

HOT SPOTS

By JULIE CATALANO



STEEPING ROOM



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL, AUSTIN
512.478.4500 | Fourseasons.com/austin.
Photography courtesy of Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts

The Four Seasons has always been associated with luxury, and their tea experience in downtown Austin is no exception. Available from Thursday through Sunday, reservations are required for what beverage manager Anesh Sharma calls “an amazing tea experience. We sit right on Lady Bird Lake, with beautiful views, at an elegantly set table in a

serene, quiet, mellow ambience.” After you’ve ordered from 12 different teas, the chef begins creating the traditional tea sandwich menu of Chicken Waldorf, egg salad, cucumber and brie — or any variation in order to take dietary restrictions into account — and warming up the melt-in-your-mouth scones, accompanied by unlimited tea, or upgrade to a champagne tea. Tables accommodate groups of eight, and larger groups are split up into tables of four. But solo sippers are a common sight, too. “We have quite a few individuals who enjoy the experience alone, and we see more people substituting afternoon tea for lunch.” Other regulars are parents who want to introduce their children to the mannered niceties of the tea tradition. Upcoming renovations will make the experience even more spectacular. “We have five Juliet balconies that are going to be combined into one giant balcony over the lake,” says Sharma. “Imagine having tea out on the lake year round, in a climate-controlled room and enjoying the view.”

THE STEEPING ROOM, AUSTIN
512.97.STEEP (The Domain),
512.46.SCONES (North Lamar)
Thesteepingroom.com

It’s like a trip around the world without leaving Austin. The two locations of The



Steeping Room in the capital city offer tea services that read a bit like an itinerary. “Our whole menu is inspired by the countries where we purchase tea,” says Amy March, co-owner and founder, who had just returned from China and Japan, “We’re inspired by major tea drinking cultures around the world.” The traditional Century Oaks offering consists of tea sandwiches, a choice of scones, tea cake of the day, clotted cream and spreads. The exotic Kasbah Express has a Middle Eastern flair with a variety of fresh fruits drizzled with rosewater infused honey, roasted garlic hummus, sheep’s milk feta, mint flatbread and cookies. For pure Zen try the napa rolls, edamame and matcha dusted brownie. All come with a pot of premium tea, mug of chai or a tea-tail (tea-based cocktail). There’s a full breakfast, lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch menu — vegan and gluten free options abound — and tea services are available anytime, including to go. Teas can be bought online, choosing from black, green, white, oolong, pu-erh, tisane and decaf. A customer fave is Beautiful Coconut green tea, says March. “It just flies off the walls.”

JINGU HOUSE CAFÉ, SAN ANTONIO
210.73.JINGU | Jinguhousesa.com



The Japanese Tea Garden in historic Brackenridge Park is one of San Antonio’s most beloved landmarks. With its exotic waterfall, lily pond, winding stone paths, arched bridge-

es and lush foliage, it makes a picture-perfect backdrop for the Jingu House Cafe. Named for the original Japanese family who lived there as caretak-



ers of the gardens from 1926 until 1942, when WWII forced them out, the house was restored as part of a collaboration between the San Antonio Parks Foundation and the city. The full lunch menu features Asian style bento boxes, sandwiches, stir fry, salads, wraps, and green tea cookies and cake. The star of the tea menu is Blooming Tea, presented in a glass pot for the full visual effect. “It’s our own special blend,” says Japanese Tea Gardens venue manager Espie Robertson. “It has this natural sweetness with a beautiful aroma and presentation.” The more than 25 tea selections are ever changing, says Robertson, and “every day we brew one herbal, one green and one black.” Take-home teas are sold by the ounce and can be mail ordered by calling the cafe. The hilltop location is immensely popular as a wedding and special event venue for up to 300, with exclusive catering by Fresh Horizons who will provide light lunches, hors d’oeuvres and of course, tea parties. Summer and winter hours vary, so it’s best to call ahead.

MADHATTERS TEA HOUSE AND CAFE, SAN ANTONIO
210.212.4832 | Madhatterstea.com

Old timers remember this San Antonio institution’s former location near the Witte Museum. Now it’s hard to imagine Southtown without this popular cafe, its quirky interior punctuated by brightly painted tables, whimsical artwork of Alice and her friends in Wonderland, and slightly off-kilter doorways and shelves. In true Lewis Carroll style, the place looks small at first, but seems to get bigger with every adjoining room and three very dog-friendly patio areas. When ordering tea, patrons choose their own from a collection of mismatched cups and mugs. Tea selections include black, green, red, white, herbal and oolong, with certified kosher, organic, gluten free, fair trade and non-GMO options. The full menu features soups, salads, desserts and best-selling breakfast fare along with a Saturday and Sunday brunch. A tea for two service is offered daily: afternoon tea serves up two types of sandwiches, two scones and petit fours; high tea adds a third sandwich with one scone and petit fours. The eclectic atmosphere is good for people watching, reading, studying or a spot of tea with friends or business associates. Or book a bridal or baby shower for the full tea party experience. Through the years, Madhatters has earned nods from the New York Times, National Geographic Traveler and Rachael Ray. Bonus: walk off those pastries on the nearby downtown River Walk. ❖