Afternoon Tea Menu Ideas

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Afternoon tea menu ideas, in summary:** Afternoon tea menu ideas: small fresh sandwiches, warm scones with cream and jam, a few good small sweets, and a brisk tea to cut it.

A great afternoon tea menu is small, fresh and balanced across three courses. For the rest of the afternoon tea series, see how to host.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in January 2026.

The classic spread, tier by tier

Tier	What goes on it	The rule
Bottom: savoury	Finger sandwiches, crusts off: cucumber, egg mayo and cress, smoked salmon, coronation chicken, cheese and pickle	Small and fresh
Middle: scones	Plain and fruit scones, warm, with clotted cream and good jam	The centrepiece
Top: sweet	Victoria sponge slices, lemon tart, macarons, fruit tartlets, mini eclairs	Variety over volume

Building the savoury tier

The bottom tier is finger sandwiches, crusts off and cut uniform: cucumber with butter, egg mayonnaise and cress, smoked salmon, coronation chicken, and cheese and pickle are the classics. One modest premium filling is plenty for a luxe feel; you do not need to be expensive across the board. They are eaten first because the palate should climb from salty upward, see the three-tier order. Small and fresh beats large and tired every time.

The scone centrepiece

The middle tier is the heart of the spread: plain and fruit scones, served warm, with proper clotted cream and a good fruit jam. Warm, fresh, real clotted cream, never aerosol, is the biggest single quality lever on the whole table. The jam-or-cream order is regional identity rather than an error, so offer both and let guests build it their own way. See jam or cream first and tea with scones.

The sweet tier and the cup

The top tier is small and varied: Victoria sponge slices, lemon tart, macarons, fruit tartlets, mini eclairs, with variety of look and texture beating sheer volume. The tea is designed with the food rather than after it, a brisk black to cut the cream and sweetness plus a caffeine-free herbal so every guest is covered. See what tea to serve and tea and dessert.

Quantities per guest

Plan roughly three or four sandwich fingers, one or two scones and two or three small sweets per guest, with a generous pot share and refills. That is enough to feel abundant without waste. Afternoon tea is deliberately light, so guests should finish satisfied, not stuffed, which is the whole point of the elegant pause rather than a feast.

Make ahead, and dietary swaps

Freshness is the real quality lever, so stage the work: prep bakes and fillings ahead, assemble sandwiches within about ninety minutes of serving so the bread does not dry, and warm the scones last so they reach the table warm. Pastries can be bought; nobody minds a shop Battenberg if everything else is fresh. Gluten-free scones, vegan sandwiches and dairy-free cream are all straightforward, but plan one full alternative set rather than token tweaks so those guests get a complete spread.

Reading a good afternoon tea menu

The same principles let you judge a menu before you order. A strong spread names a proper loose leaf tea selection rather than just "tea", offers a real caffeine free option, lists warm scones with clotted (not whipped or aerosol) cream, keeps the savouries small and classic, and shows restraint on the sweet tier rather than a dozen near identical fondant fancies. A weak one over-promises volume and under-delivers freshness. The simplest planning rule ties it together: decide the tea first, then build the three tiers to flatter it. A brisk black wants something to cut, the cream and the salt of the savouries; a delicate Darjeeling wants lighter fillings. Treating the cup as the organising choice, not an afterthought, is what turns a pile of nice food into a coherent afternoon tea.

What to buy

Build the menu around the cup: a brisk English Breakfast or another strong black tea to cut the cream, a delicate Darjeeling for lighter fillings, and a caffeine-free herbal so every guest is covered. Browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Pick the tea your guests actually finish. Hold off on variety until that tea is settled.

Afternoon-tea reading

- How to host an afternoon tea
- What tea to serve
- Tea with scones
- About afternoon tea

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