

Big Train *meets* Little Train

exploring on the Great Little Trains of Wales



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5 things you
can do
on a *train*
(but not driving a car)

1. Gaze at the view
2. Drink a coffee
3. Read a book
4. Have a cwtch (cuddle)
5. Take 40 winks!



ARAF
SLOW

Cymraeg (Welsh)

Gwynedd, where many of the Great Little Trains are based, is the heartland of Welsh language – where it's spoken by about two thirds of the population. But forget the urban myth about everyone starting to speak Welsh as soon as you walk in the pub, locals swap in and out of Welsh and English all the time without even thinking about it. You'll see bilingual signs at railway stations and hear bilingual announcements, so you can brush up on your place names...

Why not try a few words of Welsh yourself

Diolch (*dee-olk*) – thank you

lawn (*yown*) – OK/fine

Araf (*a-rav*) – slow

And here's a rough guide to some of the places you'll be visiting

Caernarfon (*k'-nar-von*)

Conwy (*con-we*)

Betws-y-Coed (*betus-uh-coid*)

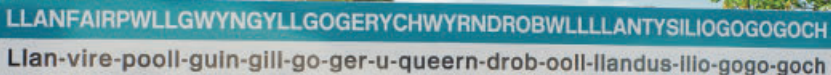
Blaenau Ffestiniog (*bligh-nigh festiniog*)

Dolgellau (*dol-geth-lie*)

Tywyn (*tuh-win*)

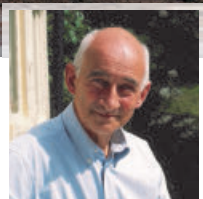
Machynlleth (*ma-khun-hleth*)

Aberystwyth (*aber-ystwith*)



LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGOGERYCHWYRNDROBWLLLLANTYSILIOGOGOGCH
Llan-vire-pool-l-guin-gill-go-ger-u-queern-drob-ooll-llandus-llo-gogo-goch

Landscape *and* memory on the trains of North Wales



Lecturer, writer, curator and historical expert Paul Atterbury, who lives in Dorset, is famous for his many appearances on Antiques Roadshow. He explored the scenic treasures of several great Welsh railways.

"When I was about ten my mother took me and a school friend on holiday in North Wales. We toured around in her pale green Morris Minor convertible, went walking, rock climbing and swimming, and explored quite a bit of Snowdonia. I remember to this day the impact that landscape had upon me. The only train journey on that holiday was the memorable experience of being pushed slowly up to the summit of Snowdon by a panting steam locomotive. There have been many subsequent visits to North Wales, by train and car, for work and pleasure, but the excitement generated by that first trip has never diminished.

The growth of travel and holidays, from the late-Victorian era onwards, made these landscapes familiar, but the story starts earlier, in the late 18th-century, when artists discovered and depicted North Wales: Richard Wilson and, later, Turner and the first generation of watercolourists. More recently the physical nature of the landscape, and those who live upon it, and the constantly changing quality of light, has been expressed magnificently by

Anglesey-based Sir Kyffin Williams, arguably Wales's most famous painter. Generations of artists have come to North Wales by train, and it was really the railway that made the region both accessible and popular.

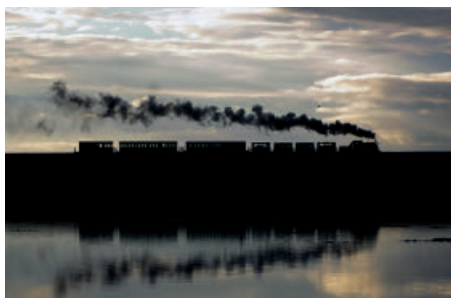


Despite this, North Wales is still, for many people, a very long way away and the journey there by car can seem interminable and devoid of pleasure. With this in mind, I decided to spend a few days exploring the region by rail, simply because trains offered the best and most relaxing way to explore the landscape that had impressed me so much as a child. My starting point was London; the gateways, Chester and Shrewsbury, are both served by rapid Virgin trains from Euston, and visitors can pack a huge amount into a weekend or short break in North Wales.

“*I took the train a couple of stops back to Llandudno Junction, a hub for a range of interesting journeys. I chose the best by far...*

The two-hour journey to Chester flashed past in first class comfort, with complimentary food and drink; it is one of the many mysteries of the national rail ticketing system that advance first class tickets can be cheaper than standard class. From Chester, it was a short hop along the coast on an Arriva service to Llandudno, a classic and still thriving Victorian resort, with a range of traditional seaside hotels overlooking the beach (again, internet booking can produce surprising bargains). For those wanting more, the magnificent Bodysgallen Hall, one of three country house hotels owned by the National Trust and run by them with great style, is only a taxi ride away. A bit further afield (but easily accessed from the Cambrian Coast line) is Portmeirion, the remarkable Italianate village and hotel created by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis in the 1920s.

After breakfast next day, I took the train a couple of stops back to Llandudno Junction, a hub for a range of interesting journeys. I chose the best by far, Arriva's Conwy valley line to Blaenau Ffestiniog: it starts with a great view of Conwy Castle across the estuary, and gets better and better as it winds up the valley beside the tumbling waters of the Conwy. Viaducts, cuttings and tunnels add excitement, and the views are constantly varied, especially around Betwys-y-Coed. This famous, well-equipped Snowdonian resort also makes a good base for those not wanting to stay in a town.



Near the end of the journey, the train plunges into a two-mile long tunnel, from which it bursts out into a dramatically different landscape. All around are towering mountains of slate, the spoil from centuries of quarrying and mining. It is an extraordinary and curiously exciting landscape, formed by the remains of North Wales' greatest industry and most important export, and the reason for many of the railways in the region.

Blaenau Ffestiniog, a slate town par excellence, had begun to die, as the industry that had made it died, but it has pulled itself together and the result is a town working hard to please its visitors. A key element is the narrow gauge Ffestiniog Railway, initially built in the 1830s to link slate quarries with the harbour at Porthmadog, but now one of Britain's premier tourist railways and one of the Great Little Trains of Wales. The twisting descent, in comfortable carriages, is a delightful journey through woods and fields, with magnificent views down to the river





valley far below. It is downhill all the way, a leisurely progress well sustained by the buffet car.

At the end of the journey, the train crosses the estuary on the raised Cob, and drifts into Porthmadog station, right by the harbour, now filled with pleasure boats rather than trading vessels waiting to be loaded with roofing slates for clients around the world. Porthmadog is another appealing town, still relatively free of High Street brand names, and coming to terms with its new life as a tourist centre and hub for scenic railways.

The Ffestiniog timetable makes it possible to leave the train, go for a walk and catch a later one, but I had a date with the recently revived Welsh Highland Railway. Opened in 1923, this narrow gauge line to Caernarfon had a chequered career, closing in 1937. Early revival attempts created the little Welsh Highland Heritage Railway, which operates trains particularly suitable for children, along a short section of track. This independent concern also runs an excellent hands-on museum that tells the history of the area's narrow gauge railways and displays an impressive collection of locomotives.

Eventually, what is now Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways acquired the track bed, raised a vast amount of money and rebuilt the entire line, which reopened all the way to Caernarfon in 2011. This is a real railway with a proper service, reconnecting important parts of North Wales; it is also a glorious journey, in carriages far larger than those normally associated with narrow gauge trains. The 25-mile route is a constant delight, offering views not easily accessible to car travellers, attracting visitors from all over the world, boosting the local economy and benefitting villages along the route. It is a slow journey, taking about two hours, but there is no need to hurry through this landscape and the end of the line at Caernarfon, facing the castle and beside the harbour, is worth the wait.



Caernarfon is a fine town, still fully walled, with plenty to enjoy, and a wide range of hotels, pubs and B&Bs. The only disadvantage is its relative isolation; apart from taking the Welsh Highland back to Porthmadog, the car-free visitor has to rely on buses and taxis. I spent the night here, in a comfortable pub/hotel, and, early next morning, caught the cheap, rapid, regular Bus 88 to Llanberis. I arrived easily in time for the train to the summit of Snowdon, a not-to-be-missed chance to revisit my childhood.



The Snowdon Mountain Railway has been operating for over a century, and still uses some of the original steam locomotives. The steep ascent, made possible by the use of a rack and pinion system familiar in Switzerland, is unique on the British mainland. It is, if the weather behaves, possibly the most exciting railway journey in Britain, an hour of glorious landscape only accessible otherwise to those who choose to walk to the summit.

There are limited seats in the single carriage, though, so advance reservation is a good idea. It is also sensible to come down on the same train that carried you up, after the 30 minute break at the top. If you miss it, there is no certainty that there will be space on a later train, and it is a long walk back down the mountain to Llanberis.

An alternative to the Snowdon train – which will particularly appeal to families with small children for whom the Snowdon experience may be too much – is the little Llanberis Lake Railway, just over the road. The lakeside route is pretty and passes the National Slate Museum, housed on the former site of the Dinorwic slate quarry which the railway was originally built to serve. The combination of impressive industrial architecture and machinery, including a huge working waterwheel, and the spectacle and drama of the actual quarries makes this an essential visit.



Getting home from Caernarfon can be a challenge, but there are two good options: a regular bus to Bangor connects with the train back to London. Alternatively, returning to Porthmadog, by train, bus, or taxi, take the Arriva's Cambrian Coast route and then cross-country to Shrewsbury or Birmingham, both of which have fast Virgin trains back to London. The slow but famously spectacular journey along the coast of West Wales, a formerly busy main line, is now one of Britain's great country railways."







Llanberis Lake Railway

Llanberis - Penllyn

An hour

long scenic journey beside Lake Padarn in the Snowdonian mountains starts at the foot of Snowdon itself in the little village of Llanberis. The narrow-gauge steam trains pass thirteenth-century Dolbadarn Castle, before entering Padarn Country Park and joining the historic 1845 lakeside slate railway. Superb mountain views open up as the train nears the end of its outward journey at Penllyn. Little Hunslet steam engines, which spent the earlier part of their working careers at the nearby Dinorwic Quarries, will pull sightseers on this timeless journey.

Kids

A bus ride from Llanberis, lots of kids will enjoy Electric Mountain, the First Hydro Company's visitor centre in Llanberis and starting point for tours of this huge power station, with 16km of tunnels deep under Elidir mountain. There's also an indoor playzone. www.electricmountain.co.uk. Padarn Adventures has a pre-bookable high ropes course for kids over eight (£22) and, for younger kids, an adventure course (£10) with wobbly bridges, tunnels and zip wires as well as lots of other activities. www.padarnadventures.com

Adventure

Boulder Adventures in Llanberis provide lots of activities including climbing, water sports and coasteering,

www.boulderadventures.co.uk. The Vivian Diving Centre is a well-equipped facility, supporting divers of all abilities, in a flooded former quarry, with 3-hour introductory courses for £45.

www.viviandivecentre.co.uk. Surf-lines, on the south-western shore of Lake Padarn offers 2 hours canoeing and kayaking for £30. www.surf-lines.co.uk

Top Walk

The Llanberis Lake Walk takes 2 to 3 hours and includes forest tracks, views across beautiful Llyn Padarn to Snowdon and the Llanberis Pass, and the historic Welsh Slate Museum. The road climbs for 1½ miles to reach Fachwen and an undulating woodland path. There some tricky stone steps so you need walking boots and raincoats might be useful. As long as you can see the lake you can't get lost!



Local Legend

The medieval Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (Llywelyn the Great) built solid Dolbadarn Castle above Llyn Padarn in the early thirteenth century. Owain ap Gruffydd (Owain the Red) was imprisoned here by his younger brother Llywelyn the Last. The brothers were fighting for control of North Wales in the 1250s and Owain spent 20 years as a prisoner on the castle's upper floor.



Eat

On the Rails

Although food and drinks are not available on our trains, we do have a 60 seat café with patio and picnic area at our main station in Gilfach Ddu open during service hours. Food hygiene rating of 5. Snacks are also available at our Llanberis station.

Off the Rails

Famous Pete's Eats, locally described as "possibly the best caff in the world" serves pint mugs of tea, generous portions of chunky chips and homemade cakes, but also healthy, vegetarian dishes like spinach and chickpea curry or provençal casserole. www.petes-eats.co.uk The Pen-y-Ceunant Isaf café is a hidden gem on the Llanberis path up Snowdon, serving tea, coffee, mulled wine, hot chocolate and local beers. www.snowdoncafe.com

Insider Tips

The quarry hospital at the National Slate Museum is worth a visit. The pioneering hospital for men who worked at the Dinorwig Quarry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now a museum, housing some of the original equipment, including an old x-ray machine, a restored operating theatre and other bits of gruesome medical equipment! www.museum.wales/402

Sleep

Budget

YHA Snowdon at Pen-Y-Pass, at the foot of Snowdon with dramatic mountainous views, is a restored mountain lodge, where George Mallory stayed while using Snowdon to train for Everest. Dorm beds from £13.00. www.yha.org.uk

Mid-range

The Alpine Lodge Hotel on the High Street in Llanberis is a comfortable guesthouse with mountain views. Doubles from £56, B&B. www.alpinelodgehotel.co.uk

Family

The Gallt y Glyn, ½ mile outside Llanberis village, is a welcoming restaurant with rooms and a bunkhouse, serving home-cooked food and a free pint with each main meal. Doubles from £60, B&B. www.gallt-y-glyn.co.uk

Did you know?

On its journey the steam railway crosses one of Britain's shortest rivers and passes between Llanberis' twin lakes as it negotiates the 2003 extension to Llanberis village.



Itinerary 1

Enjoy the train ride from Llanberis to Penllyn at the head of the lake. On the return journey, get off at tranquil Cei Llydan, mid-way along the lake, to use the lakeside tables, or visit the (independently operated) children's adventure playground nearby. Visit Wales choose this spot as one of the country's top ten places for a picnic, combining "the fun of an old-fashioned picnic with the romance of a ride on a vintage train".

Getting Here

There are regular buses from Bangor and Caernarfon (and Snowdon Sherpa bus links from Betws-y-Coed and Porthmadog) to Dol-y-Goden Interchange in Llanberis, right beside Llanberis Lake Railway.

www.lake-railway.co.uk

Itinerary 2

Alternatively, break your journey at Gilfach Ddu to visit the fascinating Slate Museum or go for a stroll along one of the Country Park's many way-marked woodland or lakeside paths. Dinorwig Quarry, which closed in 1969, is now a museum about the Welsh slate industry, an insight into the lives of quarrymen and engineers. There are reconstructed courtyards and slate-splitting demonstrations, www.museum.wales/slate. You can also watch the train driver as he fills the tanks with water and stokes the fire ready for the next journey and visit our café for a drink or a bite to eat.

Your ticket is a return to the station of your choice. You can get off at any stop and catch a later train back!





Snowdon Mountain Railway

Llanberis - Summit

Take the

trip of a lifetime to the rooftop of Wales on the Snowdon Mountain Railway. At 1085m, majestic Snowdon dominates the landscape and you can claim this mountain peak, the highest in Wales, with a unique, skywards journey.

This is a land of giants and princes, alpine flowers and rare ferns left by the retreating ice age, dotted with ruins that chronicle the history of long lost communities. Rugged scenery, awe-inspiring views, viaducts and waterfalls make this train ride a spectacular day out.

Best View

From the summit of Snowdon, there is a breathtaking 360° vista. On a clear day you can see Ireland, England, Scotland and the Isle of Man. Edmund Hillary trained on Snowdon before he climbed Mount Everest. The first person on record to climb Snowdon was Thomas Johnson, back in 1639.

Did you know?

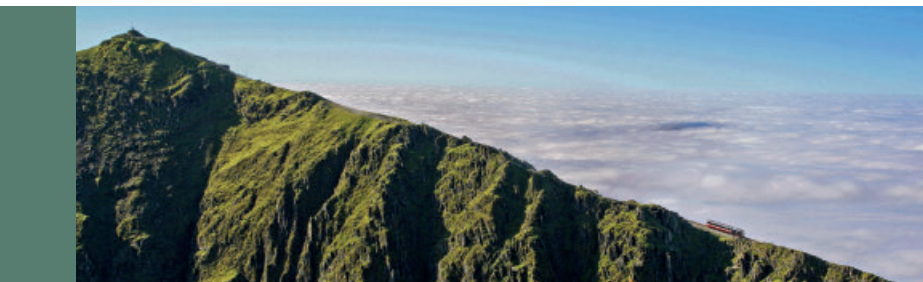
Snowdon Mountain Railway has been taking travellers to the summit since 1896 and is the UK's only public rack and pinion railway.

Top Walk

Llyn Padarn, a lovely lake in Llanberis, has a five-mile circular walk round the edge, taking in flowery meadows, forest tracks, lakeside views and sights relating to the area's industrial heritage, including the free National Slate Museum and the old quarrymen's hospital, www.museum.wales/slate. You can extend the walk a little to visit picturesque, round-towered Dolbadarn Castle, overlooking neighbouring Llyn Peris.

Local Legend

King Arthur is often linked with Snowdon, a mountain rich in myths. He is said to have killed Rhita there, a terrifying giant who made himself a cape from the beards of his enemies. Arthur's men buried the dead giant on the summit of Snowdon and covered him with a cairn of huge stones, once known as Gwyddfa Rhudda (Rhita's Cairn). Some say his knights, and even Arthur himself, are sleeping under the mountains, waiting for a call to arms.



Adventure

Surf-lines in Llanberis offers a range of lake and mountain-based activities, including canoeing and stand-up paddle boarding on Llyn Padarn, www.surf-lines.co.uk.

Padarn Adventures has a high rope course and a Tree Frogs kids' adventure course for four to eight-year-olds, with wobbly bridges, tunnels and zip wires. They also organise rock climbing, abseiling, kayaking, and multi activity days.

www.padarnadventures.com

Eat

On the Rails

Although food and drinks are not available on our trains, our licensed Station Buffet and Platform Grill serve local Village Bakery savouries as part of a varied eat in or take away menu. The summit visitor centre, Hafod Eryri, is the highest café in Wales and England, and serves large Welsh Oggies (pasties) and fresh cream cakes from the local bakery.

Off the Rails

The Heights in Llanberis offers local real ales and filling pub grub, from beer battered fish and chips to steak pie, along with puddings and lunchtime sandwiches.

www.theheightsllanberis.co.uk

Sleep

Budget

The Heights no-frills bunkhouse near Lake Padarn in Llanberis, has carpeted dorms, a shared lounge and gardens. Dorm beds from £17. www.theheightsllanberis.co.uk

Mid-range

The Royal Victoria Hotel in Llanberis, a minute's walk from the Snowdon Mountain Railway station, is a classic three star hotel, with views of woods and mountains and a castle in the grounds. Family rooms sleep up to five. Doubles from £58, B&B, www.theroyalvictoria.co.uk



Itinerary 1

Aim for the sky as you head to the top of Snowdon via steam or diesel service. The spacious Snowdon Lily steam train is reconstructed from original Victorian carriages, which were built in 1896 to take travellers to the top of the highest mountain in Wales. It takes an hour to reach the summit and there is a half hour stopover at the top before the train returns to Llanberis. Hafod Eryri, the new oak and granite visitors' centre on the summit, opened in 2009 and has a licensed café. On a clear day, there are epic views of four countries and nearly 30 lakes; on cloudy days, you can feel like a mountain explorer, heading up through mists to the hidden peak.

Itinerary 2

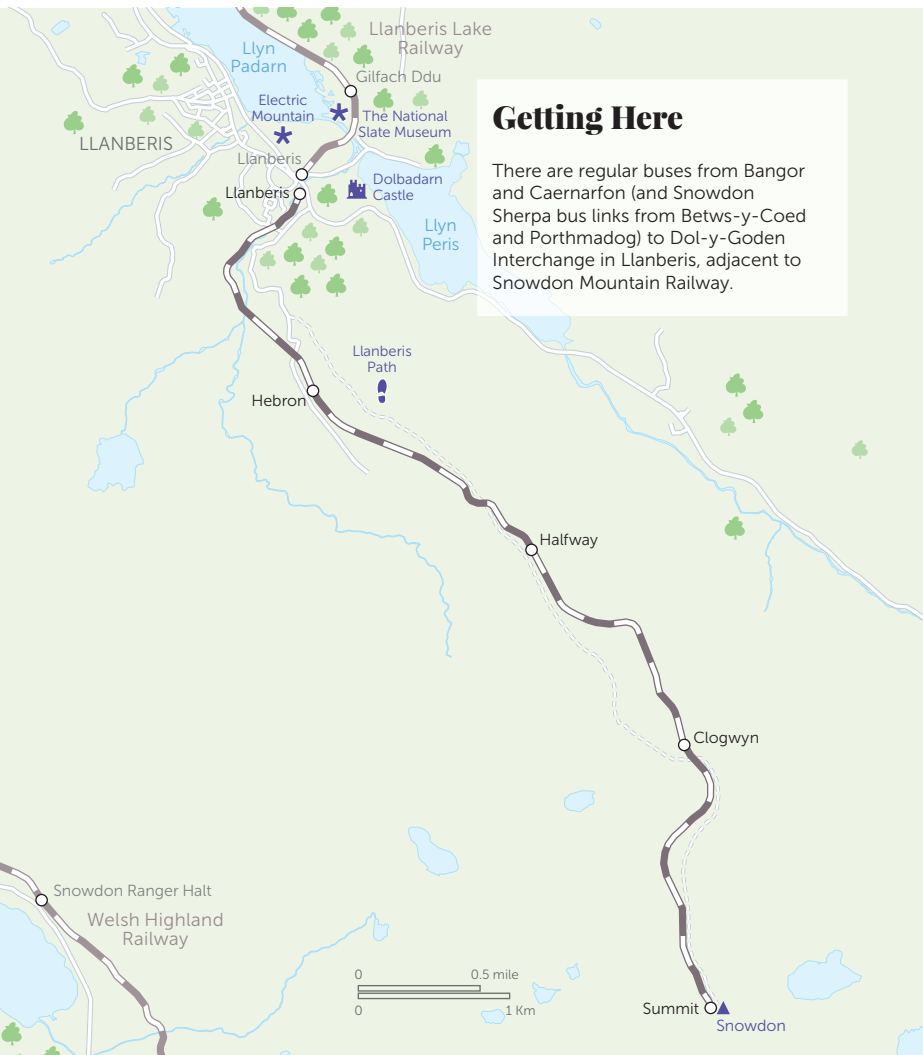
Combine a trip on the Snowdon Mountain Railway with one of the area's spectacular walks. You could stroll a couple of miles from Llanberis and back to get a closer look at Ceunant Mawr waterfall, following the signed path from the village. If you are fit, adventurous, well-equipped and the weather conditions stay fine, you could even plan to walk up Snowdon. From the path, there are views over Cwm Brwynog to the distant blue of the sea. Returning trains might be full, in which case you would have to walk back down too, so start early. Maps are for sale at Llanberis station, Snowdon Trading Post, and at Hafod Eryri. There is a small café half way up the popular Llanberis path where you can stop and enjoy the views. For details about routes up Snowdon, see the Snowdonia National Park Authorities website www.eryri-npa.gov.uk

Insider Tip

Pre-book the 9.00am 'Early Bird' departure on traditional diesel service and get a great discount!

www.snowdonrailway.co.uk/times-and-prices

www.snowdonrailway.co.uk



Getting Here

There are regular buses from Bangor and Caernarfon (and Snowdon Sherpa bus links from Betws-y-Coed and Porthmadog) to Dol-y-Goden Interchange in Llanberis, adjacent to Snowdon Mountain Railway.







Welsh Highland Railway

Caernarfon - Porthmadog

The UK's longest

narrow gauge railway runs coast to coast through mountains, from ancient Caernarfon, a walled town with a commanding, many-towered castle, to boat-fringed Porthmadog, where it shares a station with the Ffestiniog Railway. The scenery changes all the way along the 25-mile trip, with breathtaking views of Snowdonia, the Aberglaslyn Pass and the pretty village of Beddgelert. The full route offers a complete day out, starting at either end, with time to explore your destination, but you can also take shorter journeys or combine it with a trip on the Ffestiniog Railway.

Adventure

Hire mountain bikes from Beddgelert Bikes, right next to the station, and explore the tracks that wind through pastures and impressive conifers in nearby Beddgelert Forest. The forest trails, well marked with numbered posts, pass spectacular viewpoints and great picnic spots.

www.beddgelertbikes.co.uk

Alternatively, for a great woodland walk, alight at Rhyd Ddu station and take the Lôn Gwyrfai path, 4½ miles to Beddgelert.

Kids

The Fun Centre, Caernarfon, is a giant play area, inside a large church about 15 minutes' walk from Caernarfon station, featuring high drop slides, ball pools, tumble towers, spinning steps and more, www.thefuncentre.co.uk. Kids might also like the Glaslyn Osprey Centre, right next to Pont Croesor Halt; live cameras constantly watch the nest, where the first chicks hatch in May or June. www.glaslynwildlife.co.uk



Best View

The Aberglaslyn Pass near Beddgelert was recently voted the best view in Britain by National Trust members. The trains run above the narrow gorge with the lovely River Glaslyn foaming over the rocks below.

Local Legend

Beddgelert (Gelert's Grave) is reputedly named after a dog called Gelert that belonged to medieval Welsh prince, Llywelyn the Great. Coming home from hunting, Llywelyn found the dog with a bloody mouth, the baby gone and the cradle upside down. Believing that Gelert had killed his baby, Llywelyn slew the dog, only to hear the cries of the child, alive and unhurt underneath the cradle, together with a dead wolf, which Gelert had killed when it had attacked the baby. Remorseful, Llywelyn buried the dog with great ceremony and it is said he never smiled again. A pretty walk from the village brings you to Gelert's rural grave.

Did you know?

Broadcasting pioneer Guglielmo Marconi had a radio station on the hillside at Waunfawr, which, for some years, was the most important long wave transmitting station in Britain.

Garden

Exploring the seven acres of parkland at Antur Waunfawr, in the hills above Caernarfon, about 15 minutes' walk from Waunfawr station, you can find secret ways, little woods and a variety of habitats, attracting all kinds of wildlife. There are colourful trees and flowers and great views of the Snowdonian mountains. The café (which uses only home grown and local produce) and most of the paths are all wheelchair accessible.

www.anturwaunfawr.org



Eat

On the Rails

There is a light refreshment trolley service on board, plus hot and cold snacks from the kitchen car, including toasted sandwiches, soup and bacon rolls.

Spooners licensed restaurant and bar at Porthmadog Harbour Station is open daily from 9am to 9pm, serving full breakfasts, light lunches, daily specials and local real ales.

Off the Rails

At Hebog Café & Bistro in Beddgelert you can eat great, locally sourced food in a riverside garden, including minted Welsh lamb ciabattas or a Hebog cream tea with a slice of bara brith.

www.hebog-beddgelert.co.uk

And look out for Beddgelert's ice cream parlour – 24 flavours of homemade ice cream and sorbet, from butterscotch and pecan to raspberry pavlova.

www.glaslynices.co.uk

Sleep

Budget

Youth Hostel Snowdon Ranger in Rhyd Ddu, just a short walk from Snowdon Ranger halt, is ideal for climbing Snowdon. Dorm beds from £13 pp.

www.yha.org.uk

Inn

The Black Boy Inn in Caernarfon is about 10 minutes walk from both the railway and bus stations, with excellent food, local ales on tap and comfortable rooms. Doubles from £75, B&B. www.black-boy-inn.com

Family

The Travelodge in Caernarfon is handy and good value, about 15 minutes walk from rail and bus stations. Doubles from £28, room only. www.travelodge.co.uk

Woodland hideaway

Aberdunant Hall Hotel and caravan park, near Porthmadog, is close to Pont Croesor Halt, standing in its own woodland. Doubles in the hotel from £95, B&B. www.aberdunant.com



Itinerary 1

The railway itself is a full day out with time to explore the coastal towns at both ends: bustling harbour-side town of Porthmadog and historic, royal Caernarfon. Right next to Caernarfon station is the imposing medieval fortress where the Prince of Wales was formally invested. Massive Caernarfon Castle, sporting polygonal towers and bands of coloured stone, is a World Heritage site, open daily for most of the year and costing £7.95 for adults.

www.caernarfon-castle.co.uk

Itinerary 2

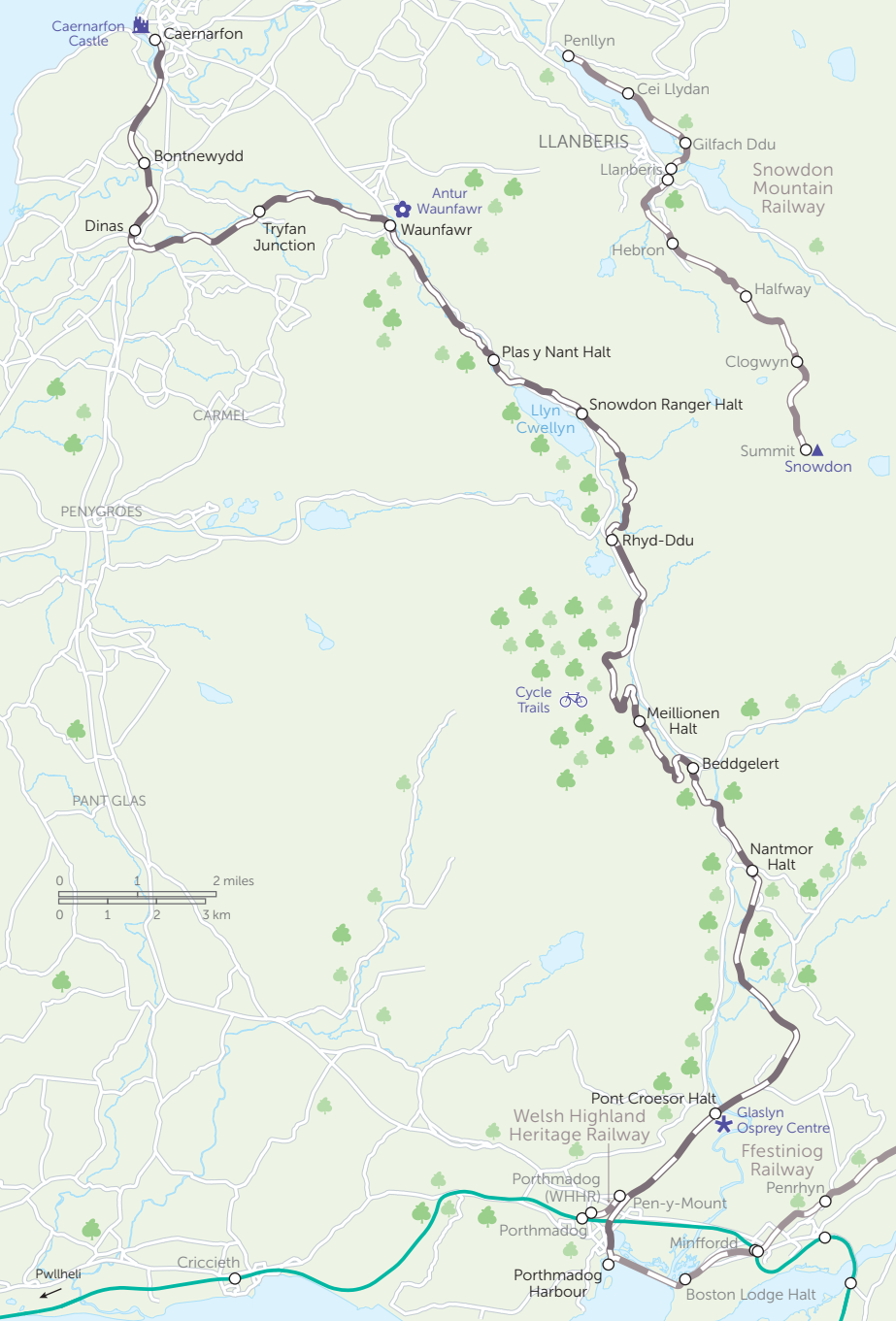
Make a circle through Snowdonia by travelling on the Welsh Highland Railway to Porthmadog, the Ffestiniog Railway up to Blaenau Ffestiniog and the pretty Conwy Valley line to Llandudno. You can then return to Caernarfon on the 5 or X5 bus via Bangor, to complete the adventure.

www.bit.do/5X5bus

Getting Here

It's a half mile walk from the National Rail station in Porthmadog. In Caernarfon it's a 1/3 mile walk from the bus station.

www.festrail.co.uk





Conwy Valley Line

Llandudno – Blaenau Ffestiniog

From the

beautiful bay at Llandudno, “Queen of the Welsh resorts”, the Conwy Valley Line takes you on a 30-mile journey through the contrasting landscapes of the Conwy and Lledr valleys. The scenery changes from gentle rolling pastures to rugged mountains and the splendour of the Snowdonia National Park. The Conwy Valley Line climbs to 250m above sea level, passing through the mountains to arrive at the slate-mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Castle Walls

& wading birds

Your journey starts in the classic Victorian seaside town of **Llandudno**, largest resort in Wales, with sandy beaches, a fine pier (the country’s longest) and a great range of hotels and shops. As you head towards Deganwy on the North Wales coast, there are glimpses of Anglesey and Puffin Island and, as you slow into Llandudno Junction, the magnificent Conwy Castle. Conwy’s town walls with their 21 towers surround the imposing 13th-century castle, standing on a rock above the estuary against a mountainous skyline.



The train leaves Llandudno Junction and now follows the broad sweep of the Conwy estuary, alive with wading birds foraging in low tide mud, to Glan Conwy, home of a nature reserve. Here visitors can see colourful shelducks in the lagoons or summertime sedge warblers whirring out of the bushes.

Gardens

& gourmet food

Tal-y-Cafn station brings you to **Bodnant Gardens**, 80 terraced acres of fragrant, exotic plants, shady trees and sloping lawns above the River Conwy, with views across the Hiraethlyn valley towards the Snowdonian peaks, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden. Close by is the Bodnant Welsh Food Centre with a choice of eateries, serving gourmet local produce, from award-winning cheeses made in the onsite dairy to local crabs and scallops, www.bodnant-welshfood.co.uk.



Nearing Dolgarrog you catch sight of Surf Snowdonia, a specially made lagoon with artificial waves in the river below, which offers a range of water-related sporting activities, www.surfsnowdonia.co.uk. The valley narrows as the line nears **Llanrwst**, an ancient market town with a graceful stone bridge built by Inigo Jones in the 17th-century, as well as Gwydr Castle, a beautiful Tudor house that offers luxury B&B, www.gwydircastle.co.uk. The Llanrwst town trail passes St Grwst's church and adjoining chapel, with the stone coffin of Llewelyn the Great, a lovely riverside walkway and some appealing cafés.

Woods

& waterfalls

Deep in the Gwydyr forest, get off at **Betws-y-Coed**, once famous as an artists' retreat, for adventure, scenic walks, tearooms and the Snowdon Sherpa bus, which runs around the Snowdonia National Park. Conwy Valley's little railway museum is housed in the old goods yard along with a small café. The Swallow Falls are a short woodland walk away, and elsewhere, down steep steps, is the Fairy Glen, a series of rapids and cascades on the Conwy river. The water is funnelled into a narrow gorge, creating a dramatic scene between wooded banks and rocky cliffs, whose moss and ferns are reflected in the river. (www.betwsycoed.org)

The railway line climbs steeply as it enters the Lledr Valley, over Gethin's Bridge, an imposing stone viaduct, carrying the line across the valley floor and up the steepest gradient (1 in 47) to arrive at Pont-y-Pant. Next stop is the picturesque village of **Dolwyddelan**; Llywelyn the Great, who ruled Wales for 40 years, built the imposing 13th-century castle that guards the pass. The wooded hill opposite the castle was the site of an earlier fortress, where Llywelyn was born, www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/dolwyddelan-castle.

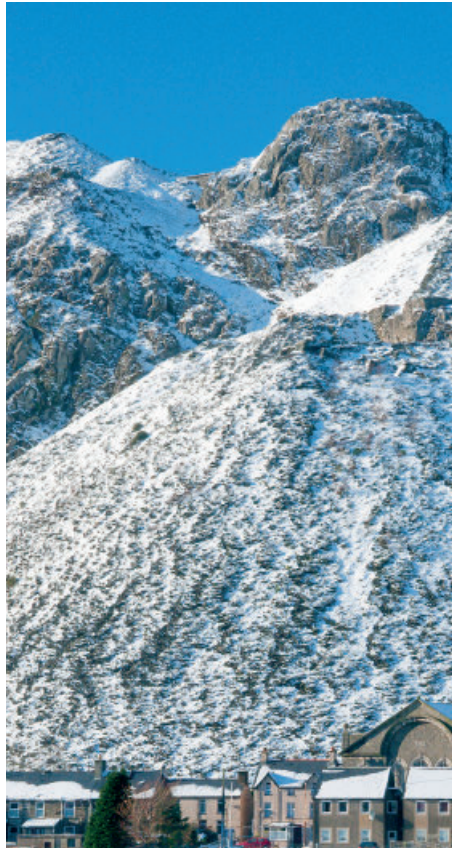


You can find out more about the industrial history of the “town that roofed the world” at the world’s deepest slate mine in Llechwedd Slate Caverns, a mile from the station. Visitors descend Britain’s steepest cable railway to step back in time with an underground Victorian tour. For adventure thrill-seekers, there are also zip wires, trampolines, rope bridges, tunnels and a world-class mountain-biking track, www.llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk. The Ffestiniog Railway, which steams south to the harbour town of Porthmadog, starts from the same station at Blaenau Ffestiniog as the Conwy Valley Line.

www.conwy.gov.uk/cvr

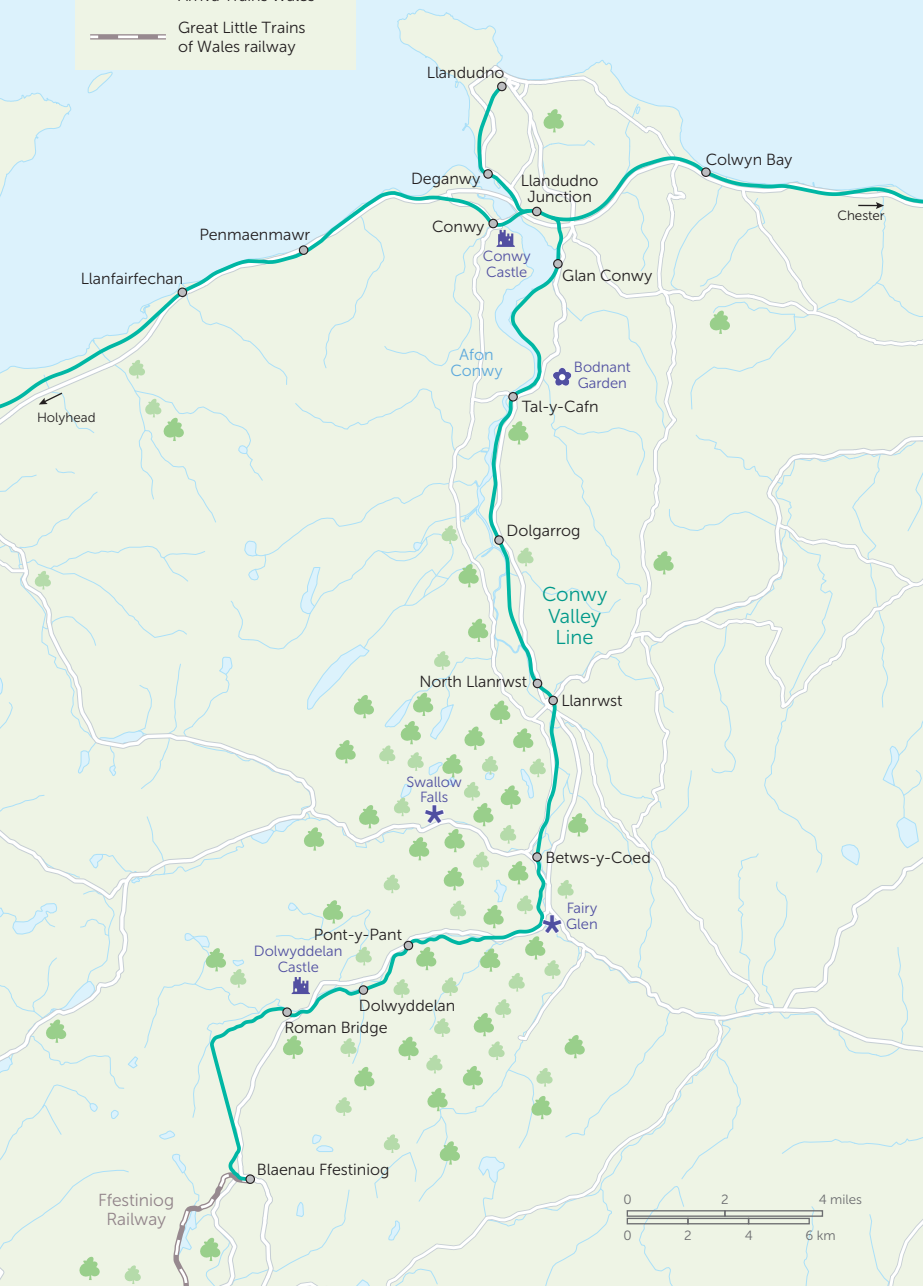
The Town *that roofed the world*

At Roman Bridge, the mountains close in and the train plunges into the darkness of a two-mile tunnel under Moel Dyrnogydd, emerging into a world of slate at **Blaenau Ffestiniog**. The iconic slate heaps towering above the town are a reminder of Snowdonia’s intimate connection with slate quarrying. Local buildings have been roofed with Ffestiniog slate since Roman times, but, during the industrial revolution, the little village became one of several busy towns, where more than 17,000 quarrymen produced over 485,000 tons of slate.



Arriva Trains Wales

Great Little Trains
of Wales railway









MINFFORDD

Ffestiniog Railway

Porthmadog – Blaenau Ffestiniog

The Historic

Ffestiniog Railway starts beside the harbour in Porthmadog, climbing from sea level to over 700ft on its journey through the mountainous Snowdonia National Park and going round the UK's only railway spiral. Passing lakes and waterfalls, forest and farmland as they steam through the picturesque Vale of Ffestiniog, the little trains reach their destination - the town of Blaenau Ffestiniog, set amidst rugged scenery dominated by the historic remains of the slate industry. Steam engines have been running here for over 150 years and include the quirky 'push me, pull you' Double Fairlie locomotives with a chimney at each end!

Top Walk

The Wales Coast Path turns inland along both sides of the Vale of Ffestiniog so, by using the train, it is possible to walk from Tan y Bwlch station down to Penrhyn through the wooded slopes of this valley. There are lovely views and a hidden lake along the way. Download the Coast Path app to guide you.
www.walescoastpath.gov.uk

Local Legend

Coed y Bleiddiau translates as 'Wood of the Wolves', and it is said that the last wolf in Wales was killed here five hundred years ago; a willow sculpture of a wolf nearby acts as a memorial.

Museum

Next to Porthmadog harbour, in the last surviving slate shed, The Maritime Museum charts the area's shipbuilding history with maps and model ships. (£2, www.porthmadogmaritimemuseum.org.uk)
INSIDER TIP: Why not try crab-lining off the harbour at Porthmadog – its simple and free!

Historic Place

Seaside Portmeirion is a Mediterranean-influenced village, created by visionary architect Sir Clough Williams Ellis: a corner of the Italian Riviera in North Wales! The amazing buildings are a cascade of colours – pink, white, turquoise, ochre – and architectural features – arches, domes and fountains – surrounded by woodland, sandy beaches, even palm trees. Open daily most of the year.
www.portmeirion-village.com

Garden

Plas Tan y Bwlch is a magnificent mansion, built for Victorian quarry owners and surrounded by a superb 13-acre garden with plants collected from all over the temperate world. The grounds are open all year and the summer tearoom serves sandwiches and cakes. From Tan y Bwlch station, it is roughly a half hour stroll through woodland to the house.
www.plastanybwlch.com



Best View

There are stunning panoramas as you leave Porthmadog station and cross the Cob, the two-centuries-old sea wall that created the town: to one side are Ballast Island and a tidal inlet of Cardigan Bay; on the other side mountains beckon, with Snowdon, Cnicht and the Moelwyns making an impressive backdrop..

Eat

On the rails

There are at-seat licensed, refreshments on the train and a licensed café at Tan y Bwlch station, which is open during train service hours. Spooner's restaurant and bar at Porthmadog Harbour Station is open daily 9am – 9pm, serving full breakfasts, light meals, takeaway boxes and local Purple Moose beers.

Off the rails

Visit Isallt coffee shop, right above Blaenau Ffestiniog station, for slow-brewed coffee, homemade cakes and great pasta dishes. There's a discount for rail passengers with a voucher.

www.facebook.com/isalltcoffeeshop



Sleep

Budget

Treks Bunkhouse, 900 feet above sea level in Llan Ffestiniog, is a 10-minute bus ride from Blaenau Ffestiniog Station. Dorm beds from £14 - £18.

www.treksbunkhouse.co.uk

Mid range

The Wenallt Guest House in Penrhyndeudraeth, a five minute walk from Penrhyn station, is a large B&B with traditional furnishings. Doubles from £60, B&B, www.wenalltguesthouse.co.uk

Top notch

Hotel Portmeirion, one mile from Minffordd station, is an impressive Victorian mansion that Williams-Ellis extended in 1926. Guests have included artists, writers and Albanian royalty! Doubles from £154, B&B, www.portmeirion-village.com/stay

Eco

Bryn Elltyd Eco Guesthouse in Tanygrisiau, powered exclusively by renewable energy, is about a mile from Blaenau Ffestiniog Station. Doubles from £80, B&B, www.ecoguesthouse.co.uk

Itinerary 1

Travel to Blaenau Ffestiniog and explore the town. There are small privately run shops, all pleased to see you, and a good selection of places to have lunch. You can follow the poetry band trail or have some retro fun at It's a Small World, with indoor crazy golf, model boats and a scalextric racing track (activities from £1, www.itsasmallworld.org.uk). Or head to Llechwedd Slate caverns, a mile from the station, for an underground Victorian tour (£20, www.llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk), zip wires, trampolines and a world-class downhill cycle track (www.zipworld.co.uk). Please note these attractions do need to be booked in advance.

Getting Here

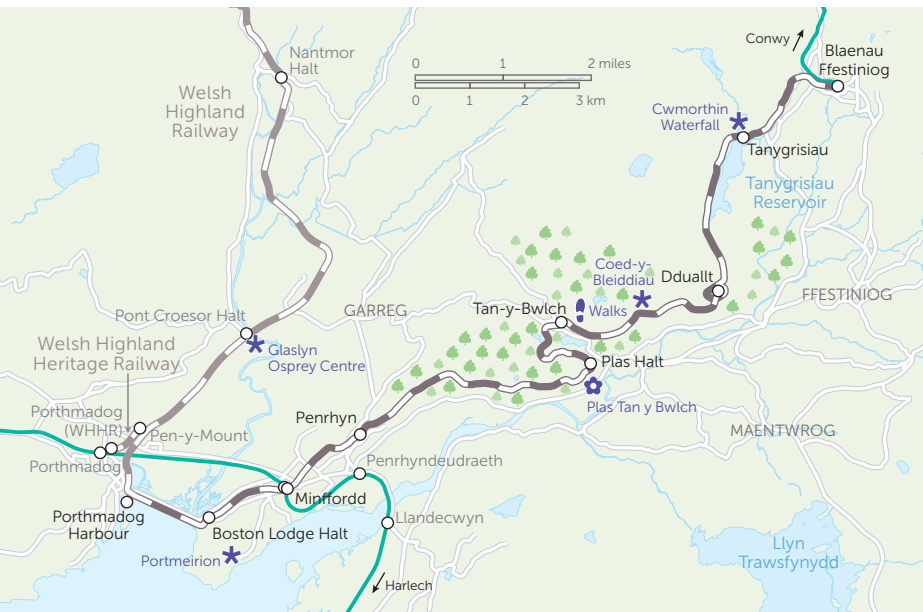
Links with National Rail at Minffordd station, or it's a half mile walk between stations in Porthmadog. Also links with National Rail at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

www.festrail.co.uk

Itinerary 2

Starting from Blaenau Ffestiniog or Porthmadog, take the train to Tan y Bwlch station in the heart of the Snowdonia Park woodland for the start of a series of walks. The Dyffryn Maentwrog map shows an extensive way-marked footpath network, allowing you to explore as much as you want, from a simple stroll round the lovely Llyn Mair Lake to a scenic afternoon hike. Longer walks to Tanygrisiau or Penrhyn stations are also available. www.bit.do/ffest

Your ticket is a day rover: so make full use of it by breaking your journey along the way!





Welsh Highland Heritage Railway

Porthmadog

If you're

a family with young children, then the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway in Porthmadog – a short two-foot-gauge railway – is for you. Your train ambles out into the countryside to the replica 1920s-style halt at Pen-y-Mount Junction with traditional wooden carriages and old-fashioned card tickets, clipped by the guard. The route is long enough to keep kids entertained but not so long they'll get bored.

Top Walk

Walk down Porthmadog's Snowdon Street with mountain views ahead. Cross the bridge over the "Cut" canal, feeding the Llyn Bach ("small pool") harbour, and turn right along the top of the inner harbour

wall. From here, there are scenic views over the Glaslyn River estuary and Traeth Mawr ("big sands"). This flood plain is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a refuge for many birds, including herons, curlews, sandpipers and geese. Just before the end of the path, sit on one of the benches and take in the magnificent views of the Cambrian hills.

Best View

After the train leaves Porthmadog and passes through a shady wooded glade, look left for the famous Tremadog cliffs, where climbers from all over the world come to ascend near-vertical rock faces and catch the area's fantastic views.

Adventure

A twenty-minute stroll from the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway in Porthmadog is Madog Quads, where people of different ages and abilities, including kids over six, can trek with quad-bikes through thirty acres of countryside near the historic village of Tremadog.

www.madogquads.com



Heritage

Seven minutes on the mainline train from Porthmadog Station (which is just over the road from the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway) is the interesting seaside town of Criccieth, overlooked by a ruined thirteenth century castle.

www.cadw.gov.wales

Insider Tip

Up a secluded stairway near the car park in Porthmadog is a 1922 granite war memorial in memory of the "ninety-seven fallen war heroes of Madoc Vale". It is 5 metres high, shaped like a Celtic cross and stands on top of Ynys Galch, one of the former islands reclaimed from Traeth Mawr estuary. In the evening, the tranquil views from here are captivating.

Did you know?

T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) was born close to the railway in Tremadog's Snowdon Lodge in 1886.

Eat

On the Rails

On special days some trains include an original buffet car, built in 1893 and now serving soft drinks and snacks. The Russell Tearoom, located on the platform at our station in Porthmadog, is a great place to eat and serves a lot more than tea! From light meals to a full Sunday roast, you can take the weight off your feet and soak up the traditional railway tearoom atmosphere.

Off the Rails

For something a little different, visit Kerfoots, a traditional department store that opened in Porthmadog in 1874. Climb up the magnificent spiral staircase to their famous first floor coffee shop.

www.kerfoots.com



Sleep

Budget

The Travelodge in Porthmadog is a less than a mile away from the railway. Doubles from £39, room only.

www.travelodge.co.uk Alternatively, the Snowdon Lodge, where Lawrence of Arabia was born, is just 800m from the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway and can be booked for groups of up to 35 people from £450/night.
www.snowdonlodge.co.uk

Mid-range

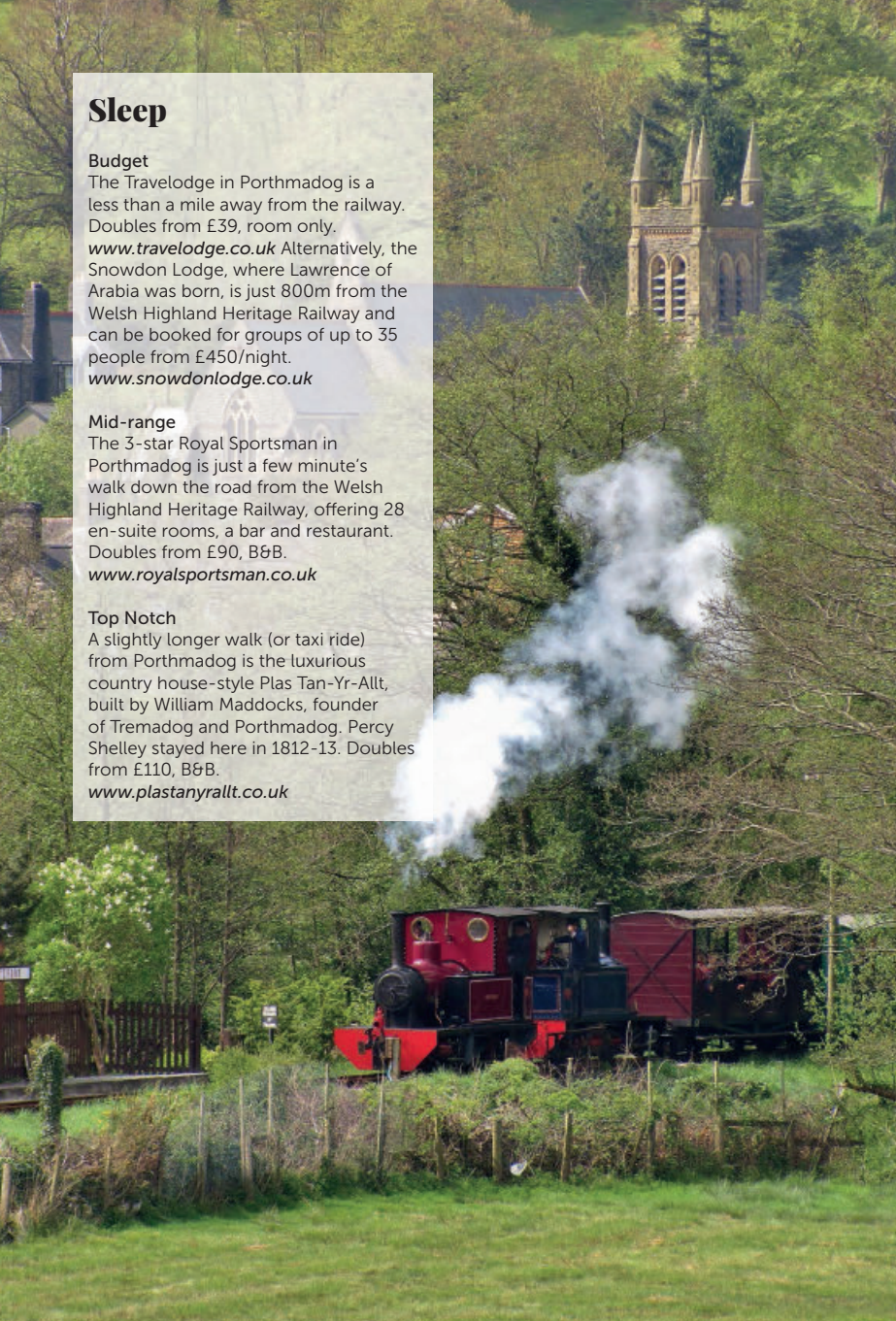
The 3-star Royal Sportsman in Porthmadog is just a few minute's walk down the road from the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway, offering 28 en-suite rooms, a bar and restaurant. Doubles from £90, B&B.

www.royalsportsman.co.uk

Top Notch

A slightly longer walk (or taxi ride) from Porthmadog is the luxurious country house-style Plas Tan-Yr-Allt, built by William Maddocks, founder of Tremadog and Porthmadog. Percy Shelley stayed here in 1812-13. Doubles from £110, B&B.

www.plastanyrallt.co.uk



Itinerary 1

Ride the 10.30 or 11.30am train to Pen-y-Mount Junction, where kids can watch the locomotive uncouple and may even be asked to lend a hand, helping the guard operate the signals and change the points. On the way back, trains stop at Gelert's Farm, where passengers can ride for free on the miniature Porthmadog Woodland Railway and visit a hands-on museum that lets them climb into locomotives and press buttons. Back in Porthmadog, have some food in the Russell Tearoom - maybe try the minted lamb burgers with homemade bara brith or fresh Eccles cakes for pudding?

Insider Tips: Pay once and your ticket is valid all day so you can ride the trains on the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway as many times as you like! And look out on Facebook for special events like Easter Bunnies and Santa trains.

www.facebook.com/WHHRLy

Itinerary 2

Porthmadog is unique with three of the Great Little Trains of Wales based here, so you can combine the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway with a ride on the Ffestiniog or Welsh Highland Railways. After your rail trips, you could walk south for a mile from the harbour in Porthmadog along the Wales coast path to the waterside village of Borth-y-Gest on the Glaslyn estuary, with a cafe looking over the water to the mountains beyond. From here a further short walk will take you to some very pretty sandy coves along the side of the estuary towards Morfa Bychan and Black Rock Sands.

Getting Here

The Welsh Highland Heritage Railway is just over the road from Porthmadog National Rail station, on the Cambrian Coast Line. T2 TrawsCymru buses from Bangor to Aberystwyth also stop right outside.

www.whr.co.uk



Gateways *to* Getaways



Local transport expert Larry Davies invites you to hop on board the UK's oldest rail replacement bus...

"Most people visiting the Great Little Trains of Wales, via the 'big trains', travel through Chester or Shrewsbury. Both these stations have direct trains to Ruabon, a little market town set in the countryside of the Welsh borders on the winding River Eitha, a tributary of the Dee.

“The ten-mile journey along the lovely Dee Valley recaptures for visitors the glory days of steam...”

The UK's oldest rail replacement service

Ruabon station was once the junction for a long-closed cross-country line to Barmouth, on the Cambrian Coast, via Llangollen, Corwen, Bala Junction and Dolgellau. When the infamous Dr Richard Beeching closed this scenic railway (along with many others) in January 1965, a replacement bus service was introduced, running from Wrexham to

Barmouth. This still survives to this day and is probably the U.K's oldest remaining such service. It is now the T3 bus route, part of the TrawsCymru network.

Llangollen Railway

Two sections of the old railway have been restored over the years: in 1975, volunteers opened a short section of the fine Llangollen Railway, the only standard gauge heritage line in Wales, near the 14th-century Dee Bridge in Llangollen. Today, the line extends to the town of Corwen, where Owain Glyndŵr declared himself Prince of Wales in 1400. The ten-mile journey along the lovely Dee Valley (designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in its entirety) recaptures for visitors the glory days of the steam railway in North Wales.



Bala Lake Railway

Further west at Llanuwchllyn, the little Bala Lake narrow gauge railway opened its doors on the old track-bed in 1972. The line runs along the beautiful Llyn Tegid from Llanuwchllyn to Bala and takes an hour to complete the nine-mile return journey. The railway operates some "Quarry Hunslet" locomotives, which once served in the slate quarries of North Wales and have been restored on site in the line's own workshops.

The Bala Lake Railway are excited about their "Red Dragon" project, raising £2.5 million to build an extension linking the railway with the town of Bala, a mile from the north eastern terminus at Pen-y-Bont. The old British Rail station at Llanuwchllyn is now the HQ of the narrow gauge railway, which has also restored many of the old features, like the Victorian signal box, and the station canopies with their ornate, wrought iron and elegant red pillars. This pretty station, whose café serves homemade cakes, is a short walk from the T3 bus stop.



Wildlife & water sports

Bala Lake is rich in water-based activities and wildlife, so there is always something to see as you steam along. There are two sailing clubs, offering yachting, kayaking and other sports. As you leave Llanuwchllyn, you will probably see boats belonging to Glan Llyn, the outdoor education centre for the Urdd, which is the Welsh League of Youth, and many local school children have their first waterborne adventures here. The lake also boasts a prehistoric species of fish, the Gwyniad, which can still be found deep in its waters.

The T3 bus continues to Dolgellau – a favourite town for walkers heading up Cadair Idris – and the harbour town of Barmouth, where it meets the Cambrian Coast Line. From Dolgellau you can walk or cycle the perfectly flat and stunningly scenic 9 mile Mawddach Trail along the old railway line, hugging the curves of the estuary, before crossing the epic Barmouth Bridge."







Bala Lake Railway

Bala - Llanuwchllyn

Bala Lake

is the largest natural body of water in Wales, with magnificent views of southern Snowdonia's high peaks. Once part of a standard gauge mainline, linking industrial north east Wales with seaside resorts on the Cambrian Coast, the Bala Lake Railway was re-laid as a narrow-gauge line in the early 1970s to take advantage of the spectacular stretch between the village of Llanuwchllyn and the town of Bala. The 4½-mile route runs through pastoral farmland and along the southern shore of beautiful Bala Lake.

Beach

Llangower, at the mid-way station on the railway, has a lovely sheltered cove on the lake. The stony beach is ideal for a paddle.

Local Legend

There is a story that Bala Lake (or Llyn Tegid, as it's known in Welsh) is home to a huge monster, which was trapped there when the sea levels receded. Some witnesses claim to have seen the monster from the lake while they were fishing; others have seen it from the shore. Because the lake is so deep, it is virtually impossible to trace the sea monster, even using a specialist submarine from Japan that was once used to survey the depths.



Top Walk

From the top of Aran Benllyn, which rises from Llanuwchllyn, you can see the Lleyl Peninsula, the Snowdon and Cambrian ranges, as well as looking back towards the border with England. A less strenuous alternative to climbing Aran is the gentle walk along the lakeshore from Bala station to the town; there is a great view up the length of the lake. You can also hire bikes in Bala and cycle the five miles between Llanuwchllyn and Bala (from £14, www.rhrcycles.magix.net/public).

Kids

Bala Leisure Centre has a swimming pool with water slide (£4.50 for adults, www.bit.do/Bala). The Gorwelion Centre, on the outskirts of Bala, is a group of rural farm buildings, with views of the hills and fields with a café. The largest building houses an indoor play barn, where kids who have a children's meal at the café can play for free, www.gorwelion.co.uk.



Adventure

The Get Wet Adventure Company has a High Ropes course for adventurous over tens (£22) and also offers gorge walking and paintball (www.get-wet.co.uk). Bala Watersports rents out kayaks and canoes on Bala Lake (from £12/hour, www.balawatersports.com) and the National White Water Centre offers rafting taster sessions (from £35, www.canoewales.com).

Garden

Over a thousand feet up, with wonderful panoramic views, Caerau Uchaf in Sarnau near Bala is the highest private garden open to the public. Local entrepreneurs and garden experts Toby and Stephanie Hickish (who also run Gorwelion indoor play center) are in charge. Kids will love the adventure playground, tucked into the woods, the new soft play barn, willow maze, and sweeping paths that lead through a garden with bold, colourful planting. www.summersgardens.co.uk



Insider Tips

Canolfan Y Plase on Plase Street in Bala is a heritage centre, housing collections of art, sculpture and photography by famous and local artists; it is well worth a quick browse. The award winning Pren on the High Street sells locally hand-crafted items made from wood www.facebook.com/pren.bala.

Eat

On the Rails

The station café serves hot and cold drinks and a selection of light snacks, plus local Aran premium ice creams, made just over a mile away on the slopes of the Aran mountains.

Off the Rails

The Eagles Inn at Llanuwchllyn serves high quality food in a convivial atmosphere. Main courses, which include local slow-roasted Welsh lamb shank with rosemary gravy or homemade goat cheese soufflé, are around £10, www.yr-eagles.co.uk



Sleep

Budget

Bala Backpackers' Hostel offers dorm beds and twin rooms in 19th-century buildings in Bala, with an eco-café opposite. Dorm beds from £21.

www.bala-backpackers.co.uk

Mid range

The White Lion Royal Hotel is an old coaching inn in the middle of Bala that also serves food. Doubles from £69, B&B.

www.bit.do/WhiteLion

Top Notch

The award-winning Bryniau Golau B&B, about ¾ mile from Bala station, is a refurbished Victorian house overlooking Bala Lake. Doubles from £110, B&B.

www.bryniau-golau.co.uk

Family

Pen y Garth Lodges, sleeping 2,3 or 4 people, are about 1½ miles from Bala station. Three nights in a wooden cabin from £249. www.bit.do/penygarth



Itinerary 1

Railways and canals of the Dee Valley: You can visit two railways in a day using the T3 TrawsCymru bus (www.trawscymru.info), which connects Bala with stations on the standard gauge Llangollen Railway. You can also take horse-drawn barges on the canal from Llangollen or longer motorboat trips over the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, spanning the Dee valley, built by Thomas Telford in 1805, and now a World Heritage Site (from £7, www.horsedrawnboats.co.uk).

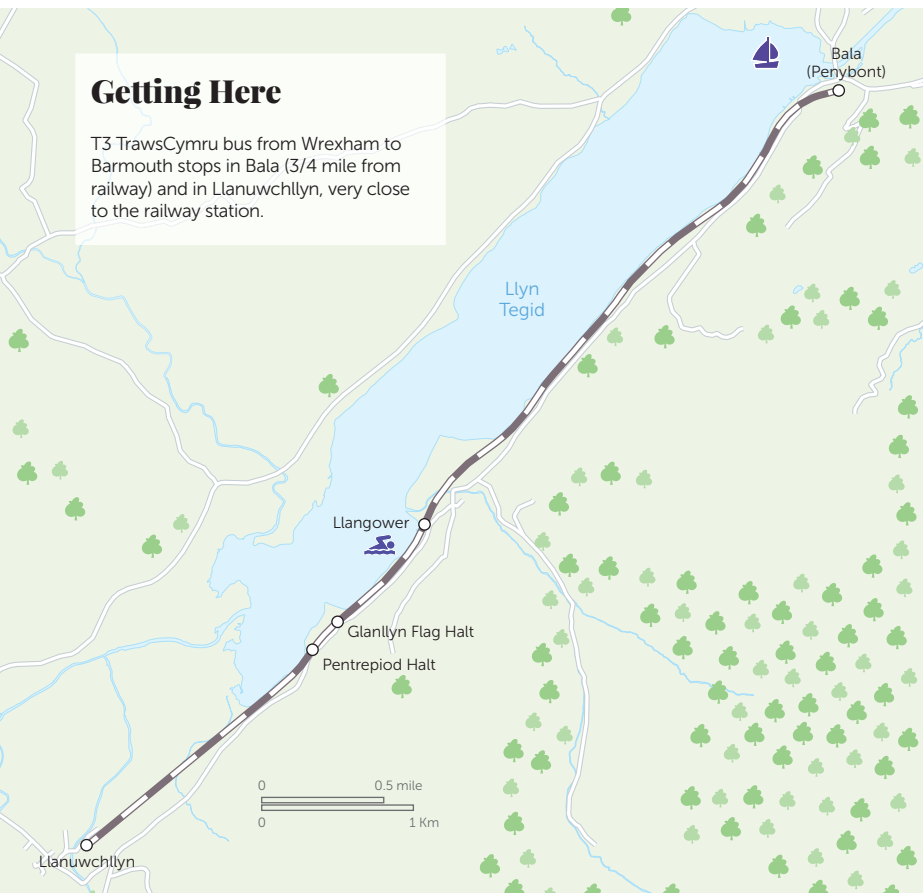
www.bala-lake-railway.co.uk

Itinerary 2

Take the train one-way from Llanuwchllyn to Bala and come back on one of these two walking routes: 1. Simply follow the B4403 country road back along the southern side of Lake Bala, where you can make detours into the scenic local hills and villages. 2. Explore the market town of Bala and return along the northern side of the lake. Pavement and off-road paths follow the A494 or take a longer route further inland, away from it all. On the way, pop in to the lakeside Mary Jones' World (£4, www.bydmaryjonesworld.org.uk), which tells the story of a young woman who walked 30 miles, desperate to get her first bible.

Getting Here

T3 TrawsCymru bus from Wrexham to Barmouth stops in Bala (3/4 mile from railway) and in Llanuwchllyn, very close to the railway station.





The Cambrian Lines

Shrewsbury - Aberystwyth & Pwllheli

The epic

120-mile ride from Shrewsbury to the Welsh coast is one of the great scenic railway journeys of Britain, crossing the border between England and Wales and running through hills and mountains to the sea. The line divides at the wonderfully remote Dovey Junction station, with the shorter mainline heading south to historic Aberystwyth, and Coast Line running north along the sea to Pwllheli on the Llyn Peninsula.

Through the hills: *rebels & royal underwear*

From the bustling medieval market town of Shrewsbury, your journey takes you

through the rolling sheep-speckled hills of mid Wales and on to the Cambrian Coast. Pick up one of the window gazer guides from Shrewsbury station to find out more about people and places along the way, many with important links to Welsh history and culture.

First stop after Shrewsbury is **Welshpool**, home to the Welshpool & Llanfair Railway, and to Powis Castle, a thirteenth-century fortress towering over enchanting gardens with Italianate terraces and herbaceous borders (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis). The Pryce Jones warehouse at the next stop, **Newtown**, operated the world's first mail order service – supplying underwear to Queen Victoria!

Welsh rebel Owain Glyndŵr established the first true Welsh parliament at **Machynlleth** in 1404 (www.canolfanglyndwr.org).

Today "Mach" is a friendly market town with a bohemian feel, where you can find everything from male voice choirs to meditation. Welsh designer Laura Ashley opened her first shop here in 1961. Just north of town you can visit the Centre for Alternative Technology and see solar or hydro generators, wind turbines, filtering reed beds and other sustainable systems, all set in pleasant organic gardens, www.cat.org.uk.

Down the coast: *drowned forests and police dramas*

Take a stroll on **Borth** beach at low tide and you might catch a glimpse of the ancient woods that grew there about 5,000 years ago. This sunken forest may have inspired the local legend of a lost kingdom, *Cantre'r Gwaelod* ("parish of the deep"), a Welsh Atlantis, which was drowned when the gatekeeper *Seithennyn* forgot to watch the rising tide. Walking among the wildlife-rich dunes at nearby **Ynyslas**, you can spot rare orchids among the spring flowers, nesting plovers, russet-breasted stonechats and hear skylarks, singing as they fly. And out to sea, you might see dolphins, jumping through the waves.



Aberystwyth, at the end of the branch line, is a vibrant, coastal university town, home to the National Library of Wales as well as the Vale of Rheidol Railway. For a taste of the sea, head to harbour-side *Pysgoty* ("fish house"), an eco-friendly café serving local lobster, samphire, wild turbot and other maritime specialities. www.pysgoty.co.uk Don't worry if you see a lot of police cars near the promenade – it's the location of the police station in TV detective drama, *Hinterland*. And if you're passing, don't forget to "kick the bar" at the end of the prom – it's supposed to bring you luck!



Up the coast:

seabirds, castles and sandy coves

The other branch of the Cambrian Coast Line heads north, from Dovey Junction, on one of the UK's most spectacular railway rides. Look out for seabirds from the train window – there's even an osprey's nest on a pole right beside Dovey Junction station! The line runs beside the **Dyfi Estuary**, its saltmarshes, sandbanks and mudflats teeming with birdlife, and passes five of the Great Little Trains, two imposing castles and a constantly changing panorama of Snowdonian mountains and clear sea.

From the pretty fishing village of Aberdyfi, three miles of sandy beach stretch north to **Tywyn**, home of the Talylyn Railway. There are more beaches all the way up the coast, including Fairbourne, where you can ride on the Fairbourne Railway and ferry across to **Barmouth**. The Cambrian Line crosses the Mawddach Estuary on the 113-span Barmouth Bridge, a wooden viaduct, which will be 150 years old in 2017.



Huge, grey-sandstone **Harlech** castle, rising from its rock above the sea, is linked to legends of the Welsh princess Branwen and inspired the rousing song "Men of Harlech" www.cadw.gov.wales. From Minffordd station, where the line turns west, it's a mile's walk to the to the fantasy Italianate village of Portmeirion, colourful location of cult 1960s TV series, *The Prisoner*, www.portmeirion-village.com. Next stop is Porthmadog, for the adjacent Welsh Highland Heritage Railway, and the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways at Harbour Station at the other end of town. The train goes on past Criccieth Castle, perched on a hill above the beach, to reach the end of the line at Pwllheli, on the Llyn Peninsular, with staggering views over Cardigan Bay.



Hidden Gems

request stops

Half of the 26 stations on this line are request stops: to catch a train at these smaller stations, you'll need to stick your arm out in time for the driver to brake and, if you want to get off at one, make sure you ask the guard in plenty of time. These remote stops give access to some great off-the-beaten-track walks and beaches. Twenty minutes' stroll from Dyffryn Arduwy station near Barmouth is one of the UK's best naturist beaches, with a mile of golden sand. The atmospheric, 13th-century church of St Tanwg near Llandanwg Halt has very ancient carved crosses and a churchyard half buried in the dunes.

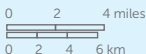
The extraordinary 870-mile Wales Coast Path follows the Cambrian Coast railway for some of its length, offering easy walks between stations; Pensarn and Llandanwg stations (both request stops) are actually within sight of each other!

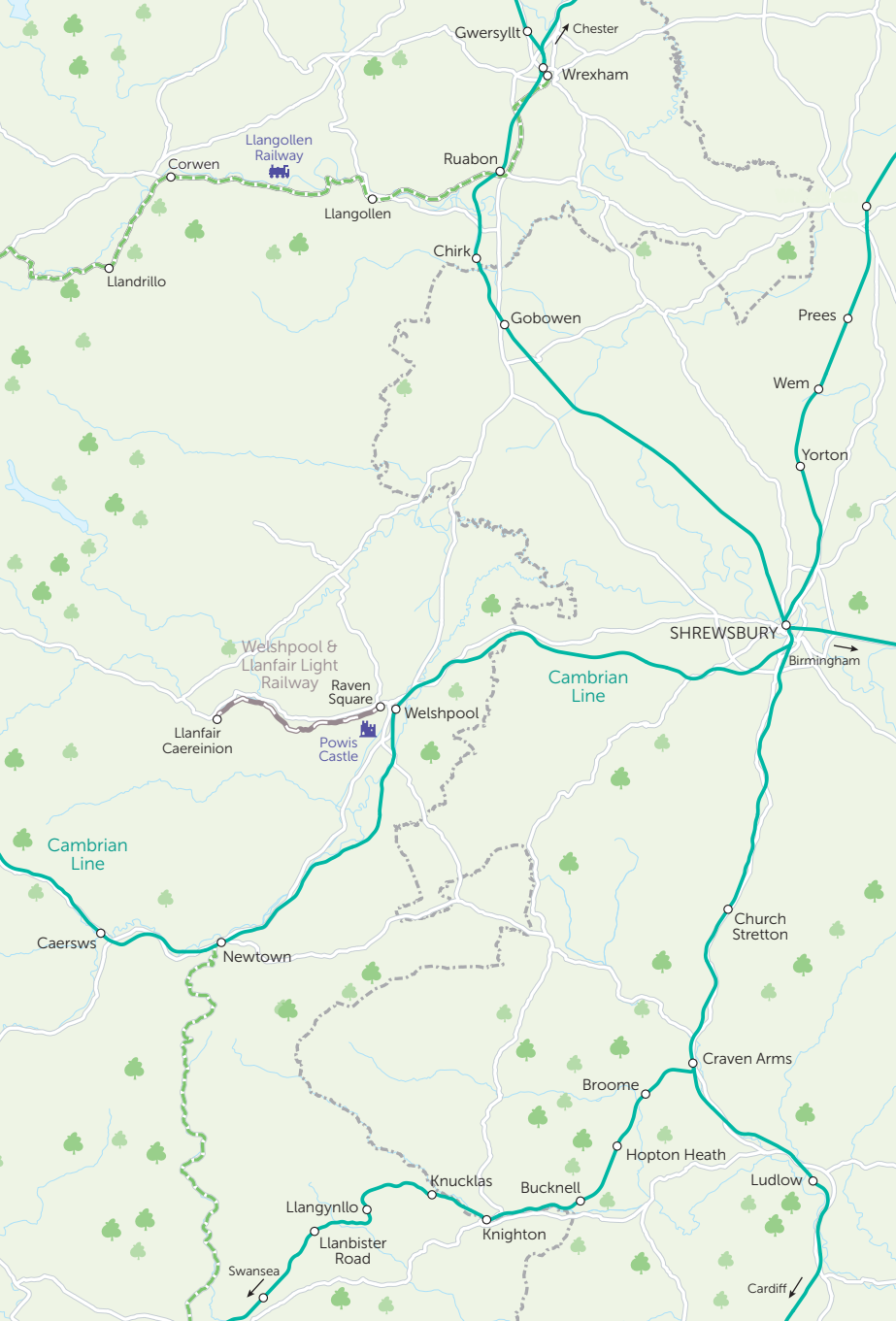
www.thecambrianline.co.uk



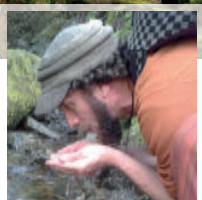


- Arriva Trains Wales
- Great Little Trains of Wales railway
- TrawsCymru bus route





Faeries and Waterfalls along the Talylyn and more



Birmingham-based storyteller Gavin Young and family holidayed through Wales on the Talylyn, Fairbourne and Vale of Rheidol railways in search of untold tales and folklore.

"Setting off from Birmingham New Street on a comfortable Arriva train, we passed Shrewsbury and began to thrill to the green and woolly welcome of undulating farmland. Our anticipation rose as the train sped on into the heart of a land steeped in story. A storyteller by profession, travelling with my wife, two teenage boys and six year old daughter, who all adore folklore in their own right, we were looking forward to finding some of the fabled fairy glens; we were also keen, if possible, to capture at least one untold tale somewhere on our four day trip. With jovial guidance from the railway volunteers, we were not disappointed in either of those aims.

“Our daughter shouted with glee as we went under a bridge and out along tracks lined with foxglove and fern...”

After a worthwhile stay in Aberystwyth, with its easy surf-town feel and generous

waterfront, we caught a mainline train to Tywyn and taxi to our accommodation at Dolgoch Falls, handily situated just below the Talylyn railway. Waking up to rain next day, we decided that a bad beach day was a good day for trains. We picked up some supplies in Tywyn and then walked up the road to the Talylyn railway station for the first steam train trip of our stay. The pretty station, with its teasop and museum, is exactly what you'd picture: full of charming, historical character and overflowing with friendliness. Once we were sitting comfortably in a Victorian carriage, our train chugged off with a joyful whistle and smiling waves from the station workers: we were on our way!

Our daughter shouted with glee as we went under a bridge and out along tracks lined with foxglove and fern, past farmers' fields full of lazy sheep and finally along the tree-lined slopes to Dolgoch, where we dropped off our supplies and caught the next train to the end of the line. I asked the ticket master the meaning of Dolgoch and he pointed to the mauve-red heather on the field beside

the station and told me *dol* means 'meadow' and *goch* means 'red'. It was then that the glory of that train trip came into its own: the clouds lifted, giving us marvellous views of the oak and fir-coated peaks across the way, stilling our tongues and opening our eyes in awe all the way to Nant Gwernol.

After stretching our legs, with a view of the vigorous river below, we travelled back to Abergynolwyn station and stopped off for an hour or so – time for a cup of tea in the café and a chat with the men who were running the train that day as they ate their lunch. One of them, Phil, said he'd been working on the railway for 36 years. We laughed when he told us how he'd let his wife-to-be know, on the day of their wedding: "You'd better get on with these steam trains if you're going to be with me, because that's what I'm about!"

Tŷyn to Barmouth via Fairbourne

The second part of our steam train adventure started on the mainline route to Fairbourne: a spectacular coastal ride past the low brick walls of seaside farms that reminded my daughter of Benedict Blathwayt's "Little Red Train" stories. The track then cut into the sea cliffs, giving us views of the choppy turquoise sea below and of the whole wide bay.

Blessed by a spell of sunshine and some time to spare in Fairbourne, we walked quickly down the road to the beach. A sandcastle, some splashing and many laughs later, we ran over to the small train track at Beach Halt, where the cutest train you've ever seen



came puffing round the corner and slowed to let us on: a toy train set come to life!

The perfect, slow pace of the little engine let us take in the jaw-dropping views of lush mountains: forested ridges and hills with low drifts of will-o'-the-wisp cloud creeping over them, as though giants were smoking pipes in the trees. All of us were mesmerised by this untouched, untainted earth, we have so seldom seen. Amazement turned to amusement when we suddenly went through the fun ghost-ride blackness of a short tunnel, coming out the other side to the picture-postcard vision that is Barmouth.



The train came to a stop beneath a proudly billowing Welsh flag and we jumped off and potted over low, grassy dunes to the ferry that took us, in keeping with an old, old tradition, across the small mouth of the estuary. The first written records of the crossing describe an eleventh-century cardinal going over to Monks' Hill (the mound of grassy sand on the Barmouth side of the harbour) where said monks grazed their sheep.

In the last of the sunshine, we ate fish and chips on the harbour and I talked to one of the ferry owners, before we caught our train back. John had delved deeply into the history of the area so out rolled the stories: an Elizabethan survey of the land had reported four houses and an inn here; a boy in the 1900s, spotting fire in one of the cabins that used to line the railway bridge, ran to the town, raised the alarm and saved the bridge. John even told me about the time eight nuns climbed onto his own ferry; far from being the quiet passengers he expected, they asked him to cross again and again, over the incoming wavelets, so the boat would bounce and splash them all with laughter!



These stories and more made me smile all the way back to Tywyn, along our now-beloved Talylyn railway, and my mirth turned to sheer delight when the sun dropped beneath the clouds to warm the Dolgoch valley. We took a walk and found it easily the most splendidous place we have discovered in all our travels: waterfall after waterfall with their secret crystal pools, where the water is sweet and tasty. Moss, fern, stone, sacred ash and oak surround you in an otherworldly place so you can almost hear the faerie laughter bubbling down the jubilant river.

Tŷwyn to Devil's Bridge via Aberystwyth

An easy ride next morning on the Talylyn line and then the mainline train to Aberystwyth gave us time for an ice cream and a walk along the pebbly beach to the cliff at the Northern end, before heading for the Vale of Rheidol station. The pristinely polished and notably heftier engine (though still small by normal train standards) has long taken tourists up the steep climbs to Devil's Bridge. It does so in three distinct stages: a flat ride along the river plain, the gentle climb along the Rheidol valley and then the magnificent rise into the mountains.

Red kites skim low over meadows on the deceptively gentle incline beside the river until we begin to pass through valleys which rival Switzerland in their idyllic splendour, and on up to high waterfalls, cliff vistas and crowding, bottle-green mountains which seem to close up if you look too long, as though they guard age-old faerie folk secrets between their majestic slopes.



By the time you arrive at the end of the track, it seems impossible there can be more still to see, but the waterfall way, which runs under Devil's Bridge, is a thing of feral wonder. Having scoured out whirlpool holes in the dark rock, the water spins and spills from one drop to the next with exuberant power, spraying its replenishing mists all around. The path winds round its course, past the great gurgling cauldron and back to the station, where it feels almost overwhelming to enjoy the views once more.

Our whole experience left us with the feeling of having had a holiday of holidays, each outstanding enough to hold their own against half a lifetime of happy tales – and all thanks to the (aptly named) Great Little Trains of Wales!"



Fairbourne Railway

Fairbourne – Barmouth ferry

From

Fairbourne village to Barmouth ferry, this train journey has splendid views, with Cader Idris mountain on one side and the sea on the other. The two-mile Fairbourne Railway also has a unique story, boasting four different track gauges in 100 years. First converted into a miniature steam railway in 1916, it was built as a horse-drawn tramway in 1895 and has carried passengers almost continuously ever since. From Barmouth Ferry Station, at the mouth of the beautiful Mawddach Estuary, you can take a small motorboat ferry across the river to Barmouth's harbour quayside.

Adventure

Hire bikes from Birmingham Garage in Barmouth (near the harbour, 01341 280644) and cycle nine miles along the incredibly scenic (and flat!) Mawddach Trail, a former railway line along the estuary, to the historic market town of Dolgellau, and back. Or perhaps just as far as the picturesque George III at Penmaenpool? www.georgethethird.co.uk

Hidden Gem

A pleasant half hour's stroll and steep climb from Fairbourne bring you to the Blue Lake, tucked away in a fold in the hills, in the old Goleuvern Slate Quarry. The water is a clear unearthly blue, very cold and reputed to be bottomless.

Kids

Fairbourne Station hosts a large model railway and a museum. Nearby Bwlchgwyn Farm offers pony trekking along the beach and estuary, and into the foothills near the Cregennan Lakes. Beginners' rides from £25 (£22 for kids). www.bwlchgwynfarm.co.uk



Beach

Fairbourne is famous for its two-mile-long golden sandy beach at the mouth of the Mawddach Estuary, backed by a pebbly bank and great views of the woods and mountains. Windsurfing and sailing are popular on the windy westward side; along the top end, there are "dragons' teeth", concrete anti-tank blocks left over from World War Two, designed to stop invasion forces.

Top Walk

The classic Panorama Walk above Barmouth provides dramatic views and routes of differing lengths, from one mile to six. On the way you pass the site of the Victorian pleasure gardens, relics of 19th-century manganese mining and a First World War memorial on Craig y gigfran ("raven rock").

Eat

On the Rails

The licensed, coffee shop-style Station Café at Fairbourne serves cakes, sandwiches and ice creams as well as tea, coffee, wine, cider and the award-winning, locally brewed Purple Moose beers. The Harbour View Café, open during school holidays, is right by the beach at Barmouth Ferry Station, serves a similar range of drinks and snacks, and overlooks Barmouth Bridge and the estuary.

Off the Rails

Barmouth has plenty of different places to eat, including a good selection of pubs and cafés on the quayside overlooking the harbour. There is also a very popular (and authentic) Indian restaurant on Beach Road in Fairbourne run by former Bollywood star Raj Verma. www.indianacuisinewales.uk

Did you know? Ferries have been crossing the Mawddach estuary to Barmouth since Roman times and in the middle ages local monks used to operate them. Famous ferry passengers have included William Wordsworth and Charles Darwin.

Sleep

Mid-range

Sea View in Friog, a Georgian guesthouse with bar and games room at the mouth of the estuary, is a ten-minute walk from Fairbourne Staion (they can also collect guests) and a five-minute stroll from the beach. Doubles from £60, B&B. www.bit.do/SeaView

Top Notch

Penmaenuchaf Hall Hotel is a luxurious country house with oak-floored sitting rooms, landscaped gardens and views of the wooded hills and valleys, six miles from Morfa Mawddach station on the Cambrian Coast Line (contact the hotel in advance for transport). Doubles from £180.00, B&B. www.penhall.co.uk

Inn

The historic George III in peaceful Penmaenpool is a scenic six-mile walk or bus ride (number 28 every two hours) from Fairbourne. It is set right on the shore of the estuary, with fabulous views and good food. Doubles from £110, B&B.

www.georgethethird.co.uk

Family

Barmouth Bay Holiday Village in Talybont, five minutes from Barmouth on the Cambrian Coast Line, has indoor heated pools and a sandy beach on the doorstep. Four-person caravans start from £104 for three nights.

www.awayresorts.co.uk/barmouth-bay

Glamping

Graig Wen, a three-mile bus journey from Fairbourne, has yurts, cabins and cottages on a 45-acre site in the woods. Two-person yurts from £160 for two nights and bell tents from £65/night. www.graigwen.co.uk





Itinerary 1

Take the first train in the morning (either 10.40 or 11.10 depending on time of year) and the ferry across to Barmouth. Spend the day in this charming town and return on the last train of the day (not forgetting to leave time for the ferry to deliver you back to the station!). You can discover more about the history of Barmouth on the town heritage trail; don't miss the Victorian cottages and steep, winding alleys of Old Barmouth and 15th-century Ty Gwyn ("white house"), which is the town's oldest building. www.barmouthheritagetrail.org

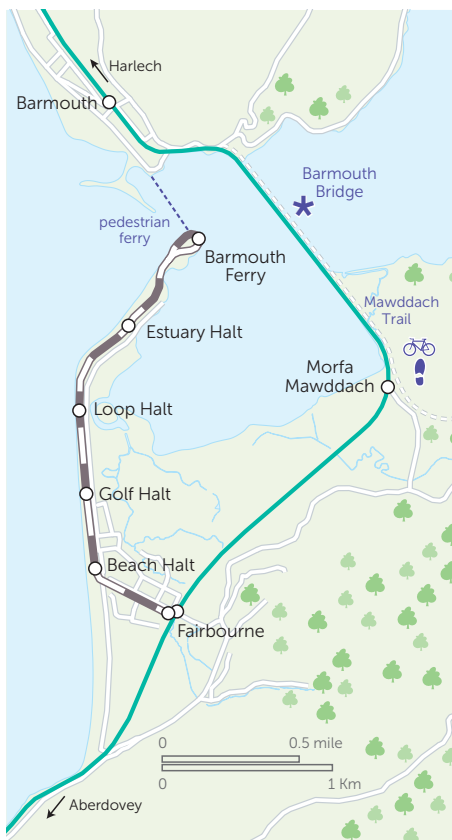
Itinerary 2

Why not catch the Fairbourne train and ferry to Barmouth, and then walk back across the epic 113-span Barmouth Bridge? The view up the estuary is unsurpassed. As well as walkers and cyclists, this 19th-century wooden viaduct carries the Cambrian Coast Railway over the water.

Getting Here

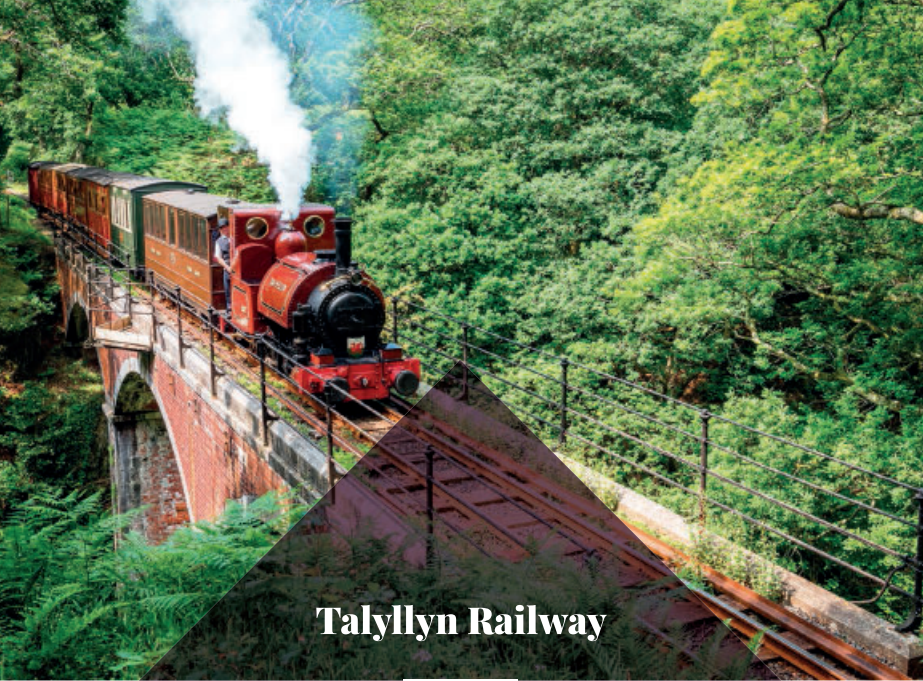
Fairbourne Railway links with National Rail services at Fairbourne station on the Cambrian Coast Line.

www.fairbournerrailway.com









Talyllyn Railway

Tywyn – Nant Gwernol

The Talyllyn

Railway runs through the beautiful Fathew valley in southern Snowdonia. From Tywyn on the Mid-Wales coast it climbs $7\frac{1}{4}$ miles to Nant Gwernol, where visitors can explore a range of way-marked forest trails. On the way, the trains stop at Dolgoch, with its cascading waterfalls, and the village of Abergynolwyn. The Talyllyn, originally built to carry slate, was the first preserved railway in the world; saved from closure in 1951, it has operated continuously since 1865. All the trains are steam-hauled, often by one of the original, 150-year-old locomotives.

Heritage

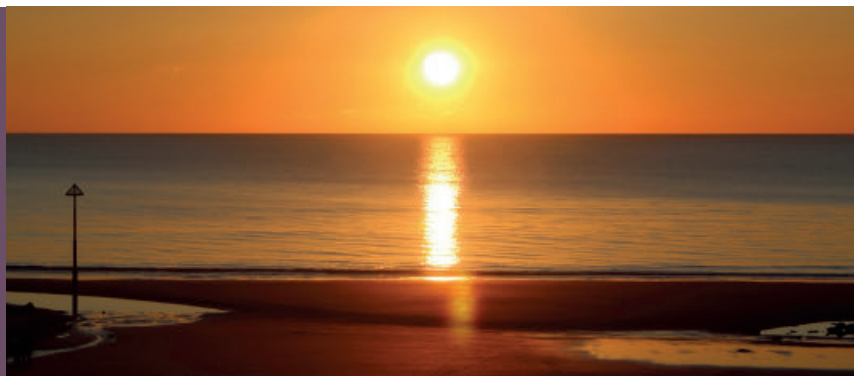
Romanesque St Cadfan's church at College Green, a short walk from Tywyn Pendre station, dates from the 12th Century and houses the Cadfan Stone, which has the earliest known Welsh writing inscribed on it and is thought to be as much as 1300 years old. The church is open 9am to 5pm and admission is free. Atmospheric, ruined Castell-y-Bere, an hour's walk from Abergynolwyn station, was once an impressive 13th-century castle built by Llywelyn the Great. It is open 10am to 4pm and is also free to visit. www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/castell-y-bere

Top walks

For the serious walker, there are paths that take you into the hills from Rhydyronen, Dolgoch and Nant Gwernol stations, with spectacular views across Cader Country and southern Snowdonia. You can even walk across the hills down into the Dyfi Estuary, and then catch the Cambrian Coast train back to Tywyn.

Adventure

Shoot your friends and family at Laser Fun near Tywyn Wharf station. A variety of battle scenarios, using remote technology to score the hits so no one gets bruised or splattered, offer the fun of paintball without the paint. From £15, booking required. www.laserfunwales.co.uk



Museum

The Narrow Gauge Railway museum at Tywyn Wharf station tells the story of narrow gauge railways in Britain and overseas. It is filled with unique artifacts, many from railways that no longer exist. The museum is open when the Talyllyn trains are running and admission is free.

Arts

Tywyn boasts one of the most vibrant cinemas in the area, The Magic Lantern, showing new releases using the latest visual and sound technology. There are also regular streamings of productions from the National Theatre, English National Opera, Royal Shakespeare Company and others. www.tywyncinema.co.uk

Beach

Tywyn's blue-flagged beach, an easy stroll from Tywyn Wharf station, is a place to relax and catch the sun. You can sometimes see dolphins in the ocean, there are views of the Llyn Peninsula and frequent spectacular sunsets over Cardigan Bay. It's also an excellent beach for surfing.





Eat

On the Rails

There are cafés at Tywyn Wharf and Abergynolwyn, serving snacks, cakes and drinks. The licensed Kings café at Tywyn also offers hearty main courses, like hunter's chicken or lasagne, while the Quarryman's Caban, in Abergynolwyn does tea, coffee and sandwiches.

Off the Rails

The Salt Marsh Kitchen in Tywyn is a Michelin-listed restaurant with locally-sourced gourmet food, like lobster bisque or steamed Welsh mussels, at sensible prices (mains around £14).

www.saltmarshkitchen.co.uk

If you stop at Tywyn Pendre station, don't miss the Holgates Ice Cream Shop, where you can buy honey ice cream, freshly made each day with real honey.

www.haloshop.co.uk



Sleep

Budget

The Dolgoch Falls hotel, beside the beautiful ravine, is handy for Dolgoch station. Doubles from £80, B&B.

www.thedolgochfalls.co.uk

Mid-range

Preswylfa guest house, very close to Tywyn Station, has a range of rooms and distant views of Cadair Idris. Doubles £110, B&B (discounts for longer stays).

www.preswylfa.net

Camping

Tynllwyn Caravan and Camping Park is next to the Talylyn line at Rhydyronen station and offers static caravans and pitches in a beautiful rural setting. Two nights in a four-person caravan from £130; spaces for tent and car from £9/night.

www.tynllwyncaravanpark.co.uk

Family

Hendy Farm Holidays run a set of self-catering cottages, for two to six people, beside the line, a mile from Tywyn. The farm even has its own halt on the Talylyn railway. Four-person cottages from £275 per week. www.hendyfarmholidays.co.uk



Itinerary 1

Catch the first train from Tywyn Wharf to Nant Gwernol and return to Abergynolwyn. Walk into the village for lunch at the Railway Inn and then catch the bus to Tallyllyn Lake, where you can walk through the lovely scenery or simply have a drink by the lakeside. Return by bus to Abergynolwyn, walk up to the station and catch the train home. Bus times:

www.bit.do/30bus

Getting Here

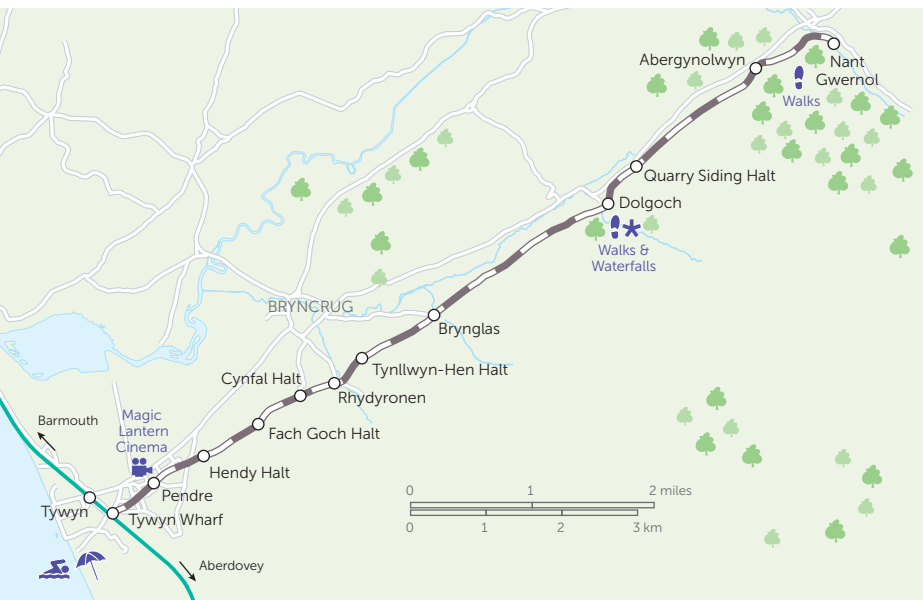
Tywyn Wharf station is 1/3 mile walk from National Rail station in Tywyn, on the Cambrian Coast Line.

www.tallyllyn.co.uk

Itinerary 2

(On days when more than two trains depart Tywyn Wharf): Catch the first train to the beautiful ravine at Dolgoch. Spend a pleasant hour or so exploring lower and middle falls before returning to Dolgoch station and continuing by train to Nant Gwernol and continuing by train to Abergynolwyn to explore the forest paths. Either travel back from Nant Gwernol, or walk down to Abergynolwyn village and station to catch the train back to Tywyn. Insider tip: From Nant Gwernol, you can also walk up one of the original inclines that brought slate down from the quarry, then along the old horse tramway and up the next incline to the remains of the quarry itself, getting a sense of the isolated life the quarrymen once lived in the hills.

Your ticket is a Day Rover so make full use of it by breaking your journey along the way.





Vale of Rheidol Railway

Aberystwyth – Devil's Bridge

Wide Meadows

wooded slopes and rugged mountain scenery surround the Vale of Rheidol Railway. It climbs 200m on its 11¾-mile route, from Aberystwyth to Devil's Bridge and the line twists and turns as it clings to the hillside. Opened in 1902 to carry lead ore and timber, as well as passengers, the narrow gauge track lets the railway follow the landscape's curves and steep gradients. In summer you can ride in open carriages to feel the wind in your hair and, getting off at one of the intermediate stations, you can walk through the valley and visit dramatic waterfalls.

Kids

Rheidol Riding Centre, a short walk from Capel Bangor station, offers horseback experiences for all ages, from half hour rides on quiet ponies for little children through to all-day treks in the Cambrian Mountains.

www.rheidol-riding-centre.co.uk. Kids also enjoy Aberystwyth's funicular cliff railway (Britain's longest!) up Constitution Hill, overlooking the town. On a good day, you can see 26 mountain peaks from the top. www.aberystwythcliff railway.co.uk

Adventure

Three of Wales' finest way-marked mountain bike trails, with challenging runs and views over forest and sea, start from Bwlch Nant yr Arian visitor centre; the lunchtime café offers soup, sausages and cake to refuel afterwards. There are play areas featuring slides, climbing walls and giant swings, and the spectacular red kite feeding, which sees up to 200 birds fly in for lunch every afternoon, is free to watch. Half hour ride from Aberystwyth on bus 525, www.bit.do/Bwlch.

Heritage

A fifteen-minute stroll from Aberystwyth station, the imposing National Library of Wales overlooks the town. It is one of five copyright libraries in the UK and is the best place in Wales for people tracing their family history. Its 6.5 million volumes mean Aberystwyth has a higher number of books per person than any town in the world! It's open all year and admission is free. www.llgc.org.uk

Local Legend

The devil himself is said to have built the oldest bridge across the deep, wooded Mynach valley, a short walk from Devil's Bridge station. According to the story, the devil met an old woman, whose cow had wandered over the river and got stuck. He promised her a bridge spanning the ravine in exchange for the soul of the first living creature to cross it. Once the bridge was built the devil told the old woman to keep her side of the bargain, whereupon she took a loaf from her pocket and threw it over the bridge. Quick as a flash her little dog (whose soul was no use to the devil!) ran over the bridge, and the devil, furious at being outwitted by an old woman, disappeared.

Beaches

Aberystwyth's South Beach is a good place to stop and unwind for a few hours, and the beach at nearby Borth is a popular spot for adventure sports such as surfing and kite boarding. The nature reserve at Ynyslas, a short walk or bus ride from Borth national rail station, is famous for its extensive sand dunes and rich wildlife, including rare orchids. www.bit.do/Ynyslas

Insider Tip

Every evening between October and March tens of thousands of starlings fly in huge "murmurations", whirling through the darkening sky above Aberystwyth, before settling to roost for the night under the Victorian Pier.



Eat

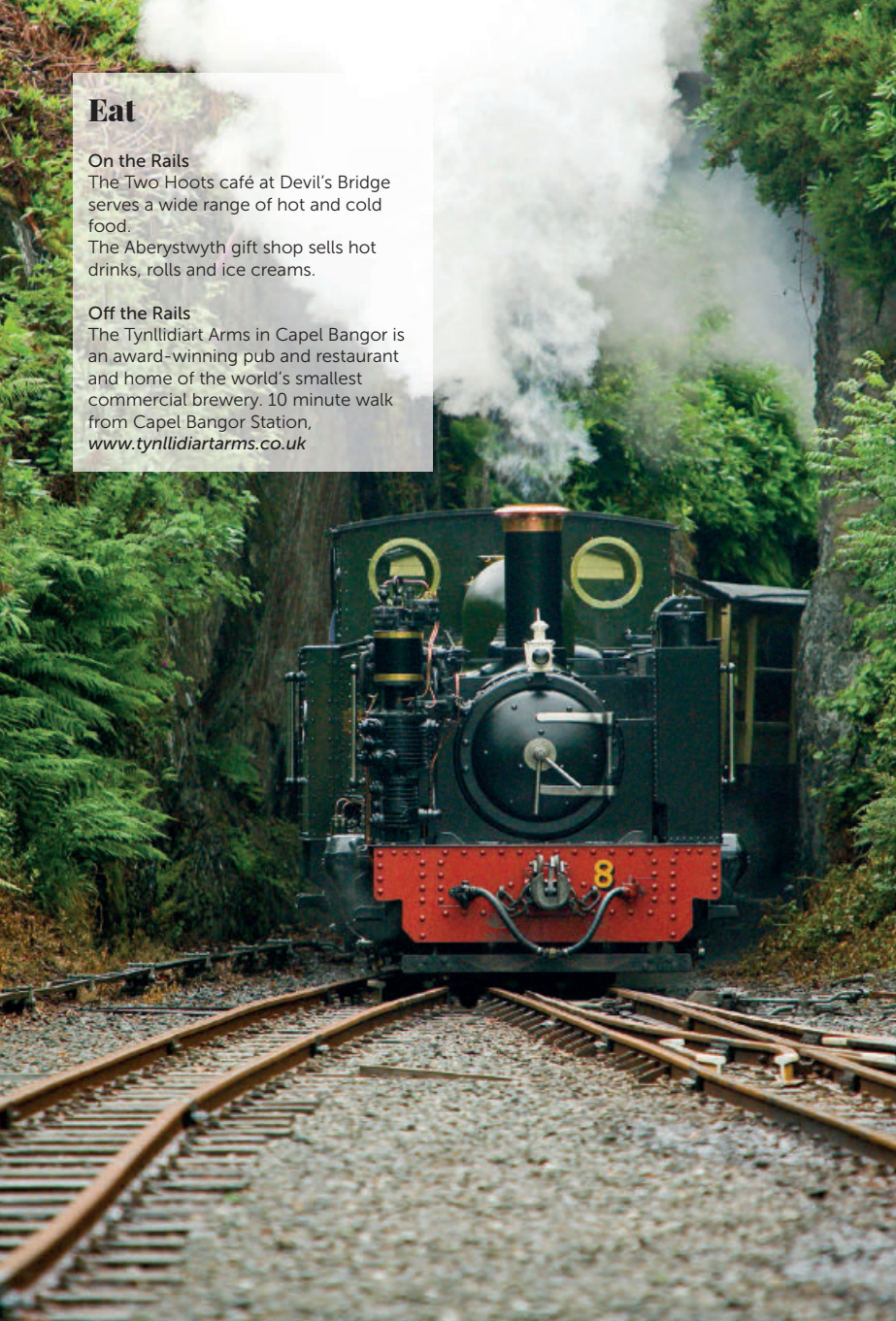
On the Rails

The Two Hoots café at Devil's Bridge serves a wide range of hot and cold food.

The Aberystwyth gift shop sells hot drinks, rolls and ice creams.

Off the Rails

The Tynllidiart Arms in Capel Bangor is an award-winning pub and restaurant and home of the world's smallest commercial brewery. 10 minute walk from Capel Bangor Station, www.tynllidiartarms.co.uk



Sleep

Budget

YHA, Borth is a small friendly hostel a short distance from the national rail station at Borth. Dorm beds from £18pp.

www.yha.org.uk

Mid-range

The Glengower Hotel, on Aberystwyth's seafront, is well placed for enjoying sunsets over Cardigan Bay. They have good food and real ales and are dog friendly throughout. Doubles from £75, B&B.

www.glengower.co.uk

Top Notch

Five-star Gwesty Cymru, about 10 minutes' walk from Aberystwyth station, is also on the seafront. Doubles from £90, B&B.

www.gwestycymru.com

Inn

The Hafod Hotel, very near Devil's Bridge station, is built in the style of a Swiss Chalet and featured in hit TV crime series *Hinterland*/Y Gwyll. Doubles from £100, B&B. www.thehafodhotel.wordpress.com

www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

Itinerary 1

For a great family outing, catch the train from Aberystwyth to Devil's Bridge and stroll around the famous waterfalls. The longer walk takes about 45 minutes and includes the 100-step Jacob's Ladder. Alternatively head for the Devil's Punchbowl, 15 minutes away, before returning to the station for tea with bara brith or Welsh cakes.

Itinerary 2

Keen walkers can get off the train at the Rheidol Falls request stop, where various paths lead to the valley floor. You can visit the hydroelectric power station

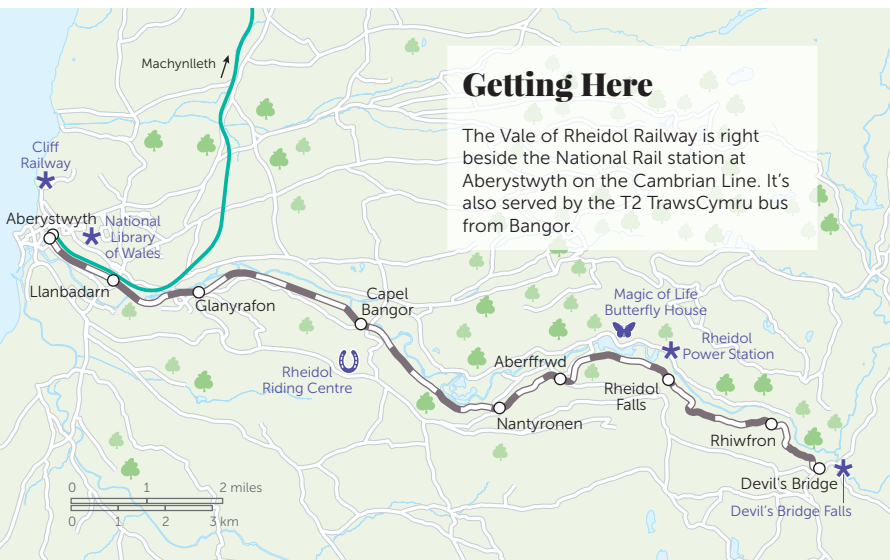
www.bit.do/rheidol (free tours), the butterfly house and other local attractions, or follow a wooded track up to an Iron Age hill fort, with panoramic views, before heading for Aberffrwdd station to hop back on the train. For more scenic footpaths in the Rheidol Valley, see:

www.rheidolrailway.co.uk/walks.htm

The return ticket (for the full length of the line) is actually a "day rover" so you can catch any train, all day, and break your journey to walk in the valley.

Getting Here

The Vale of Rheidol Railway is right beside the National Rail station at Aberystwyth on the Cambrian Line. It's also served by the T2 Trawscymru bus from Bangor.







a Trip *to historic* Welshpool



Freelance journalist Phoebe Taplin, who lives in Hertfordshire, enjoyed a vintage day out in the Welsh borders, with her brother, Nat.

"Combining a ride on the Welshpool & Llanfair light railway with a visit to medieval Powis Castle made a beautifully varied outing with a strong sense of history. Rolling through green hills, with sheep-scattered slopes and banks of bracken and foxgloves, I already feel as though I've travelled back in time since leaving London. And there's a nostalgic air about the bunting-strung market town of Welshpool, even before we reach the steam railway at the far end of its main street. There are woodcarvings and colourful bird sculptures outside the Powysland museum, housed in a cheerful old warehouse beside the Montgomeryshire canal; and the High Street has old-fashioned sweet shops, Georgian coaching inns and a series of wonderfully ramshackle stalls under the brick arches of the clock-towered market.

The Welshpool & Llanfair railway carriages have balconies at either end, so passengers can stand in the open air to watch rivers, fields and wooded valleys chugging past, and smell the sooty whiff of history. There's nothing half-hearted about this train ride,

with its deafening whistle and thick white steam, dislodging drops of water onto us from the leafy canopy overhead. The engine puffs hard as it pulls us up to Golfa summit, nearly 200 metres above sea level. We cross the six stone arches of the Brynelyn viaduct before running downhill and alongside the sepia-tinted River Banwy.





At the far end of the line, there's just time to stroll along a waterside path into the small, sleepy town of Llanfair Caereinion, with its hilly streets, bowling green and old pubs, before heading back to the retro station tearoom, for sandwiches and fruity Welsh bara brith. Returning, as honey-pungent meadowsweet drifts past outside the window, we ride in a wooden carriage originally built in 1906 for the Austrian state railway, a time-traveller's delight with elegant slatted seats and curving luggage racks.

“*A cream tea on the top terrace, complete with jewelled and predatory peacocks, revives us...*

Five hundred metres back along Welshpool's High Street, Park Lane leads right to the wrought iron gates of Powis Castle. A mile's stroll up through the steep landscaped park, with herds of antlered deer and lily ponds, we reach the red, gritstone walls and find, inside, rooms hung with faded tapestries or lined with marble emperors. The state bedroom, which survives from the 1660s, has an opulent, crimson-curtained four-poster in its own royal alcove (although we're amused to read that Prince Charles, a frequent visitor to the castle, prefers a different, lighter room just along the grand corridor). We wandered

through the Powis treasures: an 18th-century painting of Verona, with its sweeping cloud-softened distances, or a medieval book of hours, with intricate, gilded foliage twisting around gothic text and pictures that still glow royal blue and scarlet.

A cream tea on the top terrace, complete with jewelled and predatory peacocks, revives us enough to visit the Clive Museum, a collection begun by controversial adventurer Robert Clive, of Indian objects, from tiny ivory elephants to Tipu Sultan's ornate tent and palanquin. The terraced garden, over which the castle presides, is even more remarkable than the interior. With views that stretch as far as the Shropshire hills, the walkways are lined with peonies, roses and delphiniums, dancing statues and urn-topped balustrades. The herbaceous borders are sweet with lavender and the little trees outside the orangery are hung with both fruit and citrus blossom; an Ozymandian stone foot stands in the woods, near glades of common spotted orchids, and a fountain splashes on the lowest lawn, beneath tiers of winding box-hedged walks and topiaried yew.





Eventually, it was time to head back into town for supper at the vintage Bay Tree tearooms. Surrounded by period newspapers and vinyl records, with a soundtrack of fifties music, we had some stylish modern dishes: smoked salmon with pickled cucumber, slabs of butternut squash lasagne, home-cooked chips and a pleasing Snowdon lager from Great Orme brewery in Llandudno. Strolling back to the station in the gathering dark, we felt a happy sense of timeless pleasures: exploring the richness of history, enjoying tasty food and gentle, car-free travel through the countryside."







Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway

Welshpool - Llanfair Caereinion

The Welshpool

& Llanfair Light Railway runs through eight miles of idyllic scenery in mid Wales. The engine works hard as it climbs steeply out of the market town of Welshpool, through hills, valleys and farmland, before finally running alongside the Banwy River to Llanfair Caereinion, the agricultural community that it was built to serve in 1903. Here, passengers can visit the railway tearoom and children's playground or walk up to the small town, built near the site of a Roman fort.

Heritage

Many visitors combine their railway trip with a visit to Powis Castle, making a superb day out.

This historic landmark is a lovely walk up through the landscaped deer park, from Welshpool's Raven Square station. The medieval fortress, dating from the thirteenth century, rises dramatically on a rock above the celebrated garden, full of formal yew trees, Italianate terraces and flowering herbaceous borders. Over the years, generations of the Herbert family, who have lived here since the seventeenth century, have added to collections of art and fine furnishings, including an interesting display of treasures from India in the Clive Museum. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis

Best View

The railway's larger gauge allows for spacious carriages with open-air balconies at each end, which provide iconic views of the Welshpool & Llanfair railway and panoramas over the river, hills and fields along this pastoral route. Stand on the back balcony to see the line receding behind, or on the front balcony to overlook the hardworking engine crew.



Local Legend

Dolarddyn Hall, near the hamlet of Castle Caereinion at the railway's midpoint, is where Henry Tudor spent the night on his journey to the Battle of Bosworth. During the battle, in August 1485, he defeated Richard III, and in due course became Henry VII. Legend has it that Henry was given a white horse, symbol of the Powys princes, at Dolarddyn before he mustered his supporting armies at Welshpool. Henry was related to the ancient Powys princes and, since he is also a distant relative of the current queen, the fifth-century prophecy of St. Garmon, that descendants from that family would rule Powys forever, seems to be true.



Green Space

The terraced gardens at Powis castle, with their statues and orangery, are magnificent, but, for a less formal green space, head for the watery urban nature reserve at Severn Farm, run by the Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust. It's open all the time, with free access, but the best times to visit are April to July, when the wetlands round the pond are full of birds, like little grebes and reed buntings. www.montwt.co.uk



Top Walk

Several great walks start from stations along the Welshpool & Llanfair railway, making it easy to combine strolling and train rides. The Glyndŵr's Way National Trail actually starts close to the Welshpool station. Follow the trail up through the parkland of Llanerchydol Hall, with glimpses of the neo-gothic mansion, and then out onto the bare hills, heading for the heights of Y Golfa. After two miles, you can branch off the trail and return via a wooded cwm (or valley) to the little wayside halt at Sylfaen and rest your feet on the train back to Raven Square. A book by Steve Page, with more walks from W&LLR stations, is available at the railway's shops.

Eat

On the Rails

You can buy hot drinks, confections and ice creams at Welshpool's Raven Square while the railway's tearoom, at Llanfair Caereinion, with indoor and (covered) outdoor seating, offers soup and sandwiches, homemade cakes and other treats.

Off the Rails

The Raven Inn, opposite Welshpool's Raven Square station, is a cheerful family pub (www.bit.do/RavenInn). In Llanfair, the Goat Hotel serves quality food (www.thegoathotel.co.uk) and the Just3Drops bistro offers mains like Welsh cottage pie and puds like apple and blackberry crumble (www.bit.do/Just3Drops).



Sleep

Budget

The no-frills Premier Inn in Shrewsbury is just twenty minutes away from Welshpool on the mainline train. Doubles from £29 (room only) if booked in advance. www.premierinn.com

Inn

An old coaching inn with characterful rooms and an open fire, the Goat Hotel has hosted travellers in Llanfair Caereinion since the seventeenth century. It's in the centre of town, a five-minute walk uphill from the station, and serves great food and guest beers. Doubles from £50, B&B. www.thegoathotel.co.uk

Top Notch

The Royal Oak is a distinguished hotel in the heart of Welshpool. The largest in the area, it has 25 refurbished rooms and a formal dining room. Doubles from £100, B&B. www.royaloakwelshpool.co.uk



Itinerary 1

From Llanfair Caereinion, take the first train of the day for the 45-minute journey to Welshpool. Enjoy Powis Castle and the Powysland Museum, both within walking distance of Raven Square station. Having seen the fascinating history of the Borders area, return to Llanfair by train in time for dinner at one of the pubs or the wine bar.

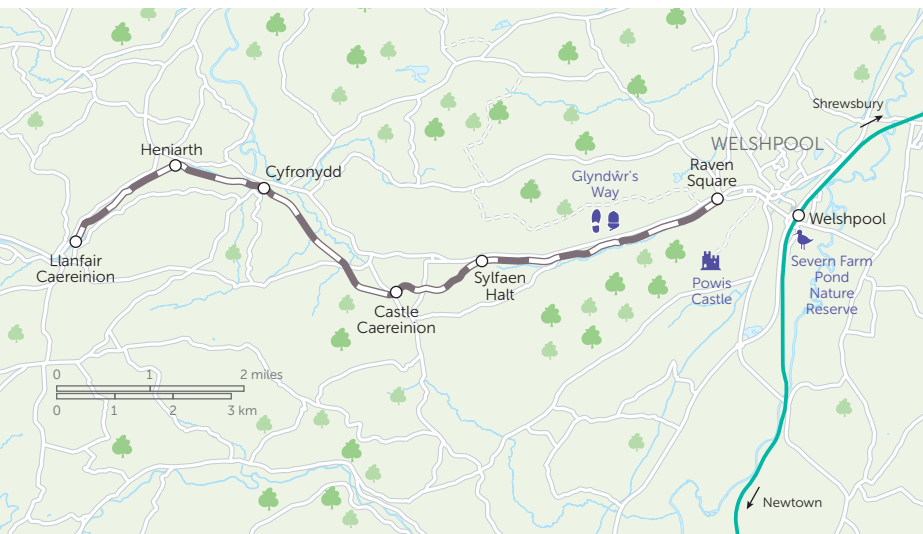
Getting Here

The Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway is a one mile walk from the National Rail station in Welshpool, on the Cambrian Line.

www.wllr.org

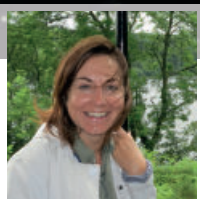
Itinerary 2

There are foodie treats at both ends of the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway; and the mainline station, at the other end of town, connects it to the medieval English market town of Shrewsbury. Arrive in Llanfair Caereinion in time for homemade fare in the railway tearoom, walk off your lunch, and take the train back to Welshpool. Walk east along the High Street, enjoy a cream tea at the Old Station and catch a mainline train to Shrewsbury, with its wide choice of dining opportunities, like Turkish-style grilled meat at the Istanbul BBQ (www.istanbulbbqrestaurant.com) or French fine dining at Number Four (www.number-four.com).





from **Brecon** *to* **Beyond**



London-based arts' producer Lucy Wood and Mitch Palmer, an engineer from Bristol, spent a memorable long weekend exploring the Brecon Beacons.

"Ever since I was young, I've been fascinated by older, slower ways of travelling, especially the drama, clamour and glamour of steam trains; I loved how they would sweep across Britain's green and pleasant land in much loved childhood films. So the chance to experience these machines in the beauty of the Brecon Beacons was too tempting to pass up. Travelling by train, and the odd bus, my three days in Wales proved extremely relaxing and memorable, with incredible vistas, fantastic food and a friendly welcome.

From Bristol, we headed to Merthyr Tydfil, via Cardiff, by train – a journey of less than two hours with lovely scenery. Accommodation for the night was Nant Ddu Lodge, an incredibly scenic, fifteen-minute bus ride from Merthyr. The hotel itself was gorgeous – set by a river that lulled us to sleep after a delicious meal of locally sourced fish and an excellent crumble. Next morning I had a spa treatment whilst my friend enjoyed the swimming pool; then a leisurely breakfast,

before heading off to the Brecon Mountain Railway, a 30-minute bus journey away in Pant.

The inviting tagline to "Steam into Superb Scenery" was spot on – it was thrilling to stand outside the carriage, right behind the engine, as it accelerated, pulling us up and away, high into the Brecon Beacons. The sun broke out as forest dropped away and the vast and sparkling Pontsticill Reservoir came into view. On either side of the track verdant foliage is interspersed with moment after moment of breathtaking beauty. It was my first time on a steam train and it was magical; you can't beat the thrill of the engine's high pitch whistle as it lets off its steam – and, being so close, you could see the workings of the gleaming pistons below us.

“The sun broke out as forest dropped away and the vast and sparkling Pontsticill Reservoir came into view

I shared the view with four-year-old Isaac and his father; Isaac was completely transfixed and we all whooped together with each whistle. The train stopped for a short break at Pontsticill and I wandered through bright yellow welsh poppies and buttercups sprouting across the banks. On the return journey, the guard let me into the cab itself to see the shoveling of coal into the glowing furnace and chat to the drivers; the experience really felt like going back in time. Whether you love trains, or just exquisite scenery - or indeed both - this is a wonderful day out.

Early Saturday evening, our next stop was Brecon, staying in the Peterstone Court Hotel – a 40-minute ride from Pant by bus. The sun was out and we were welcomed to an opulent Georgian Manor with a gorgeous backdrop, huge, freestanding baths in the rooms and views across the Beacons. During a sundowner on the outdoor terrace, we rested our ears and eyes with bird song, the sound of the rushing river below, the vivid, lush forest and dramatic mountains. In the spacious outdoor pool, set in the grass with a 14th-century church behind it, I enjoyed a long swim, with the pool all to myself, on Sunday morning, working up an appetite for the incredible menu on offer – all locally sourced and served with impeccable attentiveness by the staff; the scallops and prawns were exceptional and will be recalled with hunger for many years to come!



To finish off our wonderful weekend, we travelled to north Wales for a final adventure, staying at an excellent former coaching inn, Ty Gwyn, which dates back to 1636 with beautiful stone work and low beamed ceilings. The hotel has an award-winning, cosy restaurant where everything on our plates came from a mile or two away, the furthest distance being a whopping 12 miles for our very delicious trout from Llyn Brenig reservoir! With the country's strong connection to nature, my impression is that, all over rural Wales, hotels like these are successfully championing sustainable, locally-sourced food – indeed, they are simply continuing traditions which have never gone away.



Betws-y-Coed is the perfect access point for Snowdonia - a friendly village with an Alpine feel, enhanced by the dense Gwydyr Forest and the rivers and waterfalls that surround it. It also has its own railway museum with the most exquisitely detailed working miniature railway: a perfectly-formed city and countryside vista complete with funfair, shops, campsites, hospitals, and ports all lit up and working. With the sun now blazing, we set off upriver from Pont y Pair Bridge to the roaring Swallow Falls. Taking you past tranquil sheep pastures and up through forest next to dramatic, ancient slate mines, it's a good two hour walk and incredibly beautiful. It can get slippery, though, so be sure to wear good footwear!



The walk ended with a breathtaking view of Snowdon, framed by trees and old farmhouses. We rested on the final leg at Ty Hyll ("ugly house") in Capel Curig - a tearoom in a lovely 15th-century cottage, surrounded by woodland and a beautifully tended garden full of nesting birds, home to an innovative project to boost Conwy's numbers of queen bees. All food was homemade and locally-sourced (indeed the honey comes from the very bees which go peacefully to work outside) and we enjoyed a ploughman's lunch, with local cheeses - a unique, memorable and even educational end to a perfect break! We packed a lot into three days and I would come back for more in an instant; with so many beautiful steam railways to explore, people to meet and foods to eat, I must get planning for the next one..."







Brecon Mountain Railway

Pant - Tŏrpantau

Climbing

to the summit at Torpantau, past stunning views and scenery with mountains, lakes and forests, the Brecon Mountain Railway starts from Pant Station in Merthyr Tydfil. The railway was built in 1980 on part of the original trackbed of the old Brecon and Merthyr railway and runs beside scenic reservoirs on its way up into the Brecon Beacons, 400m above sea level, climbing steeply above the Pentwyn Reservoir. The original stone waiting room at Pontsticill is now a small steam engine museum.

Kids

Cyfarthfa Castle, an interesting museum in Merthyr Tydfil, is set in 160 acres of grounds with great views, a children's park, miniature railway and a "splashpad" for sunny days. "Ironmaster" William Crawshay commissioned this grand mansion in 1824, overlooking his immensely successful ironworks. The museum has some great historical artefacts, from the first secret ballot box and early dresses by Laura Ashley to ancient Egyptian grave goods. www.cyfarthfa.com

Did you know? Merthyr Tydfil was once the greatest iron-making town in the world and saw the trial run of the world's first steam railway locomotive in 1804.

Top Walk

At Pontsticill Station you can join the Taff Trail, a 55-mile walk from Brecon to Cardiff Bay, with views of the Brecon Beacons. The route, which can also be cycled, runs along riverside paths, old railways and woodland tracks. After four miles through forests from Pontsticill, it crosses the spectacular, 15-arch Cefn Coed Viaduct, which was opened in 1868 to carry the Brecon and Merthyr Railway over the River Taff. It was closed to trains in 1966 and is now only accessible to walkers and cyclists.

Heritage

Llancaiach Fawr Manor near Treharris, half an hour on the bus from Merthyr Tydfil, was built in the sixteenth century. Today, it is a museum, with costumed guides and rooms furnished to look as they would have in the seventeenth century, when the owner, Colonel Edward Prichard switched sides in the Civil war to support parliament against the king. The manor's defensive walls are more than a meter thick and the house is full of walled up stairs and passageways so that more windows are visible outside than inside. In winter, visitors can tour Llancaiach Fawr by candlelight and hear about its resident ghosts. (Entry £8.50; ghost tours from £15)
www.bit.do/ManorHouse

Best View

On a clear day, you can see the three peaks of the Brecon Beacons, the highest mountains in South Wales, as the train approaches Pontsticill Station: Corn Du, Criban and Pen-y-fan are all around 800m high. The landscape is also rich in wildlife, including red kites; this magnificent bird of prey was saved from extinction and can now be seen around the Brecon Beacons.



Adventure

Bike Park Wales at Gethin Woodland Centre in Abercanaid (a mile from Pentre-Bach station on the mainline railway from Merthyr Tydfil) is the UK's first full scale mountain bike park, www.bikeparkwales.com. Bryn Bach Parc, just off Heads of the Valleys Road, is a 20-minute journey on the X4 bus from Merthyr and offers kayaking, gorge walking, climbing, caving, cycling, crazy golf and more.
www.parcbrynach.co.uk



Eat

On the Rails

There is a licensed tearoom at Pant Station, serving snacks and full meals and a lakeside café for drinks, snacks and ice creams at Pontsticill station, with picnic tables and kids' play area. Open during train service hours.

Off the Rails

The Red Cow Inn in Pontsticill is a cheerful place to stop off on a local walk.

www.facebook.com/RedCowPontsticill and, down the road, the Butcher's Arms also has hearty food, local beers and a relaxed atmosphere.

www.butchersarmspontsticill.co.uk



Sleep

Budget

Coed Owen bunkhouse on a working sheep farm in Cwmtaff is a short bus ride from Merthyr Tydfil. Dorm beds from £22. www.breconbeaconsbunkhouse.co.uk

Mid-range

Llwyn Onn Guest House in Cwmtaf is four miles north of Merthyr Tydfil, with comfortable rooms and views of reservoirs and mountains. Doubles from £70, B&B. www.llwynonn.co.uk

Top Notch

Nant Ddu Lodge in Cwmtaf is a hotel and spa with a popular bar and bistro, set in lovely grounds. Doubles from £99, B&B. www.nant-ddu-lodge.co.uk

Inn

The Prince of Wales on Merthyr Road in Tredegar is a down-to-earth, dog-friendly pub with doubles from £60, B&B. Tel: 01685 844441

Itinerary 1

Get on the train at Pant Station and travel to Torpantau Station in the Brecon Beacons. Get off the train here and walk to Torpantau's waterfalls. You can reach these hidden gems, high in the mountains, via a riverside path through beautiful wooded scenery; the Blaen-y-Glyn waterfalls are where the little River Caerfanell and other streams cascade down from the hills on their way to the Talybont Reservoir. You can return on a later train to Pant Station, where you can relax and enjoy a home cooked meal, cream tea or a coffee and fresh-baked slice of cake.

Itinerary 2

Take the train from Pant Station into the Brecon Beacons and, on the way back, get off at Pontsticill and walk (about five miles) round the reservoir before heading back to Pant. Cross the dam and join the Taff Trail, where the road heads gently uphill, through woodland, passing a little waterfall, and then downhill again towards Merthyr Tydfil's sailing club. Besides the railway's cafés, there are two pubs in Pontsticill village.

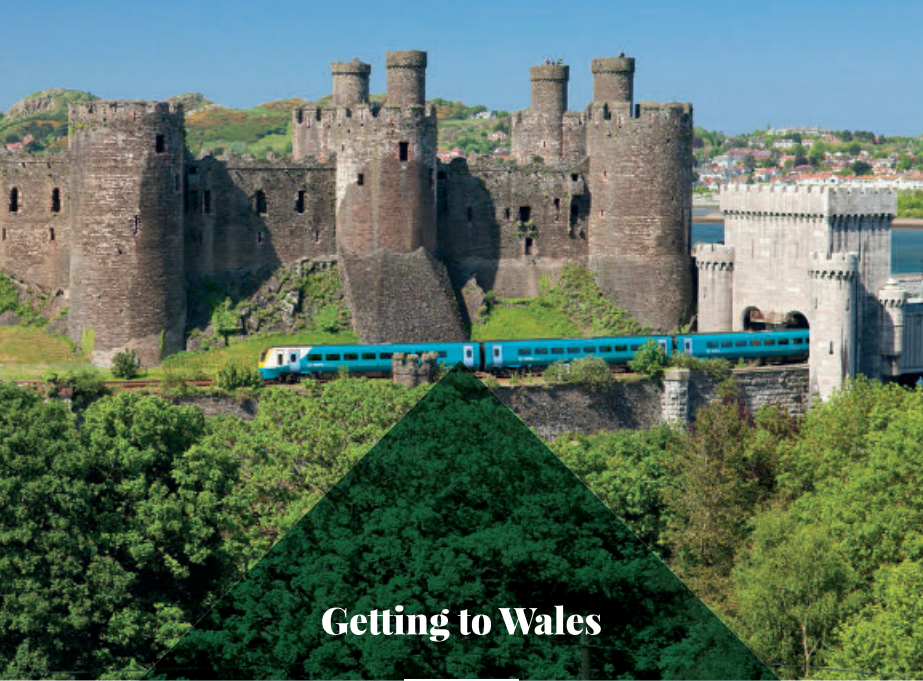


Getting Here

Brecon Mountain Railway is 4 miles from Merthyr Tydfil. The 35 bus will take you to Pant Cemetery, a few minutes' walk from the railway.

www.breconmountainrailway.co.uk





Getting to Wales

Travel by Train...

Breeze from London to Llandudno in just three hours, with proper coffee, wifi and the great British countryside.

Watch the landscape slip past and start to unwind...

Most of the Great Little Trains in mid-Wales can be reached by rail and there are connecting bus services from Machynlleth and Barmouth to explore further. You can also join the T3 TrawsCymru bus into mid Wales at Ruabon station, which links with trains from Birmingham, Shrewsbury and Chester.

North Wales

Trains run direct from London Euston (Virgin), Manchester and Birmingham (Arriva Train Wales) to Llandudno Junction and Bangor.

From Llandudno Junction join the scenic Conwy Valley Line into Snowdonia, or a bus to Betws-y-Coed.

From Bangor there are regular buses on to Llanberis, Caernarfon and Porthmadog.

Mid Wales

Arriva Trains Wales run direct from Birmingham and Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and up the Cambrian Coast – one of the great railway journeys of Britain.

South Wales

GWR trains run direct from London Paddington and Bristol to Cardiff in just two hours.

From Cardiff there are regular trains and buses north into the Brecon Beacons.



Train Tickets

For the cheapest tickets (saving up to 50%) book well in advance at www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk, www.virgintrains.co.uk or www.gwr.com

You can also save a third on most journeys with a Railcard if you are under 25, a couple, a family, or over 60 – see www.railcard.co.uk

For all UK train times, fares and information head to www.nationalrail.co.uk

Booking Service

Booking train tickets can sometimes be confusing. Don't worry, just get in touch with the clever people at Ffestiniog Travel and they'll do the hard work for you. Phone 01766 772040 or visit www.myrailtrip.co.uk

From	To	Journey time (approx.)	Frequency	No. of changes	Train operator	Cheapest ticket*	Onward travel
North Wales							
London	Llandudno Junction (or Bangor)	3 hrs	Hourly	direct or 1 change	Virgin	£16	Train: Most trains continue to Bangor. Llandudno to Blaenau Ffestiniog every 3 hrs Bus: X1 Llandudno to Betws-y-Coed hourly, also regular buses from Bangor to Llanberis, Caernarfon and Porthmadog
Manchester	Llandudno Junction	2 hrs		direct	Arriva Trains Wales	£12.50	
Birmingham	Llandudno Junction	2 hrs 45		direct or 1 change		£19.50	
Mid Wales							
London	Aberystwyth	4 hrs 30	Every 2 hrs	1 change	Virgin Arriva Trains Wales	£30	Train: All GLTW in mid-Wales are within 1 mile of a national rail station Bus: T2 and T3 TrawsCymru buses provide connections to Dolgellau and Bala
Birmingham	Aberystwyth	3 hrs	Every 1-2 hrs	direct or 1 change	Arriva Trains Wales	£16	
Shrewsbury	Aberystwyth	1 hr 50		direct		£8.50	
South Wales							
London	Cardiff	2 hrs	Every 30 mins	direct	GWR	£18	Train: Cardiff to Merthyr Tydfil every 30 mins Bus: 35 Merthyr Tydfil to Pant (for Brecon Mountain Railway) every 15 mins
Bristol	Cardiff	1 hr		direct		£10	

* cheapest single Advance ticket (book in advance, subject to availability)

*the adventure begins as soon
as you step aboard...*



Getting around Wales

There is no better way to explore Wales than by train and bus. Why stare at the road ahead when you could be taking in the view? Sit back and let someone else do the driving...

Trains

You can travel by train to most of The Great Little Trains of Wales, with great views, handy loos and at-seat refreshments on some trains. For train times and information, visit www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk

Buses

TrawsCymru is a network of long distance buses around Wales with comfy seats, big picture windows and free wifi www.trawscymru.info



Times

There's a useful Journey Planner covering all sorts of public transport in Wales www.traveline.cymru

Accessibility

If you have mobility difficulties or other special needs please contact the individual railways who will be happy to help answer your questions and make the necessary arrangements for your journey.



Rover Tickets

Great value rover tickets mean you can explore by bus and train from just £10 a day.

Explore Wales Pass

Travel all around North and Mid Wales with an Explore North & Mid Wales Pass, available from staffed stations for £69. It lasts for 8 days – allowing any 4 days rail travel and 8 days bus travel. It also gives discounts on many of the Great Little Trains www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/ExploreWales

North Wales Rover

A one-day train and bus ticket, split into zones, which starts at £12. Available at stations or on-board buses www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/RoversRangers

Red Rover

A one-day bus rover (reaching nine of the Great Little Trains), costing £6.80 on-board buses. www.bit.do/RedRover

*Why stare at the road ahead when you
could be taking in the view?*



Money Saving Passes

Great Little Trains of Wales Discount Card gives 20% off full return tickets on all GLTW for just £10. Available at GLTW railways, by post from Great Little Trains of Wales, FREEPOST CS1226, Wharf Station, Tywyn, Gwynedd LL36 9BR, or www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk

Snowdonia Pass gives discounts on all sorts of attractions throughout Snowdonia for just £5 www.snowdoniapass.co.uk

Explore Wales Pass is a rail and bus rover ticket, which also gives 50% off travel on the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways and discounts on other Great Little Trains, from £69 for 8 days www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/ExploreWalesPass

Planning your trip

Wales has a wonderful variety of things to do and places to stay. You can choose from pampering in a spa, glamping beneath the stars or meeting the chicken which laid your breakfast at a farmhouse B&B! And there are all sorts of attractions to keep you entertained – including new adventure tourism like Surf Snowdonia in the north. Here are some handy sites to start planning your adventure...

Really Useful Websites

Here are some excellent sites giving information on accommodation, attractions, events and things to do in their areas.

www.gonorthwales.co.uk

www.visitmidwales.co.uk

www.southernwales.com

www.showmewales.co.uk

Activities

Alongside these spectacular rail journeys, the great outdoors is of course the main attraction...

Nibble off a bit of the epic 870-mile Wales Coast Path www.walescoastpath.gov.uk

Spot ospreys and other amazing wildlife www.first-nature.com/waleswildlife

Explore castles and all sort of historic sites www.cadw.gov.wales

Discover Wales's Year of Adventure 2016 www.visitwales.com

Tailor made tours

If you'd like someone else to take care of everything – accommodation, tickets and travel (or just train tickets) – get in touch with the lovely people at Ffestiniog Travel www.ffestiniogtravel.com
01766 772030

Big Trains

For more information on the scenic Cambrian Line and Conwy Valley Line visit

www.thecambrianline.co.uk

www.conwy.gov.uk/cvr

Little Trains

For all the practical stuff – timetables, tickets, tea shops and tŷ bach (toilets) – visit the individual railway websites below, or give them a call.

Llanberis Lake Railway	www.lake-railway.co.uk	01286 870549
Snowdon Mountain Railway	www.snowdonrailway.co.uk	08444 938120
Welsh Highland Railway	www.festrail.co.uk	01766 516000
Welsh Highland Heritage Railway	www.whr.co.uk	01766 513402
Ffestiniog Railway	www.festrail.co.uk	01766 516000
Bala Lake Railway	www.bala-lake-railway.co.uk	01678 540666
Fairbourne Railway	www.fairbournerrailway.com	01341 250362
Talylyn Railway	www.talylyn.co.uk	01654 710472
Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway	www.wllr.org.uk	01938 810441
Vale of Rheidol Railway	www.rheidolrailway.co.uk	01970 625819
Brecon Mountain Railway	www.breconmountainrailway.co.uk	01685 722988

For practical details of all the Great Little Trains visit www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk

For inspirational itineraries and traveller's tales visit www.bigtrainlittletrain.com





Come and see us soon...

We hope you've enjoyed the read and we hope to welcome you to Wales very soon.

We'd love to hear about your travels in Wales, your favourite places, views, sleeps and eats. You can share your traveller's tales, tips and photos on www.bigtrainlittletrain.com

We've made every effort to make sure that the information in this guide is correct, but please double-check with railways, attractions and accommodation before travelling.

This guide was majority funded by an award won by The Great Little Trains of Wales (working in partnership with Arriva Trains Wales and the community rail officers of North and Mid Wales) in the Heritage and Community Rail Innovation competition sponsored by the UK Department for Transport.

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