

# What is Afternoon Tea?

*Afternoon Tea is a tea-related ritual, introduced in Britain in the early 1840s. It evolved as a mini meal to stem the hunger and anticipation of an evening meal at 8pm.*

*Afternoon Tea is a meal composed of sandwiches (usually cut delicately into 'fingers'), scones with clotted cream and jam, sweet pastries and cakes. Interestingly, scones were not a common feature of early Afternoon Tea and were only introduced in the twentieth century.*

*Afternoon Tea was initially developed as a private social event for ladies who climbed the echelons of society. It was only when Queen Victoria engaged in the Afternoon Tea ritual that it became a formal occasion on a larger scale, known as 'tea receptions'.*

*These receptions could have as many as two hundred guests with an open 'at home' invitation to visit between 4pm and 7pm, during which they could come and go as they pleased; this was the genesis of the Afternoon Tea as we know it.*

*In Britain today Afternoon Tea is usually enjoyed as an occasional indulgence or to celebrate a special event, such as a birthday, a pre-wedding party, or baby shower with a group of friends.*

*This was all well and good for the upper classes, but the working classes ran to a different schedule and a different budget. Tea was still quite expensive at the time and the working classes could not afford to waste it on anything other than necessities. A wearied factory worker wouldn't arrive home until six in the evening, and when he did, he was famished! Thus, in the industrial areas of the UK (northern England and southern Scotland), the working classes evening meal evolved: high tea.*

*English High Tea usually involved a mug of tea, bread, vegetables, cheese and occasionally meat. Variations on high tea could include the addition of pies, potatoes and crackers.*

*So while Afternoon Tea was largely a social event for their upper class counterparts, high tea was a necessary meal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This traditional high tea still exists for some parts of the North and Scotland.*