



# Ascot Racecourse is now a destination with every budget covered

**With a sack full of awards for its group services, Ascot Racecourse continues to evolve into a destination that offers much more than racing. Rob Yandell explains.**

**F**rom the Royal meeting to festivals, concerts and family events, you can take a group to Ascot Racecourse in the knowledge that it now caters for a wide audience and budgets big or small, with discounted rates available for parties of six or more.

I have rarely seen a world-class attraction (and it is) with such a focus on the group visitor. And it pays dividends as coach load upon coach load make their way to Berkshire during Royal Ascot to experience one of Britain's most glamorous social occasions.

Ever-evolving and able to provide special experiences, I was invited to the launch of Royal Ascot's fine dining programme for this summer's event. There are some quite stunning options if you are looking to organise a top quality experience with Michelin-starred chefs, Tom Kerridge and Atul Kochhar confirmed residents for the five days.

The award-winning Steve Golding is once again in residence, overseeing a major catering operation and serving his menu in the Parade Ring Restaurant. Atul Kochhar is heading up the Panoramic Restaurant.



Unsurprisingly the food I sampled was first class and I also tucked in to the most imaginative afternoon tea I have ever seen. If you're looking for something really fun I suggest you take a closer look at the Mad Hatter's Afternoon Tea which will be served in the Royal Ascot Village. Prices start from £299 +VAT per person which includes the tea, but also a Pimms reception and four-course lunch.

**Royal Ascot 2014 takes place between 17th and 21st June and there are a variety of smaller race days and experiences throughout the year that offer various themes and options for groups.**



## Useful contact:

**Royal Ascot Group Sales:**  
 ☎ 01344-878536  
 ✉ groups@ascot.co.uk  
 🌐 www.ascot.co.uk

**> (L-R) Atul Kochhar, Tom Kerridge and Steve Golding will be serving top quality dining experiences during Royal Ascot.**

**A quick chat with Craig Staddon, head of sales at Ascot Racecourse.**



**What is Ascot offering for groups this year outside of the Royal meeting?**

We have five family days throughout the year where under 18s get in free. There is a Country Fair race day with a bouncy castle, pony trekking, learning about horses and country pursuits. Then we move into King George weekend and the Sunday in particular is angled towards families. There will be a country fair and garden party atmosphere with climbing frames for children and fairground rides. Family days are a really good push for groups.

For groups of ten plus some of the notable dates are King George day on Saturday 26th July; and there is the Shergar Cup on 9th August when there's a concert after the racing which works really well. We have a Festival of Food & Wine race day and a beer festival too.

**So for people who have varied interests, it's much more than a race day?**

I think it's really important you mention it. Ascot is a destination and that's what we want to do. It's not just about racing; if you talk to people about Ascot as a racecourse it might put some people off. Ascot is now a destination whereby you can see a bit of racing but you can sit down, have a drink and a relaxing time, have a bet, bring your children along and enjoy a really good day out.

**Royal Ascot has been voted the Best Event for Groups by our readers on numerous occasions; why do you think it's so popular with groups?**

There are two things and the first thing is that we actually work with groups and I think we're one of the very few race courses that make a contact and build up a relationship with a customer. If someone books for ten people we pick up the phone and ask what else can we do.

The second thing is that it's a great place. If you come to Royal it's in the summer, it's not pretentious and I think

getting that across is really important. There is the Silver Ring where you can bring a picnic, relax and have a really good time for £20. You can opt for the Grandstand which is a little bit different, where people dress up a little bit smarter, put a hat on and that is going to cost you between £60 and £75. So it's saying to people: Royal Ascot is not about being a certain class or a certain type, it's coming to a place to watch the best racing in the world.

**Tell me about what's new for 2014...**

When it comes to groups I think we sometimes miss the whole dining aspect. I think we can take it for granted that people aren't interested. But if we start with groups in terms of tickets, we have the Silver Ring where they can buy beer, they can buy different types of wine, they can also buy different types of food. It's more like a shopping cart scenario, where you can create your own picnic hamper. We'll have lots of activities taking place within the Silver Ring too.

In terms of the Grandstand we have the Furlong Club where we are improving the look and feel. What we have changed is bringing in a dining piece that's at a level that people aren't scared of. We've got an entry point of £250 which we've never had before.

**“If someone books for ten people we pick up the phone and ask what else can we do”**

**One of the other options is when you can hire gazebos with great positions; how does that work?**

We have Silks Lawn, which is a private area that's partly under cover and it is £2,000 for up to 50 people. It could work out at £40 per head, plus the cost of your ticket - so for £100 you're getting a private area and your admission. We're nearly sold out for this year but we're looking to put more on. ■

**These are new if you want to splash out**

**The Royal Ascot Pavillion:** Overlooking the Plaza Lawns and the Bandstand this is a more affordable upgrade for groups with Grandstand admission. £250 +VAT per person gets you a Pimms reception, three course lunch and afternoon tea.

**On 5:** This very special new restaurant will be led by celebrity chef, Tom Kerridge during Royal Ascot. Expect Tom's modern take on British classics, views of the course and a lovely outdoor space. An amazing experience awaits for a cool £800 +VAT per person.

**Lenôte:** Menus from the three Michelin starred chefs of Le Pre Catelan, Paris will be served across three restaurants in a double-decker marquee overlooking the racetrack. This is a premium choice with prices from £330 +VAT per person.

> A picnic on the lawns can be fun - you can bring your own, or create a hamper at the course.

