Devon vs Cornwall Cream Tea: The Difference

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Devon vs Cornwall cream tea, in summary:** Devon vs Cornwall cream tea: Devon puts cream first, Cornwall jam first, and both are authentic. The history, what actually matters, and how to host both ways.

The cream tea is a West Country institution and a friendly civil war. Other afternoon tea reading sits alongside it, including jam or cream first.

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

Devon and Cornwall side by side

	Devon method	Cornish method
Order	Clotted cream first, jam on top	Jam first, clotted cream on top
Feel	Cream as the base layer	Jam as the base layer
Heritage	Devon dairy tradition	Cornish clotted cream pride
Correct where	In Devon	In Cornwall

The history behind each method

Neither order is arbitrary. The Devon way, cream then jam, leans on a dairy heritage where clotted cream was the prized element, spread like butter; the Cornish way, jam then cream, is fiercely tied to Cornish clotted cream sitting proudly on top. Both are centuries-deep regional identity rather than a right-or-wrong rule, which is why the broader afternoon tea tradition treats it as living custom, not etiquette to police. Insisting one is universally correct is the only real mistake; each is authentically correct in its own county. See jam or cream first for the debate itself.

What actually matters more than the order

Once the rivalry is enjoyed for what it is, the quality of a cream tea is decided by four things, and the order is not one of them. The scone should be fresh and ideally still slightly warm, plain or fruit, never dense or day-old. The cream must be real clotted cream with its characteristic crust, not aerosol or whipped, the single most common thing that ruins an otherwise good cream tea. The jam should be a proper fruit-forward preserve, strawberry being traditional, set but not stiff. And the tea should be a strong, brisk black brewed

properly in a pot, because its astringent strength is exactly what cuts through clotted cream, the logic in what tea to serve and tea with scones. The commonest hosting error is treating the tea as an afterthought: a weak, milky, stewed mug collapses under cream and jam. Get the four right and a Devon and a Cornish cream tea are both excellent; get them wrong and the order you argued about will not save it.

Hosting a both-counties cream tea

The neat host trick is to refuse to take sides: serve the scones, clotted cream and jam as separate components and let each guest build it their county's way, so the rivalry becomes the entertainment rather than a faux pas. Bake or buy the scones the same day and warm them briefly just before serving, since a slightly warm scone is the single biggest upgrade most people miss; keep the clotted cream cold until the last moment so it holds its shape, decant the jam into a small dish, and brew the tea fresh in a pot rather than stewing it in advance. Lay it all out, brew a strong black as the spine, offer a caffeine-free option, and the only argument left at the table is a happy one. See how to host.

What to buy

Build the cream tea around the pot: a strong black tea brisk enough to cut clotted cream, a classic English Breakfast, or the wider loose leaf range. Browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery over £35.

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