

FORK IN THE ROAD

Live like a royal foodie

From chocolate to tea to a train feast, you can be treated like the queen

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
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LONDON — Sink your teeth into a rich chocolate truffle at a tiny shop in Piccadilly and you begin to understand why the royal coat of arms appears on each box. These chocolates are of such high quality that Queen Elizabeth II herself indulges in them, perhaps seated in a comfy armchair a few miles away in Buckingham Palace.

But anyone can buy these chocolates, or tea from the royals' favorite food purveyor, or enjoy Champagne and caviar in the art deco dining car of a luxury train as it rolls through the English countryside to a royal estate.

All it takes is knowing where to shop and where to book a movable feast fit for a queen.

Chocolatier to the queen

In 1902, Prestat chocolates opened its doors in London, and through them passed archbishops, politicians and celebrities, such as John Gielgud, Paul McCartney, Tina Turner and Cher. Roald Dahl, author of "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," was a big fan. He put Prestat in his lascivious adult novel, "My Uncle Oswald," in which a love potion is hidden in truffles that are doled out to Europe's royalty and literati.

But perhaps Prestat's most famous customer is the queen, who awarded the chocolatier a royal warrant, giving it the right to display her coat of arms and the words "by appointment to Her Majesty the Queen." Some 800 businesses hold royal warrants, ranging from Bentley cars to umbrella-makers to chimney sweeps. All must have done business with the royal family for at least five years. Only three people can grant a royal warrant: the queen, Prince Phillip and Prince Charles.

When the queen mother was alive, she also influenced the granting of warrants, and Prestat's director, Bill Keeling, said she was instrumental in obtaining one for the chocolate-maker. The Lord Chamberlain, who handles the af-

fairs of the royal household, balked at giving Prestat a warrant, saying it did not supply a great enough quantity of its product to the palace. Hearing this, Keeling said, the queen mum replied, "How many chocolates is an old lady supposed to eat?"

Prestat's tiny storefront in Princes Arcade is a sea of colorful boxes containing all shapes and sizes of chocolates, with many arrayed on gold platters in glass display cases. It uses cocoa grown in West Africa, said Keeling, who was a foreign correspondent for the Financial Times in Ghana before dipping into the chocolate business.

'The queen's grocer'

Just down the street, another royal warrant holder has served every monarch since 1707. Tea was an important product of Fortnum & Mason, and it remains so with 181 varieties. Which does the queen prefer? Fortnum & Mason isn't telling. Royal warrant holders are forbidden to give details about the products the royal family uses. It's only a guess that the teas served in its Diamond Jubilee Tea Salon, which marked the queen's 60 years on the throne in 2012, include her favorites.

Afternoon tea at Fortnum & Mason is an elegant affair, with white tablecloths, uniformed waitstaff, tea brewed just right and served with three-tier trays of savories and sweets to share. Among them might be finger sandwiches of beef, chicken and salmon and individual tea cakes and pastries. Of course, there are scones with Somerset clotted cream.

But Fortnum & Mason is much more than tea. Nicknamed "the queen's grocer," its five floors house specialty food items as well as china and silver, a cook shop and demonstration kitchen, men's and women's accessories and five dining spots ranging from a wine bar to an ice cream parlor to a full-service restaurant. On the roof, the store maintains beehives that produce its signature



British Pullman cars, some dating from the 1920s and '30s, wait at Victoria Station for passengers to board for the excursion to the royal estate at Sandringham. Guests will enjoy brunch on the way, then dinner on the return trip.



Is this the tea the queen drinks? Rules forbid Fortnum & Mason, the royal tea vendor, from telling.

honey. In choosing its products, Fortnum & Mason supports individual craftsmen, such as the woman who picks roses from her garden every night at dusk to make rose petal jelly.

Long a favorite haunt of the royal family, the store frequently drew visits by the queen mother. Some older store clerks remember that the down-to-earth royal would wrap her own parcels when the store was busy.

A palace on wheels

The queen mum was a regular aboard the luxury

dining cars on trains traveling across Britain. Eleven of these art deco beauties, many from the 1920s and '30s, are part of the British Pullman, sister train to the Venice-Simplon Orient Express. Though not a royal warrant holder, the historic train is an English institution, its cream-and-brown cars departing London's Victoria Station for Sandringham in Norfolk, where the royal family gathers for Christmas. Nonroyalty can make the same trip, though they may feel like royalty.

The 106-mile day trip begins with brunch on board: a Bellini cocktail,



Each box of Prestat chocolates bears the royal coat of arms, designating the chocolatier a royal warrant holder.

If you go

Prestat: 14 Princes Arcade, Piccadilly, London; prestat.co.uk. From \$2 for a chocolate bar to \$145 for the 2.8-pound Jewel Box.

Fortnum & Mason: 181 Piccadilly, London; www.fortnumandmason.co.uk. Afternoon tea from about \$64.

British Pullman: orient-express.com/uktrains. The Sandringham excursion starts at about \$630; other trips and dining experiences about \$325.

fresh fruit, scrambled eggs and smoked trout, pastries, tea or coffee. After touring the royal estate, its grounds and museum, passengers reboard the British Pullman and settle in for a four-course dinner, perhaps featuring Scottish salmon followed by a selection of cheeses from the British Isles served with homemade chutney. The wine flows freely.

Named for the Pullman Palace Cars that Chicagoan George Pullman popularized in the United States, the dining cars' sumptuous interiors are traveling works of art, rolling palaces fit for royalty. Walls are paneled in rich wood veneers inlaid with marquetry. Diners sit in plush armchairs at tables set with china, silver and fresh flowers, and they peer out past red velvet curtains as courses are

served by waiters in white coats. Rose lampshades bathe the tables in a warm glow.

Each car has a different design and its own history. The Phoenix, built in 1927, was the queen mum's favorite and carried dignitaries, such as Charles de Gaulle, on state visits. The Minerva transported well-wishers from Dover to London for the queen's coronation. Perseus was used in Winston Churchill's funeral train.

In addition to the Sandringham day trips, the British Pullman has excursions to other country houses, castles and historic cities in Britain, plus brunch, afternoon tea and dinner trips for which guests are encouraged to don black tie.

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