

Special Feature

The British Tea Ceremony

If you were not born in Britain, and I wasn't, the British penchant for tea, copious quantities of it, at all times of the day, in all weathers, is a bit difficult to get used to. Probably everyone round the world knows that 4 pm is tea time in Britain, even if they have never visited our shores, or sipped a piping hot cuppa. But when one lives here it is virtually imperative to be able to drink it. So when I moved to Britain in 1982, I set about trying all the different varieties of tea, and fully expected to be able to cultivate the habit.

The Mysteries of Tea

I visited all kinds of tea shops; in one shop I ordered Orange Pekoe Tea, and the waiter said "Ah, the champagne of teas!"; I thought for a moment that I had *really* found the perfect tea, until I realised that the waiter said that to all the customers, regardless of the type of tea they ordered! I ate little cucumber sandwiches, scones with clotted cream and jam, lovely cakes and pies all to accompany increasingly different varieties of tea. I was crestfallen when one of the builders working on our house told me I was hopeless at making tea (after he had consumed many cups). How complicated is it to pour boiling water over a PG tips bag, I thought to myself? But then I learned that there is an art to getting it just the right colour before removing the bag. I have still not learned how you

know how many bags to add to the pot before making a large pot of tea, nor how long it should steep....and as for the ultimate question....I am still really stumped! Milk in first, or second? How do you know in advance that the amount of milk in the cup is going to be the right amount before you pour the tea in?

Everything Stops For Tea!

Then the hot weather came, and I found myself surrounded by people who extolled the virtues of a hot cup of tea on a warm summer's day to 'cool them

down'. Nothing could be more incomprehensible to me than to drink a hot drink on a hot day, when all I wanted was something served in a very large glass with lots of ice in it!

I have now lived in Britain for 24 years, fully enough time to cultivate the taste for tea! Sweet tea, with sugar to soothe one after a terrible shock, warm tea to revive one at

3 pm, late-night tea to end the day...and yet, I am still not able to brew it properly, drink it copiously, or enjoy it at all! I have had to admit that tea and I will never be best friends or even fond acquaintances. I have tried and tried to understand tea, and to love it, but I have singularly failed in the art of becoming British through the cultivation of tea drinking. I have concluded you have to be born British to love tea!

Peggy Walmsley

