Le Cordon Bleu High Tea at the Mandeville

Off all the social rituals that suggest a more civilised and leisurely bygone era, afternoon tea at a grand London hotel has to be among the world’s most refined. But while those delicious cakes and pastries take no time at all to gobbled up, it requires months of rigorous training to produce pastry chefs skilled enough to lay on a spread like the one which greets you at Le Cordon Bleu’s regular High Tea, hosted by the Mandeville Hotel.

Le Cordon Bleu is the world’s most prestigious culinary academy, preparing thousands of chefs around the world for work across all branches of catering – but before its students can graduate, they must successfully serve a sample meal to a panel of judges. And that’s why, for the bargain price of £15 (regular afternoon tea at the Mandeville would cost you £23.50), you can treat yourself to an afternoon of virtually unlimited tea, scones and cakes, all made by the school’s pasteliers students.

The scene upon entering the Mandeville’s restaurant for this month’s event was breathtaking: every available surface, it seemed, was covered with exquisite, individually-sized pastries, from macarons to éclairs, from lemon meringue pies to chocolate mouse cakes, and too many others to mention. Imperturbably presented, served by beautiful Royal Albert crockery, and with each type of pastry proudly explained by the trainee chefs who had spent the past 15 hours preparing them (!), these little works of culinary art were almost too gorgeous to eat. Almost.

This isn’t afternoon tea with the full works – there are no sandwiches, for example, so it really is only for those with a sweet tooth. A petit point might point out, too, that it’s not actually a high tea at all – high tea and afternoon tea being, strictly speaking, quite different meals. Minor quibbles aside, though, the quality of the pastries and the service, the charm of the boutique-hotel setting, and the knowledge that you are not just gorging yourself on cake, but actually helping hard-working culinary students to pass their diplomas – it’s practically a good deed – make these regular events an irresistible proposition.

The next Le Cordon Bleu High Tea at the Mandeville will be held on 27th April from 3.30 to 5.30pm: tables can be booked directly through the hotel on +44 (0)20 8586 6666.

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