

Tea 2 – “I’ll be back”

Until recently I’d always thought of afternoon tea as a quaint old ritual for tourists and grandmothers, but it seems that change is brewing. Recent reports tell of tea rooms booked out weeks in advance, not by hoards of tradition-hungry tourists but by leading lights of the London fashion world. Tea parties for fashionistas... Whatever next? How did this happen? Is there any chance I could get on the guest list?

Read on and I’ll try to enlighten you...

Like Japan, the U.K. is an island country and it’s always been a bit different to its continental neighbours. So, while the rest of Europe took to coffee, Brits fell in love with tea. It became a social ritual so universal that when you visit someone’s home, whether it’s a palace or a terrace, you’re likely to be offered tea when you get there.

Tea’s popularity went almost unchallenged until, inspired by continental European chic, beatniks and mods took to coffee in the 1950s and ‘60s. It was out with the old and in with the new - a minor rebellion against the establishment. Inevitably, it went on to become the new establishment.

Fast forward to 2008 and coffee is all over the place – quite literally if you’ve ever tried balancing a waxed plastic cup full of boiling hot liquid in one hand whilst jostling your way along a crowded pavement and looking for your mobile with the other... But hang on, where’s the pleasure in that? No, if you want to stand out from the crowd these days, you drink tea.

So, afternoon tea is making a comeback, but it’s changed its image while it’s been away. It’s young, it’s cool and it doesn’t have to be somewhere else in five minutes. Sadie Frost, Alexander McQueen and Tamara Yeardye Mellon of Jimmy Choo have all recently hosted tea parties to launch new collections. Frost even sent everyone home with a pair of “I love tea” knickers! I’m sure the tea drinking Victorian ladies of years gone by would not have been amused by that...

But celebrity-studded afternoon tea parties are just the tip of the iceberg. For most of us tea’s a very simple pleasure - just a teabag and boiling water in a mug (a cup’s too small) with milk and sugar to taste. And there’s no need to wait until the afternoon – literally any excuse will do!