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Pittsburgh tea party

From 61C to Kiva Han

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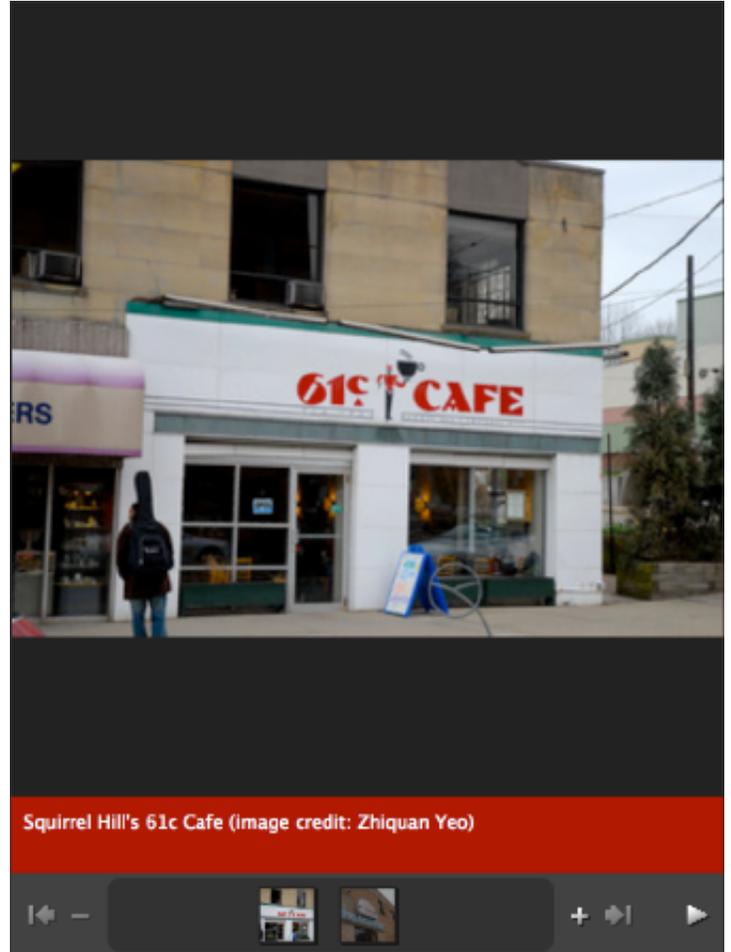
There's nothing like a good cup of tea to warm you on a cold morning, to soothe a sore throat, to energize you for a long day of class, or to accompany a good book and maybe a cookie or two. Whether you like your tea hot, harsh, and caffeinated or delicate, herbal, and laced with honey, you'll find a good cup at these Pittsburgh cafés.

Té Café, Murray Avenue, Squirrel Hill

No one in Pittsburgh takes tea more seriously than Té Café. In the winter, the shop fogs up like the inside of a teakettle. Té Café serves over 100 kinds of tea. When you order, your selection comes on a tray, served loose-leaf in its own teapot and accompanied by a tea timer. Complete with three different hourglass chambers, a tea timer allows you to brew a perfect cup of weak, medium, or strong tea — you'll only see them in the really serious tea shops. I particularly enjoyed the rose tea, but you can't get a bad cup of tea at Té Café. All the teas that the café serves are also available to take home. With free wireless, a quirky assortment of chairs and tables, and the occasional musical act or poetry reading, Té Café is by far Pittsburgh's best spot for tea.

61C Café, Murray Avenue, Squirrel Hill

Just up the street from Té Café, 61C Café is named for the bus that stops just outside. The café serves 41 kinds of tea, everything from simple black teas to obscure flavored blends. The tea comes loose-leaf in a nice teapot, but the café doesn't provide anything to put the infuser on, which either leads to overstewed tea or a soggy table. With so many choices, you can order a different kind of tea each time you visit the café and never be disappointed. The café's free wireless and overpriced but delicious pastries attract everyone in Pittsburgh with a laptop, and during peak hours it can be hard to find a table (and impossible to find an outlet). A cash-only policy is a bit discouraging for those who prefer



plastic, but 61C Café is still a great place for a relaxing, homework-accompanying pot of tea.

Quiet Storm, Penn Avenue, Garfield

Although Quiet Storm offers a comparatively piddling 16 teas, each is served loose-leaf in a generous Chinese restaurant-style teapot with a strainer and a honey pot. The lounge in the back features several old-fashioned arcade games and a rack of magazines. A combination coffeeshop and restaurant, Quiet Storm offers excellent hippie-watching, which is a nice change from the Starbucks crowd. Last weekend, a mother and daughter came in with matching hot pink hair. Quiet Storm is definitely a worthy spot for tea and conversation — though it's probably wise to avoid Penn Avenue at night.

Kiva Han, South Craig Street, Oakland

Although this coffee joint only offers tea in bags, they're organic and tasty (the Earl Grey with lavender is particularly good) and served in colorful mismatched mugs. What Kiva Han lacks in customer service it makes up for with lots of seating, wacky art, and huge people-watching windows, perfect for laughing at the fools going to Starbucks across the street.

Briefly Noted:

Coffee Tree Roasters: Although the tea is served in teapots — a plus — the tea is bagged (the shame!) with only a few worthwhile flavors. The Walnut Street shop is worth visiting for the yuppie-watching, but not particularly for the tea.

Starbucks, Borders, and Barnes & Noble: All serve dull Tazo teas. Boring! At least Borders offers loose-leaf Tazo.

Margaret's Fine Imports: No tea fan can live in Pittsburgh without visiting this Forbes Avenue shop. Margaret's Fine Imports offers a wall of loose-leaf teas and shelves of bagged teas from several countries, plus teapots of all sizes, shapes, and colors. Margaret even holds a tea class at the beginning of every month.