

Chapter 15

On the Lighter Side: Snacks and Meals on the Go

In This Chapter

- ▶ Grabbing a quick bite at sandwich shops, department stores, pasta parlors, and “chippies”
- ▶ Finding the best places for a spot of tea
- ▶ Treating yourself to ice cream
- ▶ Dining alfresco

Londoners have a much less casual attitude toward food than Americans have. You won't see many adults in London eating on the street or having a bite while traveling the Tube. And you don't find street vendors peddling hot dogs and other foods from carts (although you may see a fast-food van or two near major attractions). Even the most frenetic Londoner likes to eat a proper, civilized “sit-down” meal. So what's a too-rushed tourist to do?

Well, you can take in the all-American fast-food restaurants sprouting up all over Central London, including **Burger King**, **KFC**, **Pizza Hut**, and **McDonald's**. They're familiar, and your kids may clamor for them. But you're in London, after all; to help you enjoy snacks and light meals the London way, this chapter offers some interesting alternatives.

Cut Off the Crust: Sandwich Bars

Sandwiches are an English invention (supposedly of the earl of Sandwich), and sandwich bars are a faster and cheaper alternative to sit-down restaurants and pubs. Most open early for breakfast and close in the afternoon. You can usually eat at a counter or in booths, or you can take your sandwich and go to the nearest park for an alfresco lunch. The bars sell coffee, tea, and nonalcoholic beverages.

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Americans are sometimes confused by the way the English style their sandwiches. In general, the Brits use the word *mayonnaise* the way Americans use *salad*. *Tuna mayonnaise* or *egg mayonnaise* simply means “tuna salad” or “egg salad.” The word *salad* is used in Britain to denote that lettuce and tomato have been added to a sandwich, as in “chicken with salad.” At a sandwich bar, make sure that the sandwiches are *freshly cut* — meaning that they haven’t been sitting around in the display case for hours.

The following sandwich bars are worth a bite:

- ✓ Near Victoria Station, **Capri Sandwich Bar** (16 Belgrave Rd., NW1; ☎ **020/7834-1989**; Tube: Victoria) serves an imaginative variety of sandwiches. The bar is open Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- ✓ If you’re in the vicinity of Euston Station, try the unpretentious but cheerful **Giovanni’s Sandwich Bar** (152 North Gower St., at Euston Road; ☎ **020/7383-0531**; Tube: Euston), open Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The best sandwich shops in Central London are the **Pret à Manger** chain stores, which offer fresh, inventive, healthy sandwiches and fast counter service. A convenient West End branch is located at 77–78 St. Martin’s Lane, WC2 (☎ **020/7379-5335**; Tube: Leicester Square). It’s open Monday through Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Friday 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., and Sunday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Eat Hearty: Fish-and-Chips Joints

The English call a fish-and-chips place a *chippie*. At some chippies the food is wonderful; at others it’s hideous. At the good places (the only ones I recommend), the fish (usually cod, haddock, or plaice) is fresh, the batter crisp, and the fries (chips) hand-cut. You can get tartar sauce, but the British also like to splash their fish-and-chips with malt vinegar.



The following restaurants all have sit-down and *takeaway* (what the Brits call “takeout”) service and welcome families with kids.

- ✓ **North Sea Fish Restaurant** (7–8 Leigh St., WC1; ☎ **020/7387-5892**; Tube: Russell Square) is a restaurant (see Chapter 14), but it also offers takeaway service Monday through Saturday noon to 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 11:30 p.m. If the weather is good, take your meal over to Russell Square in the heart of Bloomsbury.
- ✓ **Rock & Sole Plaice** (47 Endell St., WC2; ☎ **020/7836-3785**; Tube: Covent Garden) offers all-day takeaway service as well as a place to sit down and eat amid the bustle of the Covent Garden Piazza

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(tables are available on the lower level). Because of its location, this chippie is crowded with theatergoers in the evening. You'll pay at least £8 (\$13) for a meal. It's open Monday through Saturday 11:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. and Sunday noon to 10 p.m.



- ✓ **Fryer's Delight** (19 Theobald's Rd., WC1; ☎ 020/7405-4114; Tube: Chancery Lane or Holborn) is across from the Holborn Police Station. A plate of cod and chips is £4.95 (\$8) if you eat in or £4.50 (\$7) for takeaway; takeaway is available the same hours that the restaurant is open, Monday through Saturday noon to 10 p.m. The fish is fried in beef fat here; other options include pastries and pies.



- ✓ **Golden Hind** (73 Marylebone Lane, W1; ☎ 020/7486-3644; Tube: Baker Street or Bond Street) is a few blocks south of Madame Tussaud's. This place is another bargain chippie where an average meal costs £5 (\$8); hours are Monday through Friday noon to 3 p.m. and 6 to 10 p.m., Saturday 6 to 10 p.m.
- ✓ **Sea-Shell** (49–51 Lisson Grove, NW1; ☎ 020/7723-8703; Tube: Marylebone) is within easy walking distance west of Madame Tussaud's and is considered one of the best chippies in London. It's open Monday through Friday noon to 2:30 p.m. and 5 to 10:30 p.m., Saturday noon to 10:30 p.m.
- ✓ **Seafresh Fish Restaurant** (80–81 Wilton Rd., SW1; ☎ 020/7828-0747; Tube: Victoria) offers a good cod fillet and great chips for about £8.50 (\$14). It's open Monday through Friday noon to 3 p.m. and 5 to 10:30 p.m.
- ✓ **Costas Fish Restaurant** (18 Hillgate St., W8; ☎ 020/7727-4310; Tube: Notting Hill Gate) is open Tuesday through Saturday noon to 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 10:30 p.m.
- ✓ **Geales** (2 Farmer St., W8; ☎ 020/7727-7969; Tube: Notting Hill Gate) is open Tuesday through Saturday noon to 3 p.m. and 6 to 10:30 p.m.



Costas Fish Restaurant and **Geales** are both good choices if you've been poking around the antiques and what-not stands along Portobello Road.

Chomp Where You Shop: Department Store Restaurants

London is a great city for shopping, and you may not want to tear yourself away from the stores in order to get a bite to eat. The answer is to grab a bite at a department store restaurant. These eateries are convenient, but they aren't cheap. Here are a few of the most noteworthy:

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Never too latte: London's coffee bars

It had to happen sooner or later, and frankly I'm glad it did because finding a good cup of coffee in London wasn't always the easiest thing to do. But now **Starbucks** has opened branches all over the city, offering nice places to sit down and have a latte or cappuccino or a "regular" cup of joe. They also sell pastries.

- ✓ **Fortnum & Mason** (181 Piccadilly, W1; ☎ 020/7734-8040; Tube: Piccadilly) has three restaurants to choose from, the **Fountain** being the least expensive (see Chapter 14). Restaurant hours for the the Fountain are Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- ✓ **Harrods** (87–135 Brompton Rd., SW1; ☎ 020/7730-1234; Tube: Knightsbridge), in addition to its ice-cream parlor and awe-inspiring Food Hall, offers its **Famous Deli Counter**, where you can perch on stools (no reservations) and pay too much for what's called "traditional Jewish food" but often isn't. It's open Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- ✓ **Harvey Nichols** (109–125 Knightsbridge, SW7; ☎ 020/7235-5250; Tube: Knightsbridge) is another Knightsbridge emporium with a restaurant, the **Fifth Floor at Harvey Nichols**. It's open Monday through Friday noon to 3 p.m. and for dinner 5:30 to 10:00 p.m., but eating here is pretty expensive. A better bet is the cafe, also on the fifth floor, where you can get a cup of tea and a salad or light meal; it's open Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Like Harrods, Harvey Nichols has a fabulous food emporium where you can buy now and eat later.

Stop for a Spot of Tea: Simple and Lavish Teas

The stereotype is true in this case: Brits do drink tea. In fact, they drink 171 million cups per day (give or take a cup). Tea may be served fast-food style in paper cups, home-style in mugs, or more elegantly in bone china.

Casual tea rooms and pâtisseries

In the following comfortable neighborhood tearooms and pâtisseries, you can get a good cup of tea along with a scone or other pastry or a plate of tea sandwiches for about £3 to £10 (\$5–\$16):

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✓ **Beverly Hills Bakery** (3 Egerton Terrace, SW3; ☎ **020/7584-4401**; Tube: Knightsbridge) is noted for its muffins and serves light lunches from noon on. It's open Monday through Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Sunday 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

✓ **Muffinski's** (5 King St., WC2; ☎ **020/7379-1525**; Tube: Leicester Square) offers a great lowfat, homemade, vegetarian muffin. It's open Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

✓ **Pâtisserie Cappucetto** (8 Moor St., W1; ☎ **020/7437-9472**; Tube: Leicester Square) serves breakfast, sandwiches, soups, and superb desserts Monday through Thursday 8 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday 8 to 12:30 a.m.

✓ **Pâtisserie Deux Amis** (63 Judd St., WC1; ☎ **020/7383-7029**; Tube: Russell Square) is a good choice for a quick bite. It's open Monday through Saturday 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Sunday 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

✓ **Pâtisserie Valerie** (44 Old Compton St., W1; ☎ **020/7437-3466**; Tube: Leicester Square or Tottenham Court Road) has been around since 1926 and serves a mouthwatering array of pastries, but expect to stand in line night or day. It's open Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., and Sunday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Pâtisserie Valerie has two branches in Marylebone (one at 105 Marylebone High St., W1; ☎ **020/7935-6240**; Tube: Bond Street or Baker Street, and the other near Regent's Park at 66 Portland Place, W1; ☎ **020/7631-0467**; Tube: Regent's Park). The Marylebone branch is open Monday through Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Sunday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Regent's Park branch stays open until 7 p.m. and opens at 8 a.m. on Sundays.

✓ **Richoux** has three old-fashioned tearooms situated in choice London locations. They serve food all day long, and they're kind to your budget: **Richoux-Knightsbridge**, (215 Brompton Rd., SW3; ☎ **020/7823-9971**; Tube: Knightsbridge); **Richoux-Mayfair**, (41a South Audley St., W1; ☎ **020/7629-5228**; Tube: Bond Street or Green Park); and **Richoux-Piccadilly**, (172 Piccadilly, W1; ☎ **020/7493-2204**; Tube: Piccadilly Circus). They're all open the same hours: Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday.



Elegant spots for afternoon and high tea

A traditional afternoon English tea with cakes, sandwiches, and scones with clotted cream and jam, and served in a high-toned hotel or

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restaurant, is one of the quintessential English experiences. It can be a special afternoon affair or a nice alternative to lunch or dinner.

So what exactly, you ask, is the difference between afternoon tea and high tea?

- ✓ **Afternoon tea** is tea with cakes and/or sandwiches, served between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.
- ✓ **High tea**, served from about 5 to 6 p.m., is a more elaborate affair: High tea includes a light supper with a hot dish, followed by dessert and tea.

These rather lavish affairs are expensive. You're paying for the location, the food, and the service. But at any one of the following places, you can get a very proper traditional tea:

- ✓ **The Palm Court Lounge**, in the Park Lane Hotel (Piccadilly, W1; ☎ 020/7499-6321; Tube: Hyde Park Corner or Green Park), requires that you make reservations. Teatime is daily 3 to 6 p.m., and a traditional afternoon tea costs £19 (\$30), £25 (\$40) if you want strawberries and champagne.
- ✓ **Ritz Palm Court**, in the Ritz Hotel (Piccadilly, W1; ☎ 020/7493-8181; Tube: Green Park), requires reservations at least one month in advance for weekday teas, and three months in advance for weekend teas. Men must wear jackets and ties. Teatime is daily 2 to 6 p.m., and afternoon tea is £29 (\$46).
- ✓ **Fortnum & Mason** (181 Piccadilly, W1; ☎ 020/7734-8040; Tube: Piccadilly Circus) serves tea in the **St. James's Restaurant**, Monday through Saturday 3 to 5:30 p.m. at a cost of £18 (\$29).
- ✓ **Georgian Restaurant**, on the fourth floor of Harrods (87–135 Brompton Rd., SW1; ☎ 020/7225-6800; Tube: Knightsbridge), serves high tea Monday through Saturday 3:45 to 5:30 p.m. (last order). It runs £18 (\$29) per person.
- ✓ **Lanesborough** hotel (Hyde Park Corner, SW1; ☎ 020/7259-5599; Tube: Hyde Park Corner) requires reservations for high tea daily 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. (last order). The cost is £24.50 (\$39); the price goes up to £32 (\$51) if you add strawberries and champagne.

Slurp Up Spaghetti: Pasta Parlors



If you're backpacking around London on a budget or you just want to save some dough, visit a pasta parlor for a plate of spaghetti, lasagna, or cannelloni. These places are open for lunch and dinner, and you can get a fixed-price meal that includes two or three courses for about £10 (\$16).

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Spaghetti House has several locations in Central London (the last two in the following list operate under different names):

- ✓ 20 Sicilian Ave., WC1; ☎ **020/7405-5215**; Tube: Holborn
- ✓ 30 St. Martin's Lane, WC2; ☎ **020/7836-1626**; Tube: Leicester Square
- ✓ 15 Goodge St., W1; ☎ **020/7636-6582**; Tube: Goodge Street
- ✓ **Vecchia Milano**, 74 Welbeck St., W1; ☎ **020/7935-2371**; Tube: Bond Street
- ✓ **Zia Teresa**, 6 Hans Rd., SW3; ☎ **020/7589-7634**; Tube: Knightsbridge

All the preceding locations welcome children; they have highchairs and reduced-price kids' portions.

Another big pasta chain, **Cafe Uno**, with more than 20 branches, also provides these items for kids. The most popular branch is at 5 Argyll St., W1 (☎ **020/7437-2503**; Tube: Oxford Circus).

Nip In for a Treat: Ice Cream Stores



Nearly everybody likes ice cream, and Häagen-Dazs has several well-placed branches in tourist-heavy sections of London:

- ✓ 14 Leicester Sq.; ☎ **020/7287-9577**; Tube: Leicester Square
- ✓ Unit 6, Covent Garden Piazza; ☎ **020/7240-0436**; Tube: Covent Garden
- ✓ 83 Gloucester Rd., SW7; ☎ **020/7373-9988**; Tube: Gloucester Road

The preceding are nonsmoking places that welcome kids, provide highchairs, and offer children's portions. They're open daily 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. (sometimes to midnight in summer).

More upscale (and overpriced) is **Harrods Ice-Cream Parlour & Crêperie** (87 Brompton Rd., SW1; ☎ **020/7225-6628**; Tube: Knightsbridge), on the fourth floor of Harrods department store. It's open Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Wednesday through Friday 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Farther west in Bayswater, you find **Winton's Soda Fountain** on the second floor of Whiteley's Shopping Centre (151 Queensway, W2; ☎ **020/7229-8489**; Tube: Bayswater or Queensway). It's open Monday through Thursday and Sunday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and Friday and Saturday 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

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Regent Milk Bar (362 Edgware Rd., W9; ☎ 020/7723-8669; Tube: Edgware Road) is a classic 1950s milk bar offering about a dozen flavors of ice cream. You can also get sandwiches and snacks. Popular with families, it's open daily 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Take Advantage of a Nice Day: Alfresco Dining

London may not be the perfect city for picnics. Rain can quickly put a damper on a picnic hamper, and nothing is quite as unappetizing as a wet sandwich. But on days when the weather cooperates, you may enjoy packing up some sandwiches and heading to a green spot to eat.

Delis and sandwich shops or expensive **Fortnum & Mason** or **Harrods**, whose Food Halls are legendary (see Chapter 19), can provide all the necessary picnic provisions, if you're in the West End. In neighborhoods outside the West End (South Kensington or Marylebone, for example), you can go into any supermarket and generally find packaged sandwiches, crisps (potato chips), fresh fruit, and drinks.

In the West End, the **Embankment Gardens** is a pretty picnic spot, looking out on the Thames. This flower-filled strip of green is next to the Embankment Tube station, below The Savoy Hotel. You have to sit on benches instead of the grass, and the traffic noise along the Embankment can be annoying, but it's still a nice place to know about. Sandwich shops and takeaway food shops are clustered around the Embankment Tube station.

Kensington Gardens (see Chapter 16) offers vast green lawns, frolicsome fountains, Kensington Palace, and the famous statue of Peter Pan. This spot is a favorite with children of all ages. The Princess Diana Memorial Playground in the garden's northwestern corner makes a wonderful play area. The park is close to all the great museums in South Ken. Adjacent **Hyde Park** is another lovely picnic site, particularly along the shores of Serpentine Lake. You can buy sandwiches and snacks at the Dell Restaurant (see Chapter 16) at the east end of the lake. In summer, bandstand concerts are given in the park.

The *royal parks* — **Green Park** and **St. James's Park** — are more sedate. You can choose to picnic on a lovely knoll and gaze upon Buckingham Palace.

Looking for an urban space that's good for people watching and has great views across the river? Picnic on the **South Bank** of the Thames, along the riverside promenade close to Royal Festival Hall and the National Theatre. Beside the busy Thames are trees and flowers — but no lawns for stretching out.