

# High Tea at the Mount Nelson Hotel

Cape Town, South Africa



## Tea at the Mount Nelson Hotel, Cape Town, South Africa



**The Mount Nelson Hotel has been an institution in Cape Town for many years and its walls have sheltered the rich, the famous and the royal, and anybody who wishes to stay in colonial style and grandeur.** Click here for more info on the [Mount Nelson Hotel](#)

Carrie Hampton falls into the latter category and in her capacity as a Travel Writer, was lucky enough to have a suite at the 'Nellie' (as she is affectionately known), for a weekend of luxury.

### Tea at the Nellie

I have written about the Mount Nelson for guide books and travel articles and have seen inside the rooms, had drinks in the bar and strolled the grounds, but it wasn't until I actually stayed overnight at the Mt. Nelson that I felt the fullness of its appeal. My experience started with the **wonderful English tradition of Afternoon Tea** - and even in London it doesn't get much better than 'Tea at the Nellie'. There were cucumber sandwiches of course and quiches, savoury tarts and cheeses for the savoury palate, then petit fours, iced cakes, chocolates, fruit tartlets and hot berry compote. Washed down with Earl Grey, China, Indian, Herbal or whatever pot of tea takes your fancy.

Earl Grey and I took our time lounging on a sofa scoffing delicacies, which gave me time to discreetly scan the room. The Mount Nelson is the kind of place where **famous faces are common**, but there is no drama about their presence. Seated nearby was heartthrob actor Colin Farrell, who had been staying for

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Earl Grey and I took our time lounging on a sofa scoffing delicacies, which gave me time to discreetly scan the room. The Mount Nelson is the kind of place where famous faces are common, but there is no drama about their presence. Seated nearby was heartthrob actor Colin Farrell, who had been staying some weeks while making a film. An elegant lady with a very aristocratic air nosed by, and a couple of teenagers in designer jeans scuffed their hems across the newly refurbished parlour. Mount Nelson dress codes are long gone and anything goes at the Nellie these days!

The lounge, lobby and bar at the Mt. Nelson had a stylish refurbishment in 2004 and the mood for afternoon tea is set by warm creams, taupe and duck egg blue fabrics, unlined taffeta curtains diffusing Cape Town's brilliant sun, and high ceiling cornices highlighted in silver leaf and an oak floor.

## Opened in 1899

But even with the new lighter contemporary look, you can't subdue history and Mount Nelson's columns and bricks speak of its Cape colonial past. Mount Nelson's history spans more than one hundred years, through three wars and an African renaissance.

The Mount Nelson opened its doors on 1 March 1899, to provide luxurious accommodation for Union & Castle liner passengers. Only a few months later the corridors were ringing with war talk as British and Boers engaged in an historic conflict. Kitchener, Buller, Roberts and the young war correspondent Winston Churchill, favoured Cape Town's Mount Nelson Hotel as their base.

## The Pink Palace

After the First World War, the Mount Nelson continued giving hospitality to moneyed colonial travellers visiting Cape Town, and also underwent a blushing facelift. In 1923, after years of wearing a combination of pale yellow and green, then later a dramatic mix of ochre and oxblood red, the Mount Nelson turned pink! Over the years its distinctive pale rose colour has given rise to the nickname, ' Pink Palace ' and it even has its own palate colour named 'Mount Nelson Pink'.



The Mount Nelson in the heart of Cape Town, is enjoying a contemporary heyday. This means there are two TV's in your suite, an electronic safe, internet facilities and a room key that beeps. But the traditions of afternoon tea and drinking champagne or cocktails before dinner (albeit in the newly designed Planet Bar), and eating only the finest foods, will never change.

## Dressing for Dinner

I partook in all of these Mt. Nelson traditions. After tea I relaxed in a very long and large bubble bath and then slowly dressed for dinner. Yearning for the time when people really dressed up, I barely compromised to the 21st century casual look and instead wore a long velvet dress and Red-Riding Hood boots, then breezed into the bar on my partners arm. After pink champagne we were shown to our table in the Cape Colony Restaurant and welcomed by the Hotel Manager, Andrew Cook, who like me is a converted Brit, who thinks he has landed the best job in the world.

Executive chef Stephen Templeton explained his choices for us, which were to include delicate poached crayfish on a squared marinated cucumber, salmon, a bean and dill salad and tender de-boned oxtail with a sophisticated mash. A fresh Darling Cellars Sauvignon Blanc was an inspired choice for the starter and the Waterford Chardonnay hit just the right wooded note for the salmon.

Templeton deserts included soft citrus rice pudding (nothing like boarding school stuff!), served with a crunchy honeycomb ice-cream and finished off with a quirky South African sweet dough - a thin crispy koeksuster. Or a chocolate concoction with sugary lattice tendrils heading skywards, or roasted pear and thyme brulee with hazelnut beignets. Oh and lets not forget the decadent chocolate soufflé with marshmallow ice-cream. Oh woe goes the waistline!

Complete, we returned to the grand classic bedroom, bedecked with immensely long thick floral curtains making a very traditional statement, and an enormous bed for a wonderfully comfortable nights' rest.

## Local and International

The Mount Nelson is a contrast of old and new; the rooms make no apology for their conservative style (some might say old fashioned), while the newly refurbished bar and lounge seem to have found just the right contemporary note. More and more discerning locals are choosing to drink in the Planet Bar and by the end of each day, you will find an agreeable mix of visitors and Capetonians. It's amazing how the Mount Nelson keeps up with the times, and after a hundred years on, is still the place to see and be seen.

Carrie Hampton 2004.

### Mount Nelson Hotel

The Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town, South Africa is renowned for old school glamour and luxury. A regular base for visiting international celebrities, this luxury Cape Town hotel is a landmark of the city.... [more](#)

