**PUBLICATION:** The Debrief

**HEAD**: A Beginner’s Guide to Cat Cafes

**SELL:** I visited Sheffield’s Tabby Teas to brush up on my kitty cat etiquette. Here’s what I learnt…

**COPY:**

One young man seemed to get more attention than the rest. He carried himself with confidence as his guests admired his red hair and slim physique. In true gentleman style, he welcomed each of his guests at the door. Once everyone was seated he worked the room with charm, graciously checking each tea cup was filled and every well decorated delicacy was enjoyed. Called over by an older lady wearing an elegant shawl with matching emerald earrings, the popular host made his way to the large seating area on the perimeter of the open plan space. The woman, excited to finally have her moment with the well sought after male, began to stroke his back. She took his face in her hands and held his gaze before whispering “I love the way those white hairs sprout from your ears.” Not an uncommon trait in tabby cats.

Olaf, the kitty in question, is somewhat of a poster boy for Tabby Teas, Sheffield’s first and only cat cafe. With his own [Instagram profile](https://www.instagram.com/olaftabbyteas/) and a recent accolade naming him one of the [UK’s most photogenic cats](https://www.theneighborscat.com/blog/2017/12/9/the-uks-most-photogenic-cat-cafe-cats), Olaf is a firm fan favourite. Cat cafes are opening their doors in almost all major cities across the UK. It seems the cat compilation craze never really left us, as excitement surrounding eating out with the internet’s most loved animal is climbing faster than resident kitty Luna towards a freshly served Victoria sponge.

Like many others, every time I scrolled past an advert or article about a cat café I got hyped. Cats and cake? Sounds like a perfect pairing. With images of food and fluffy kittens brimming in my brain, I spontaneously booked into my local cat café. Everyone I told about my upcoming trip looked pretty puzzled. “Do you share your food with the cats?” One friend asked. “Make sure you check the hygiene rating,” said another. It was amidst these questions and comments I began to realise, I had no idea how these things worked. What is correct cat café conduct? I decided to reach out to Olaf’s mum and owner of Tabby Teas, Charlotte Pickering. Who better to show me the ropes, the scratching posts and the cardboard box castles?

When I met Charlotte her sea of blue hair was pulled back into a ponytail, the colour complimented by a silver glittery headband. The thirty-one-year-old emulates enthusiasm for her self-built environment and was eager to explain how Tabby Teas came to be. *“It was the lovely internet that introduced me to the cat café idea, [the concept] comes from Japan originally. I love animals and it had always been a dream to work with animals. I’m not clever enough to be a vet and getting into zoos is hard work. I had been working in a café already, so I started working at The Sheffield Cats Shelter in order to learn how cats coped in big groups and how they interact with one another. There are so many cats that need homes out there. [The café] is letting these cats have a forever home.”*

Tabby Tea’s décor denotes cat lover in every detail. At a non-feline foodery you would expect to find flowers or a dimly lit candle as a centre piece. But at a cat café you can expect a quirky toy replacement, in my case a handmade mouse on a spring that wiggled enthusiastically with every passer-by. A selection of books were scattered around the café, all cat led content of course. I had a quick flick through one while I waited for my drink. I read the title “Cats in Art” aloud to myself half laughing, the fun non-fiction number told the tale of cats featured in paintings throughout history. The theme doesn’t stop at table toppings. I was brought a large teacup filled with creamy hot chocolate, finished with a dusting of coco powder to create a cute cat’s paw.

Sat in an arm chair, paw print beverage in one hand kitty literature in the other, I seemed to have been transported to a zen zone or sorts. *“For anyone who enjoys the company of cats it’s a chilled-out environment. That’s the idea, it’s not supposed to be a run around place. That’s why we have an age limit. For customers that do want to come here it’s a bit of cat therapy.”* After always thinking cat cafes would be a chaotic hub of hyperactivity I felt I still had a lot to learn. I did what any good journalist would, spent the next few hours chatting with Charlotte, quizzing customers and most crucially cuddling the cats. It was hard work, but now I can present with confidence my three top tips to getting the most out of your cat café therapy session. Doctor Olaf will see you now.

**Read the rules**

First up, read the rules. The house rules can usually be found on your local cat café’s website. If you can’t find them at first check under the FAQ tab. Don’t worry, the restrictions are reasonable and tend to always be similar. Don’t wake a sleeping cat, don’t feed them any unapproved food or pick them up without permission. High heels are a strict no no and as I mentioned before there are often age limits so make sure to check the minimum age of entry. If you’re in doubt about anything at all just ask, staff will be happy to help.

*“The cats get a good play time, they get cuddles. But it’s on their terms which is why we have rules. We don’t allow people to just pick up a cat and put it on their knee because the cat might not want to do that. If you are chosen by the cat that’s a different matter. You can stroke them if they are awake. We ask people to let them sleep. 90% of people are amazing but there’s always the odd few that you’re like oh my god what are you doing.”*

The cats have rules too. They are trained to stay away from food preparation areas and know to stay down from tables.

**Learn the lingo**

Grab a pen and some paper because we are about to begin a cat café dictionary. During my time at Tabby Teas conversations were disrupted not only by “cat congestion” – when two of the tabbies clamber competitively to claim one of the higher platforms then neither can get down – but also due to my lack of understanding of the Tabby Teas’ terminology. The whimsical words are reminiscent of Roald Dahl’s BFG with his hopscotchy and whizzpopping. Here’s a run-down of a few of my favourites…

* “Marshmallow cats” – These are cats that enjoy being around others. Often indoor cats, they love nothing more than plenty of attention and affection.
* “Booping” – A technique used by kitties to assert dominance over one another. This paw to nose action is discouraged in the cat café community as owners aim to create a more inclusive environment.
* “Wagglers” – Toys that can be ‘waggled’ in front of cats, usually long sticks with a feather or another fun feature attached to the end. A favourite amongst the Tabby Teas crowd.

**Meet the adopted moggies**

Don’t be scared to interact with the residents. As long as you are respecting the rules enthusiasm is encouraged, these are marshmallow cats after all. What you may not know is the majority of cats in these cafés are rescued from local shelters.

*“The shelters we work with are Mill House Animal Sanctuary and Pet Samaritans. We are able to give [the cats] a home. Vince had been at the shelter for over a year and he wasn’t picked because he’s got medical problems and he’s quite an old man, now he can spend his last few years here.”*

So, when you’re visiting your local cat café you are not only supporting an independent business but also a worthwhile cause. At Tabby Teas there are donation pots at the till and information about the contributing shelters is readily available if you fancy doing more to help out.

The more fusses you give, the more feline friends you will make. You’ll almost certainly become attached to the little characters and miss them until your next visit. Or until the next time Olaf appears on your timeline \*double tap.\*

Want to book a table at Tabby Teas? Click the cat to visit their [website](https://www.tabbyteas.co.uk/)

Or follow them on Twitter [@TabbyTeas](https://twitter.com/TabbyTeas)