

High times at the Nellie

Cape Town's sights might beckon, but **Alison Stewart** prefers the Mount Nelson Hotel's afternoon delights.

CAPE TOWN visitors often find themselves hurtling from the tip of Cape Point to the top of Table Mountain on a tight tour schedule. But there are calmer pursuits for those yearning to catch their breath, such as a gentle cultural meander followed by high tea at a city icon. Possibly followed by a more vigorous meander, depending on how much your willpower has deserted you. As it will.

Glowing pinkly thanks to its 1920s "Mount Nelson Blush" paint job, the Mount Nelson Hotel is as much a part of Cape Town as the mountain beneath which it has sat for the last 112 years.

Also known locally as "the Nellie", it provided luxury accommodation for Union-Castle shipping line passengers and was the preferred hotel for those on the "correct" side of the Anglo-Boer War – Lord Kitchener, Winston Churchill.

Given the Nellie's high-colonial history, it's no coincidence the hotel puts great store by its high tea, made famous by the Duchess of Bedford to combat her late-afternoon "sinking feeling". It has won an array of "best tea" gongs and is excellent value – 185 rand (about \$22), which compares favourably to other world-class high teas. There are no tiered stands either, meaning, not to be too cross, it's a buffet free-for-all.

I will return to its calorific marvels, the very idea of which calls for some vigorous virtual exercise. The Nellie's position at the top of the city's Company Gardens provides the opportunity.



The gardens present a snapshot of early Cape life. The city's founder, Jan van Riebeeck, established them in 1652 to provide fresh produce for passing ships and settlers. Today, they are a green lung in the city centre with lawns, fountains, fish ponds and significant plants, including South Africa's oldest

cultivated pear tree. Enter the gardens at the Adderley Street end and walk up the tree-lined Government Avenue, choosing places of interest from among the Houses of Parliament, the Iziko Museums of Cape Town (originally a slave lodge), the Sir Herbert Baker-designed St George's Cathedral and the Tuynhuys, built in 1700 for important visitors and now the president's office. There's the National Gallery, with works by 6500 local and international artists; the Holocaust and South African museums, the Planetarium and Bertram House, Cape Town's only surviving brick Georgian house.

Wander through the Japanese rose garden, visit the Delville Wood memorial to South Africa's World War I soldiers or buy nuts for the squirrels.

Don't nibble, for there is high tea to be had. If hunger pangs have set in, exit the gardens into Orange Street and beyond a pillared entry is the Nellie's urban oasis set in generous gardens.

High tea is served in the lounge, on the terrace or around the Lord Kitchener fountain.



There are no tiered stands either ... it's a buffet free-for-all.

We choose the comfortable lounge with its pianist and easy access to the groaning table. The selection includes finger sandwiches filled with rare roast beef and rocket; cucumber; smoked salmon; egg mayonnaise; quiche; mushroom empanadas; glazed onion and tomato tarts; smoked lamb focaccia with baba ganoush; and butternut, sage and pine-nut savoury muffins with sage sour cream. There's an excellent assortment of gateaux, including strawberry cream, dark chocolate, bee sting and an extremely divine granadilla sponge.

A substantial selection of small cakes and chocolates includes mini eclairs, a choice of eight petits fours, three tea loaves and cheese or plain

Calorific ... clockwise from left, the Mount Nelson Hotel high tea; Company Gardens; an assortment of gateaux is available.

Trip Notes

Getting there

▶ South African Airways has return flights from Sydney to Cape Town via Johannesburg. flysaa.com.

Eating there

▶ Mount Nelson Hotel, mountnelson.co.za. Afternoon tea costs 185 rand (\$22) for adults and 85 rand for children under 12. Morning tea is 109 rand for adults and 60 rand for kids. Bookings essential.

More information

www.capetown.gov.za/en/parks/Pages/TheCompanyGarden.aspx.

scones with fruit, lemon curd, coulis, clotted cream, jams and conserves. Don't miss the traditional South African "melktert", whose light-as-air pastry crust encloses a creamy filling. The offerings are replenished regularly.

We're well looked after by "tea master" Sydney Moonsamy who, apart from having a great sense of humour, has met the great Mr Dilmah and is a walking tea encyclopaedia. Sydney reverently infuses the teas, inviting us to try as many as our groaning bellies allow.

Teas are from a local supplier and there are leaf and flowering varieties. The hotel's signature tea is blended from Darjeeling, Kenya, Assam, Keemun, Yunnan, Ceylon and Nellie rose petals. Try the wonderful forest berries infusion; the classic Rooibos is a refreshing finale; and coffee is available. Barely able to heave ourselves out of the armchairs, it is time for another walk, possibly from the tip of Cape Point to the top of Table Mountain.

The writer was a guest of the Mount Nelson Hotel and South African Airways.



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BEEN PLANTED
PLASTIC BAGS HAVE
BEEN BANNED
SHOWERS HAVE
BEEN SHORTENED

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