

On the Tea Shop Trail



Welcome to our new series in which we'll be showcasing some of the area's best tea shops. For the first instalment, we pay a visit to The French Tarte in Surbiton, where they bring a slice of Parisian life to Surrey Words by Louise Johncox

The low-down

Opened in January by husband and wife team Sarah and Eric Guignard, who run The French Table restaurant next door, The French Tarte is a beautiful boulangerie/patisserie that brings a slice of French life into the heart of Surbiton.

On my visit, I chose to indulge in what turned out to be the most sublime apple slice, which transported me straight to a Parisian patisserie; the thinly sliced apple laying atop a custard-coated delicate pastry base – a true classic.

Back at The French Table, the couple have won numerous awards during the ten years they have been running the place, including Best London Restaurant in the *Good Food Guide 2010*. I have a feeling that their latest venture will win them some more accolades too.

Pastries

Head pastry chef Michel Rissons has created a divine afternoon tea menu including a mix of French specialities (millefeuille, Paris Brest and éclair etc) and English pastries (carrot cake and lemon drizzle cake and so on). If you really want to indulge, at the weekends they do a special Afternoon Tea (£14.50 per person) with a three-tier stand filled with a selection of sandwiches, cakes and pastries followed by scones, clotted cream and jam. Opposite the counter is the speciality bread so if you're still peckish you can take home a baguette, chorizo bread or even a small rye.

Best Table

If it's sunny, then you can sit outside and pretend you're in Paris; plus, Maple Road is the perfect place to people watch! Soak up the late summer warmth with a coffee, a book and a mouthwatering cake, just a short walk from the international coffee chains offering tasteless muffins.



Located in the heart of Surbiton, The French Tarte is just the place for a coffee and a pastry

Décor

French-themed artwork lines the walls, while cake stands and artisanal food gifts adorn the shelves. Many of the cakes look like pieces of art, from the strawberry tarts to the pretty pistachio macaroons.

Prices

My apple slice was £2 and worth every penny. A latte costs £2.20. For lunch you can have a filled baguette (from £3.20) and other French specialities including the traditional croque-monsieur (£4.95). These are reasonable prices for pastries made on the premises.

The verdict

Owners Sarah and Eric give a warm welcome, chatting to people as they pass through the café. The waitress was also friendly and pointed out that the strawberry tarts are one of the most

popular cakes at the weekend. I'll be back again soon!

■ **The French Tarte**, 83 Maple Road, Surbiton KT6 4AW. Open Tuesday to Friday, 8am to 7pm; Saturday and Sunday, 9am to 5pm. Closed on Mondays. Tel: **0208 399 1123**. For more details, see thefrenchtable.co.uk

■ Louise Johncox's parents, Peter and Frankie Johncox, ran Peter's tea shop in Weybridge from 1958 until 2000 when they retired. Her grandparents also ran two tea shops so there is baking in the genes! Louise is now writing a book about her parents' tea shop, with the working title of *The Baker's Daughter* (see louisejohncox.com/index.htm).