Hot Chocolate UK: Buying It Well

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **UK hot chocolate, in summary:** Hot chocolate is the comfort cousin of tea on British shelves: a treat made well, driven by cocoa content and milk not branding.

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

Hot chocolate is the cousin category to tea on most British home shelves, comforting, warming, and roughly the same use case as a sweet evening tea. We stock a small range because customers ask for it and because the quality range is dramatically wider than the supermarket shelf suggests. This is the working guide.

The UK hot chocolate quality range

Bottom tier (£2-3)

Cadbury, Galaxy, supermarket own brand. Mostly sugar + milk powder + cocoa. Functional but flat. Most "hot chocolate" people drink falls here.

Mid tier (£4-7)

Hotel Chocolat (single origin cocoa drinking chocolate), Whittard (multiple cocoa content levels), Charbonnel et Walker. Real cocoa percentages stated; better quality.

Premium tier (£8-15)

Single origin small batch hot chocolates. Pump Street Bakery, Coco Caravan, Mast Brothers. From small specialist makers.

The two preparation styles

"Hot chocolate" (drinking chocolate)

Real chocolate flakes or grated chocolate melted into milk. Rich, thick, dessert tier. The European tradition.

"Hot cocoa" (cocoa powder + sugar)

Cocoa powder mixed with sugar and milk powder, dissolved in hot water or milk. Lighter, sweeter, less rich. The mainstream UK supermarket norm.

What's in a typical UK hot chocolate

Mainstream supermarket

- Sugar (often the largest ingredient)
- Skimmed milk powder
- Cocoa powder (typically 10-20% of mix)
- Stabilisers, emulsifiers
- Possibly added flavourings

Premium drinking chocolate

- Real chocolate flakes or shavings (40-70% cocoa solids)
- Possibly some sugar (depends on cocoa content)
- No milk powder (use real milk)

How to make better hot chocolate at home

From cocoa powder (improving the supermarket version)

1. 2 tsp cocoa powder + 2 tsp sugar in a mug.
2. Add 1 tbsp boiling water; stir to a paste.
3. Heat 200ml whole milk to just below boiling.
4. Pour over the cocoa paste, stirring vigorously.
5. Optional: pinch of salt, dash of vanilla, cinnamon dust.

From real chocolate (the proper way)

1. 30-50g good quality dark or milk chocolate, finely chopped or grated.
2. Heat 250ml whole milk to just below boiling.
3. Pour over the chocolate, stirring until fully melted.
4. Optional: chilli powder, cinnamon, espresso shot.

Flavoured variants worth trying

- **Mexican hot chocolate.** + cinnamon + pinch of chilli. Traditional.
- **Salted caramel.** + caramel sauce + flaky salt.
- **Mocha.** + espresso shot.
- **White hot chocolate.** White chocolate + milk + vanilla.
- **Vegan hot chocolate.** Real dark chocolate (high cocoa) + oat milk. Surprisingly good.
- **Dirty hot chocolate.** Hot chocolate + espresso + whipped cream.

Why a tea website sells hot chocolate

Clear answer: the same independent perspective applies. Most UK households who drink tea also drink hot chocolate (especially in winter or for kids). We carry a small range because customers ask, and because the quality differential between supermarket basics and proper drinking chocolate is dramatic, and most British shoppers don't realise it.

Caffeine in hot chocolate

Real chocolate contains caffeine and theobromine. Per typical 200ml mug:

- Mainstream supermarket hot chocolate: 5-10mg caffeine
- Real chocolate drinking chocolate: 15-30mg caffeine (more cocoa = more caffeine)
- Dark chocolate hot chocolate: 25-40mg caffeine

Plus 50-200mg theobromine (a related stimulant compound, longer acting and gentler).

UK hot chocolate brands worth knowing

- **Cadbury Drinking Chocolate.** The everyday standard.
- **Hotel Chocolat Velvetiser system.** Premium home preparation; serious investment but excellent results.
- **Whittard Luxury Hot Chocolate range.** Multiple cocoa levels; mid premium.
- **Green & Black's Hot Chocolate.** Organic, dark cocoa led.
- **Coco Caravan, Pump Street Bakery.** Premium small batch makers.
- **Drink Me Chai Salted Caramel.** Sachet based. Not hot chocolate strictly, but related comfort drink.

Storage

Hot chocolate powder: airtight, cool, dark cupboard. 12-18 months. Real drinking chocolate: similar storage; consume within 12 months for peak flavour.

FAQ

Why does a tea website sell hot chocolate? Most UK households drink both. Same independent specialist perspective applies.

Best UK hot chocolate? Hotel Chocolat for premium; Whittard for mid range; Cadbury for accessible.

Hot chocolate vs cocoa? Hot chocolate uses real chocolate; cocoa uses cocoa powder + sugar + milk powder. Both legitimate, different drinks.

Caffeine? Yes, modest amounts. 5-30mg per cup depending on cocoa content.

Vegan? Use dark chocolate (most are dairy free) + plant milk.

Curator's note: real drinking chocolate made from proper chocolate flakes is one of the great underrated winter pleasures. £8 of decent dark chocolate flakes makes 8-10 cups, dramatically better than any supermarket sachet. Worth the upgrade. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

UK hot chocolate at a glance

Aspect	The read
What it is	A comfort drink, the cousin category to tea on most British shelves
Two styles	Instant powder (convenient) vs real melted chocolate or high-cocoa flakes (richer)
Caffeine	Low but not zero, theobromine plus a little caffeine from cocoa
Quality lever	Cocoa percentage and milk, not branding
Why we sell it	Same use, same shelf, same comfort occasion as a caffeine-free tea

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

The upgrade that counts is better cocoa and proper milk, not a fancier brand. Pair a good hot chocolate with an evening rooibos, or browse the full tea shop (free UK shipping over £35).

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Start with a cheap tin; stay with it until it disappoints. Most rich teas reward patience, not budget.

Comfort drink reading

- Caffeine-free tea
- Rooibos
- Herbal tea overview
- Caffeine in tea

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

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