champagne on the hotel's terrace. Its Veuve Cliquot Champagne Bar is small but very eye-catching.

To book, call 011 344 8500. Address: 54 Bath Avenue, Rosebank.

3. THE MICHELANGELO

Undoubtedly Sandton's classiest hotel, its unbeatable location (within Nelson Mandela Square), means that the Michelangelo plays host to thousands of international visitors every month. The Il Ritrovo lounge is definitely my favourite place for coffee and a snack after watching a movie, it's open until late and has plush, comfy couches overlooking the square.

The lounge serves a weekend Lindt high tea between 2pm and 5pm. As if Lindt chocolate by itself isn't delicious enough, the Michelangelo's pastry chefs have now turned a good thing into something great. Sip on a Lindt Chocolate Martini, or a frozen Lindt latte while you munch on cakes and pastries with Lindt chocolate filling, with the sounds of a live pianist in the background.

If you'd prefer going during the week, the lounge serves a plated high tea menu for R145 a person, including croissants, dainty finger sandwiches, assorted miniature desserts and tartlets, as well as a selection of teas, coffees and other hot beverages. The Lindt chocolate high tea is priced at R175 a person. To book, call 011 282 7463. Address: Sandton City, Maude Street, Sandton.

For more ideas of things to do in Jozi, visit Hasmita's blog: www.joziliciousblog.co.za.

Hasmita was hosted by the Saxon and 54 on Bath for the purposes of this review.

Baking for yourself can be as easy as pie

HASMITA NAIR

AS MUCH as I love cake, when a craving hits (as it often does), if there isn't a bakery or home industry nearby, I'll happily go without rather than try my hand at baking. I've had more than my fair share of baking disasters, and apart from this being a waste of ingredients, it's a waste of time.

However, sometimes a store-bought cake doesn't hit the spot, as these cakes tend to be dry as a result of being left out too long. I've tried a few supermarket muffin and cake baking kits and the quality just hasn't been up to scratch. There's nothing quite like the

aroma of a freshly baked cake sifting through your home, or the taste of a slightly warm, crumbly just-baked treat, so when NoMU announced a new range of nine baking kits last year, I immediately knew I'd be a fan.

Launched in 2000, NoMU has built up a strong reputation as one of South Africa's leading (and independent) food innovators. I've been buying their skinny hot chocolate and spices for years and I love their uncomplicated approach to cooking, as well as their consistency when it comes to quality. The baking kit range includes cakes, biscuits and muffins, with my favourites being the chocolate

fondant, chocolate brownie, and breakfast muffin kits.

All the dry ingredients are in the kit, so you'll just need to add wet ingredients like eggs, milk or oil. There are clear instructions on what to do, making the recipes fool-proof. Your role is limited to mixing the ingredients together and sticking your mixture in the oven – simple as pie. The chocolate fondant kit even includes fondant moulds, while the chocolate and vanilla cake kits include icing mix.

Those who are more comfortable in the kitchen should not be put off the baking kits – the beauty lies in their versatility, and NoMU encourages one to experiment

with the kits. For example, the pancake kit can be transformed into cinnamon doughnuts, while the oatmeal cookie kit works great as a crumble topping.

Also, there's no end to the toppings or fillings that can be used with the kits, allowing you to customise your cake just the way you like it – add peanut butter to your chocolate fondant, or add fresh carrot and a cream cheese frosting to turn the breakfast muffins into carrot cake.

The NoMU baking kits are halaal- and kosher-certified and retail at between R28 and R48.50. For more information and to order online, visit: www.nomu.co.za.



Chocolate cake made using a NoMu baking kit.