

Tea Time Opulence: A Champagne Afternoon at Prestonfield House

Prestonfield House Hotel offers free parking for cars and helicopters, signalling immediately that budget travellers aren't their typical clientele.

Yet on a fine spring day, my guest and I opted for the humble approach: a Lothian bus ride followed by what was meant to be a short walk. Our distinct lack of map-reading skills transformed this into somewhat of an adventure, including getting lost in a wood as we attempted to navigate toward this five-star hotel sitting in view of Arthur's Seat's yellow gorse.

Thankfully, a passing dog walker rescued these damsels in distress, guiding us to a shortcut that led to the sweeping drive, at the top of which sits the magnificent Prestonfield House.





Owned by James Thomson, one of Scotland's most celebrated independent restaurateurs and hoteliers, Prestonfield sits in Edinburgh's most secret location – nestled amid a housing

estate filled with bungalows and architectural curios. Yet somehow, this unexpected setting only enhances its charm.

The estate spans 20 acres of gardens and parkland, with beautiful Highland cows grazing in the field alongside the entrance. Prestonfield promises – and delivers – opulence, theatrical flair, and luxurious seclusion, sheltering guests from the city's bustle beyond its grounds.

While Edinburgh offers numerous afternoon tea experiences, Prestonfield's ranks among the finest, matched perfectly by its sumptuous interiors and impeccable service.

We were greeted at the entrance by Raven, the resident hotel cat—a charmingly dishevelled black short-hair—and Colin, the peacock strutting through the gardens displaying his spectacular plumage in full glory.

Stepping inside Prestonfield House feels like entering a scene from Downton Abbey or a Jane Austen novel. Every corner reveals delightful objects and antiques, with rooms elegantly arranged for dining celebrations.









"Winston"

Commissioned by HIGHGROVE

A rare reproduction of the classic rocking horse HM King Charles III,
Queen Elizabeth II and Princess Margaret played on as children



Prestonfield shares a significant historical connection with rhubarb, having been the first estate in Scotland to propagate the plant in the 18th century. This heritage is celebrated in the aptly named “Rhubarb” restaurant, where the plant continues to flourish in the estate’s kitchen garden.

We were shown to what must be one of Rhubarb’s finest tables, overlooking gardens with beautifully coiffed fir trees encased in pyramid-shaped wooden structures and beds of growing rhubarb.



At Prestonfield, excellence lies in the details—from tactile, armed velvet chairs to beautiful white crockery bearing the signature rhubarb design, silver teapots, and even the powder

room's leopard-print chaise lounge.

Alongside delicate finger sandwiches, savouries, scones, and house-baked cakes, we savoured chilled Billecart-Salmon Champagne while selecting from seventeen beautifully described speciality teas, coffees and hot chocolate.

Despite my grandfather's history working on an Indian tea plantation, I chose the Rose Petal tea—freshly dried rose petals with aromatic Chinese congou black tea and essence of rose – offering subtle floral notes. My companion selected First Flush Darjeeling, often called “The Champagne of teas,” where the most coveted leaves are plucked during the first harvest.

Prestonfield's afternoon tea achieves perfect balance between savouries, sandwiches, both plain and fruit buttermilk scones with clotted cream and raspberry jam, and exquisite cakes. They've thoughtfully created special menus for vegans, vegetarians, and those requiring gluten or dairy-free options—attention to detail that truly sets them apart.



The staff accommodated my fish allergy by replacing the Lapsang souchong-cured sea trout, avocado, and lime curd on sourdough cracker with a vegetarian sun-dried tomato and

avocado oatcake with lime purée, garnished with delicate white edible flowers.





While I rarely choose white bread at home, finger sandwiches somehow demand it. No mass-produced loaves here, but beautiful, doughy homemade white bread worthy of Smeaton Farm

free-range egg with Caesar mayonnaise. Among the selections, the spring chicken with lemon and spring onion mayonnaise and the pulled Ayrshire ham with Prestonfield rhubarb and honey relish were standouts.

The cakes elevate the experience to extraordinary heights with imaginative Lilliputian morsels of pure delight. Lemon verbena and lime Battenburg, Earl Grey and chocolate orange mousse, rhubarb and cardamom custard tart, and blueberry, lemon and lavender gateau delivered mouthfuls of ecstasy with every bite.



The Last Sip

Sometimes getting lost leads to the most delightful discoveries. From our woodland detour to the final crumbs of those miniature masterpieces, our afternoon at Prestonfield proved that luxury isn't always about helicopter landings – sometimes it's about the journey, the company, and those perfect moments of indulgence. As we reluctantly departed, past Highland cows, Raven the grumpy cat and peacock plumes, we agreed that while the £75 price tag for the Champagne service reflects the five-star setting, the memories created in this secluded pocket of Edinburgh elegance were absolutely priceless.

Prestonfield's Spring Afternoon Tea is available Sunday–Thursday 12-6:45 pm, Friday and Saturday 12-4 pm.

Spring Afternoon Tea £60 per person

Spring Champagne Afternoon Tea £75 per person

<https://www.prestonfield.com/>