



# Mayfair Charm

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The scene can't be more typical of the British capital. Pulling away from Piccadilly, leaving behind brightly red-coloured double-decker buses bound for Charing Cross, our black cab pulls into the much more obscure Half Moon Street to plunge into the quintessential heart of Mayfair.

Rounding the corner, we draw past the charming covered archway that tunnels into Shepherd Market to come to a halt in front of the luxurious serviced apartments at 44 Curzon Street.

Although I am a regular visitor to London, it is the first time I have stayed in this upmarket area. After checking in, we are escorted into a small, old-fashioned elevator with metal sliding doors that takes us to our one-bedroom apartment on the third floor.

The luxury of having a living room and a small kitchen along with a bedroom and bathroom is frankly liberating. It doesn't feel as if I am staying in a hotel at all. It's more like coming home. And it's not just the space, furnishings and general ambience; it's the access to London's best-loved attractions, shops, restaurants, and underground stations and bus stops that makes this the perfect London location.

With Berkeley Square and Bond Street just around the corner, it is pretty hard to imagine that this elegant corner of

London was nothing more than an open, boggy area called Brookfield before an annual, 15-day fair began taking place during the first two weeks of May between 1682 and 1764.

The development of nearby Grosvenor Square during the 1720s and the expansion of the area as an upmarket part of London eventually forced the fair to move. Only the reference to the name -Mayfair - remains to remind us of its humble origins.

A local architect by the name of Edward Shepherd was commissioned in 1735 to develop the area, and some 10 years later the swampy fields had given way to a two-storey market with paved alleys, a theatre and even a duck pond.

And so, with Shepherd Market in place and new buildings sprouting like mushrooms, Mayfair rapidly became a magnet for the rich and famous. Beau Brummel, the legendary 18<sup>th</sup> century dandy, lived here, as did Oscar Wilde, along with Florence Nightingale, Winston Churchill and Jimi Hendrix. And who knows, perhaps Ian Fleming, who was born here, was inspired by his sophisticated surroundings to create the world's most stylish, fictional spy, James Bond.

Leaving our apartment shortly after 11:00, we enter the narrow, covered walkway into Shepherd Market to find ourselves in a village-type square, with

passages reminiscent of the London of Dickens' time. Surrounding us are no fewer than four pubs and a dozen or more restaurants. There is also a delightful little chemist, a florist and several barber shops, including the quaint Jack The Clipper.

After a drink in the charming King's Head, we decide to enjoy a bite at the L'Autre Pied. The name, which means 'the other foot' in English, suggested that the venue might offer something quite unusual. But a Polish-Mexican restaurant? I've never heard of a gastronomic fusion of the two cuisines. Opting for Polish borscht, a blood-red beetroot soup with mushroom dumplings, as a starter, and a vegetarian burrito for the main course, the rich, full flavours of both dishes left me very impressed. It must be the best "simple" restaurant food I have had in London.

That evening, settled snugly in our cosy living room, I lean out of the window to glance out over the fast-darkening Curzon Street. Across the road, the proprietor of the charming bookstore closes shop. Lights twinkle brightly as businessmen and office workers prepare to head home. Some will undoubtedly be stopping off at Shepherd Market for a pint on their way.

For more information visit [www.44curzonstreet.co.uk](http://www.44curzonstreet.co.uk). ■