



A very big house in the COUNTRY

Sue Thomas samples a delightful hotel overlooking the Thames

After a busy working week, it's sometimes hard to find the energy to go away for the weekend – until you do it. After being pampered at the delightful Danesfield House Hotel and Spa I'm thinking 'Why don't I do this more often?'

We enjoyed the drive through the pretty Buckinghamshire countryside on a Saturday after a 'what shall I wear?' frantic packing session (that's me, not my man of course).

After browsing and spending a little on new clothes at Nicki's, one of the gorgeous boutiques in Marlow's traditional high street, and a tasty spot of late lunch at Brasserie Gérard, we were already getting into the spirit of relaxing.

Within minutes we were driving up the steep slope to the hotel – a grand but not imposing country mansion set in 65 acres of gardens overlooking the meandering Thames.

We have only friendly folk to meet here. The staff are smiley and helpful, without intruding. We are shown to our room by Matthew who takes our bags – it's the lbstone with a huge four-poster bed and views over the topiary garden and the river. My 'chilled' rating has just gone up again.

Matthew's a mine of information – if we get time he suggests we go to the village of Turville, where the *The Vicar of Dibley* and other TV shows and films including *Goodnight Mr Tom* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* were filmed.

But instead, after a tour of the hotel with its oak-panelled walls, chandeliers and beautiful works of art, we opt for comfy sofas, afternoon tea and delicious home-made biscuits.

We while away some time watching a wedding party arrive in the Grand Hall opposite the reception. It's grand indeed and the guests are all dressed in their finery, complementing the surroundings.

Back to our elegant room and it's just a short stroll in our dressing gowns down the carpeted corridors and across the walkway joining the hotel to the modern spa – time for a swim and a sauna.

I also have an appointment for an aromatherapy massage – a blissful time spent being pampered in a warm, candlelit room with soft music and the smell of peppermint oil. The

hunch of being desk-bound is banished for a time.

It was a great way to relax before getting ready for our evening meal. Suited and booted, we arrive for cocktails at the cosy bar. We also choose a decent bottle of chardonnay to go with our menu choices and soon we are called to our table in the Orangery Terrace brasserie.

Small but beautiful is how I would describe the thyme crusted tuna loin, baby chicory and blood orange jelly portion. Totally delicious and cooked to perfection, as is the soy-roasted quail, crisp leek and rocket salad my man chose.

More elegance on a plate arrives with delicious roasted breast of pheasant, mustard mash, with spinach and baby onions – and pan-fried turbot for him with pomme puree, and our side order of mangetout and green beans.

We are ready for pudding which promises much. Treacle tart with prune and Armagnac ice cream doesn't disappoint. He has a selection of cheese with biscuits and a robust glass of port. We are comfortably replete.

Our Sunday morning starts early with a visit to the gym and the pool – it's a wonderful way to begin the day with the sun shining into the spa, glinting off the beautiful Italianate murals. A hearty breakfast in the Orangery follows.

We reluctantly pack our bags and before leaving visit the wonderful topiary garden, the waterfall and admire the views over the river. It's a perfect spot for a summer picnic.

■ Danesfield House Hotel and Spa, Henley Road, Marlow, SL7 2EY, 01628 891010, www.danesfieldhouse.com

FACTFILE

Did you know that Danesfield has...

- Eight conference and banqueting suites
- 84 rooms
- A helicopter landing area
- A putting green, tennis courts and croquet lawns
- A valet service
- Afternoon tea served from 3pm to 6pm