



Tea, two sugars



'Cha-biskoot' is a phrase that every Bangladeshi around the world recognises. It's often not even pronounced as two separate words and there isn't even anything grammatically correct about it, yet it is one of the few constants we have in our everyday life.

It instantly conjures up a sense of comfort and relaxation. Think of a rainy monsoon day, sitting on your veranda with a couple of pieces of toast biscuit and a cup of strong tea, sweetened with lashings of condensed milk.

The slightly more glamorous equivalent to our beloved 'cha-biskoot' in the UK is the famous afternoon tea, a custom originating in the 1840s among the upper echelons of society at the time. Tea itself was introduced in England during the mid-17th century, although it became a major export for what is now Bangladesh during the rule of the British Empire until the mid-18th century. The concept of afternoon tea is said to have been introduced by Anna, Duchess of Bedford, in a bid to bridge the long gap between the afternoon and evening meals.

Traditionally, afternoon teas include brewed loose-leaf tea, a selection of sandwiches, cakes and pastries, and scones served with clotted cream and jam. While a variety of sandwiches can be served, the most popular one has to be cucumber sandwiches, cut into dainty little triangles. Other fillings that are crowd favourites are smoked salmon, cream cheese and roast beef.

There are, of course, an infinite number of combinations for an equally vast number of ingredients, so if you are planning on serving afternoon tea, you have a lot of options to choose from.

Scones are a quintessential part of afternoon teas, and can easily be made at home as they only require self-raising flour, baking powder, butter, milk and sugar – all kitchen staples. Admittedly, finding clotted cream in Dhaka might be a bit troublesome but a few specialty shops do stock it. If not, using plain thickened cream works just as well. Strawberry jam is the ideal accompani-

ment to this classic treat.

For afternoon teas, proper etiquette is as important as the tea itself. The most common misconception is that the teacup is meant to be held with the pinkie finger sticking up – a major faux pas! When stirring sugar or milk into your tea, make sure you don't clink your spoon against the side of your cup; the aim is to stir as silently as possible.

Generally, the savoury items are eaten first, followed by scones, and then the cakes and pastries. However, don't worry about following every single rule to a T because it will only hamper your enjoyment of the whole afternoon experience.

To put a 'desi' twist on afternoon teas, use locally sourced loose-leaf teas, which have much better flavour and aroma compared to tea bags. Go for Asian-inspired flavours for your sandwich fillings, for example, tandoori chicken, slices of paneer, or egg salad mixed with a bit of cumin and coriander. You can even substitute sandwiches for vegetable pakoras, shallow-fried so they aren't too greasy. The spices in your savoury dishes will intensify the sweetness of your tea, so it's the perfect amount of contrast.

Next time you have guests over, bring out the fine china, get your scones ready, and enjoy the wonderfully classy experience that is afternoon tea.

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Location: A restoran
Special thanks to Ashfaq Uddin Siddique and Mehazabin Mazher.