

Travel

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TEA TIME IN BOSTON

Not simply a weekend luxury, but an art of brewing, of relaxing, of observing life over your cup

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PHOTOS BY DAVID LYON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; KAYANA SZYMCAK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (TOP RIGHT)



Boston might have a turbulent history with the beverage (we did turn the harbor into a teapot in 1773), but the city has warmly embraced the genteel British tradition of afternoon tea. There's something to be said for pausing to brew a pot of tea instead of grabbing a latte to go from the nearest coffee stand. Add a couple of scones with jam and clotted cream, dainty pastries, and finger sandwiches, and you have the makings for the most civilized hour of the day.

It certainly doesn't hurt that, in many Boston locations, the ritual can begin with a glass of champagne or Kir Royale — or that tea is generally offered in some of the city's most elegant dining rooms.

Shortly after we were seated for afternoon tea in the sumptuous brocade-and-gilt second-floor lounge at the Taj Boston, the violinist launched into a gliding version of "Happy Birthday" and the folks at the nearest table burst into applause. Many people come to tea to mark a special occasion, our server Rosa Sorto told us. In fact, there would be six birthday celebrations that afternoon. Later on, after our tiered tea trays arrived, the fiddler played a quick chorus of "When I'm Sixty-Four." It could have been another birthday fête, but he was too discreet to signal which table.

Discreet service — to the point of outright pampering — is the norm at the Taj. Our teas steeped in gilded porcelain pots sitting on silver tea-warmers until Sorto came to check whether they were sufficiently brewed. She simply lifted the lids and sniffed. Throughout the afternoon, she and other servers patrolled the room, attending to the pots lest any patron have to

Clockwise from left:
The pour at the **Rowes Wharf Sea Grille** in the Boston Harbor Hotel.

Tea sandwiches at the **Bristol Lounge** in the Four Seasons Hotel.

Earl Grey trifle among the pastries on the tea plate at **L'Espallier**.

Tiny pumpkin tart for tea at the **Taj Boston**.

Slice of the pastry tray at the **Courtyard Restaurant** in the Boston Public Library.