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Travel

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# How the other half lives

## British Break

By Ben Hurst

**IN THESE troubled financial times, one sometimes wonders how much the super-rich are really affected.**

The upper echelons of our society, the bankers and city traders, have lost a packet and been bailed out by the public purse.

But judging from the car park packed with top of the range BMWs, Jaguars and Aston Martins at The Grove, London's contemporary country estate, they seem to be doing perfectly all right.

Make no mistake – The Grove unashamedly caters for those top earners who will be paying the 50p tax.

With a lunch buffet costing £30 per head and bar burger and chips at £14.95, it's not quite for those seeking a cheap and cheerful few days away.

But if you want a pamper-filled break, packed with top notch food and staff who are only too keen to help, then look no further.

Situated just off the M25, it is surprising just how near The Grove is to London, given it has such a rural aspect.

It even offers people the opportunity of arriving by boat.



What a view. Enjoy the fantastic grounds at The Grove, near London.

An 18th century house with 227 rooms, it is set in 300 acres of parkland – and it is immediately clear that it is aimed at those in search of leisure pursuits.

Pull off the main road, go over a hump backed bridge and you're driving through the middle of a golf course.

The house itself is situated in an imposing location on a hill, and is deceptively large – stretching away out of sight from those initial views, and includes no fewer than 227 rooms and suites.

Evidence that we were entering another strata of society hit us as soon as we dragged our bags from our (rather more modest) car to the main entrance.

At least three people were waiting eagerly to open doors, take bags and help us in.

Our room was lavishly appointed, with a huge plasma TV, entertainment system, ipod docking station and a grand view across the gardens, which were designed by Chelsea Gold Medalist and judge, Michael Balston.

Although it was a bit cold to make much use during our stay, there was a small balcony allowing you to take in the views at our leisure outside the room.

If anything, the bathroom was even more impressive. There was certainly no grotty bath with mildew covered tiles, and a dirty shower curtain.

In fact it was home to one of the grandest baths I've seen.

Our children were greeted with the welcome sight of complementary cookies and milk.

It's in an excellent location. There's the obvious opportunity to venture forth into London and sample any number of the attractions there.

For families who may not all want to play golf, there is the opportunity to explore the grounds – although some paths are very close to the fairway, so keeping an eye open for flying golf balls is a must. The River Gade and the Grand Union Canal both run through the property, there is also a Walled Garden,

woodland, meadowlands, a wetland area, beehives, and two lakes.

The hotel concierge staff can arrange a variety of outings to local attractions including Legoland, Whipsnade Zoo and horse riding.

As well as golf, the hotel boasts a spa which has twelve treatment rooms, a purified saltwater vitality pool, private relaxation areas, heat experiences, and health bar.

It's not all about a spartan existence of sport and spa – with three restaurants on the site there's a big opportunity for indulgence – if your pockets are deep enough!

The previously mentioned lunchtime buffet certainly goes beyond some cold meats, vol u vents and a selection of cheeses.

Food included Thai, Indian, Chinese, a huge seafood selection and some traditional roasts meant all tastes were catered for – and how! I never thought I could eat at a buffet costing £30 and feel I'd got my money's worth, but I think this one fitted the bill.

We never felt the need to venture further afield during our two night stay, when we got an insight into how the 'other half' live.

## Getting There

Families with two children or more can book inter-connecting rooms in the contemporary West Wing. (Prices from £280 for a double room) Children's twin rooms will be charged at 50 per cent of the price of the parents' room. For more details call 01923 807807.

