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## Danesfield House Hotel and Spa, Buckinghamshire

Just over an hour from central London, Danesfield House is an imposing castle-like mansion set in stunning grounds; exactly how you'd picture the ideal luxury country retreat.

Our opulently-decorated room has a four poster bed and a charming view of the maze. It's spacious without being huge, with a modern bathroom and not-so-modern television (but hey, it works). We tear ourselves away from the rugby match on TV to have a cocktail in the cosy bar. The service is impeccable and we're given menus to peruse before dinner.

Danesfield House's restaurant is no ordinary hotel eatery: chef Adam Simmonds has been tipped as the new Jamie Oliver and was recently listed as number 13 in *The Good Food Guide*. His intimate restaurant at Danesfield attracts foodies on gourmet breaks, so we're curious to see if it lives up to the hype. We're ushered into the quiet wood-panelled Oak Room and soon find out why no one's talking much: the food is amazing.

Highlights of our seven-course tasting menu (£75 each) include quail's egg in watercress sauce, delicious venison and cheeses so fabulous we get the waitress to write the names down. The wines are fine and the attention to detail incredible: we only have to quietly wonder what the rugby score is and the maitre'd has sidled to our table to fill us in. With different tasting wines for most courses (an additional £55 each) it's all we can do to stagger upstairs to the four-poster bed for a good night's sleep.

Breakfast the next morning is in The Orangery, the hotel's informal restaurant. An airy conservatory overlooking the grounds, it feels more functional in design than the previous night's venue. A note in our room has warned us that it gets busy when the hotel is fully booked and we duly have to wait for service and nab missing cutlery from nearby tables. The buffet's good, though, with unusual options such as rhubarb and apple compote, and the meat and cheese plate options come with the continental bed and breakfast price (cooked dishes cost extra).

After breakfast, it's time to experience another of Danesfield's specialisms: the spa. A more modern building connected to the house via a walkway, it's well staffed but appears unremarkable until my treatment begins. I have the ESPA Holistic Aromatherapy Back, Face and Scalp massage (£90) which is instantly relaxing and expertly applied: the kind of massage you remember for days afterwards. It includes acupressure, aromatic oil massage and a full facial, during which I'm offered a pillow and a duvet – no wonder then that I nearly nod off. This is one of the best treatments I've ever had.

After a skim through the Sunday papers we have a roam in the large grounds: it's so cold the fountain has frozen and the icicles are straight out of a fairy tale. Reception's busy at check-out time, so we wait in the impressive Great Hall and skim through a book of wedding photographs on display: Danesfield looks like a magical place to tie the knot and particularly spectacular in the snow.

Once checked out, we set off for a local walk. Danesfield is accessible to several quaint towns and villages including Marlow, Henley and Hurley, and the latter proves perfect for a pub lunch after a ramble by the river, watching the swans and ducks. We pop back for our bags and meet a couple who've stayed at Danesfield for their anniversary, which seems like the perfect occasion to visit.

It may not be cheap, but if you're looking to splash out, this country house hotel is well worth the expense – and packages like their Relaxing Break are decent value: £185 each including room, breakfast, lunch and spa treatment. We leave Danesfield House reluctantly but relaxed and happy – just as every country weekend break should end.

### Danesfield House Hotel and Spa

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