

# Take your time touring in timeless Wales

You, your car and the open road; exploring Cymru is about much more than getting from A to B, writes Simon Richardson

**M**any things have conspired against the good old touring holiday in recent times – not least soaring petrol prices and low-cost air fares. There are however, signs that the taking the car on holiday is very much back in vogue – and for Isle of Man residents the accessibility of Wales, coupled with its fantastic roads through swathes of unspoilt countryside, is a powerful draw.

If your schoolboy (girl) French is acceptable, and your holiday Spanish stretches beyond ordering Tapas and Rioja, don't be fooled into thinking you can get by in Welsh! It's an extraordinarily difficult language to grapple with. Fortunately you won't have to – as English is widely spoken – though a little more reluctantly in some of the more rural areas of North Wales. But, as we know in the Isle of Man, a native tongue is a cultural treasure, to be coveted and nurtured, and, thankfully, Welsh is alive and well. Crossing the border from England into Wales carries no great drama; there are no border guards or surly passport control officers. We didn't know we had crossed the line until the road markings appeared in both Welsh and English.

The journey from Liverpool, where we had berthed after an extremely pleasant 2 hours 45 trip aboard the Steam Packet Company's fastcraft Manannan, was simplicity itself. About thirty minutes after disembarking under the watchful eye of the Liver birds, we were over the border.

Our two night touring break took in the delights of North and Mid-Wales – resplendent in its summer



coat of lush green. The fantastic countryside and excellent roads were a strong reminder of the days when driving was for fun, and not just a means of getting from A to B.

Our destination on day one was the tiny village of Llandrillo. It's about ten miles north of the tourist honeypot, Llangollen and five miles from the sleepy town of Corwen. We were booked for dinner, bed and breakfast at the stunning 'Tyddn Llan' – a magnificent Michelin starred restaurant with guest rooms, set within its own lovely gardens. Our hosts were celebrated Welsh chef, Brian Webb and his wife Susan. Brian's stunning cuisine brings visitors from all over the UK, and it's easy to see why. The menu is a triumph of fine British/European cooking at its best – served in Tyddn Llan's elegant dining room.

We feasted on treats such as lobster, Turbot with Leak Risotto on a red wine reduction followed by Pannacotta with strawberries. The food was spectacularly good. The restaurant is open to the public – including Sundays.

Our comfortable and characterful room at Tyddn Llan overlooked the lovely gardens and was equipped with everything we might need.





Chef Brian Webb



From Tyddn Llan we explored the surrounding area – taking in nearby Llangollen, and the magnificent Pontcysylte canal aqueduct over the River Dee, known locally as ‘the stream in the sky.’ It’s an incredible piece of engineering created by Thomas Telford in 1795. The structure is made from 18 piers, each 126 ft in height. The 19 arches each have a span of 45 ft. You can walk the entire length of the aqueduct, alongside the canal channel – vertigo sufferers be warned!

The canal ‘trough is just under 12 feet wide and 5ft 3 inches deep.

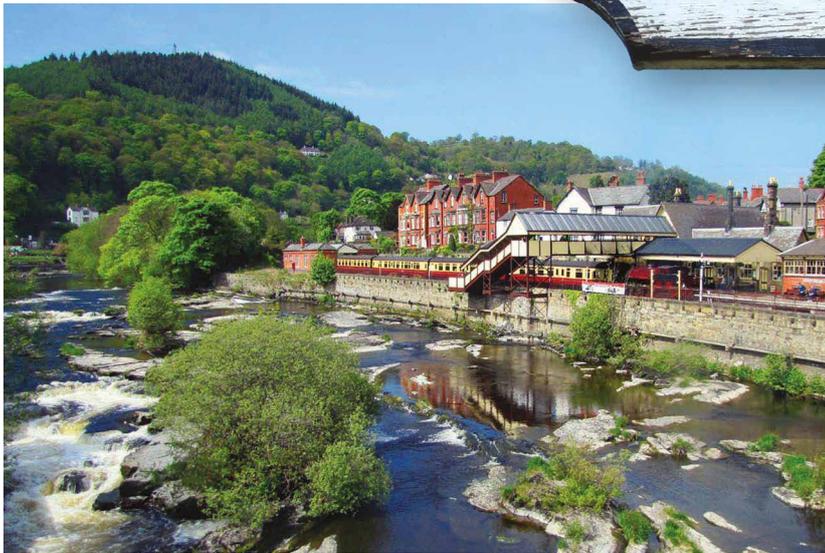
The piers of the structure are built from local stone and held together with a mortar made from Ox blood, lime and water, which – when combined – create a mixture akin to treacle toffee. Yuk.

Canal barge trips to the aqueduct can be taken from Llangollen Wharf. You can also take a 45 minute trip on a horse drawn barge to the famous Horseshoe Falls.

**‘The food was spectacularly good.’**



# LLANGOLLEN



The Langollen area is a haunt for adrenalin junkies. White Water Rafting is a popular pursuit, but be aware, your skills will be on show to a large audience, as some of the best rapids pass under the bridge in the centre of town. Kayaking and rock-climbing are also available in the area. After a hard day exploring, a glass of wine before dinner in Tyddn Llan's tranquil gardens was the perfect antidote.

Our day and night over we headed south towards Mid-Wales and our second destination – the spa town of Llandrindod Wells.

The journey of around two hours took us through some beautiful scenery – not the drama and majesty of Snowdonia to the north, but rolling green hills and pasture reminiscent of the Cotswolds. It's a cracking drive on generally quiet roads – the only blip being

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a short foray back across the border through Oswestry.

Our home for the night in Llandrindod Wells was the famous, four star Metropole Hotel. Built in 1896 it earned the mantle of largest hotel in Mid Wales. It's been owned by the same family throughout its life and is currently under the charge of Justin Baird-Murray, great, great grandson of the founder.

Despite its considerable size the Metropole retains its individuality and character. Whereas Llandrindod Wells may be a sleepy little town where not a lot happens, the Metropole attracts a large and varied clientele at all times of the year. During our stay no less than three vintage car clubs had descended on the hotel, turning the huge car park into a veritable motor museum.

Our newly refurbished room was spacious, comfortable and very well equipped and dinner in the hotel's highly regarded restaurant lived up to our expectations. The hotel offers a great selection of special packages for guests. Ours was the 'Pamper and Prosecco Spa Break.' Priced from just £74.50 per person (minimum two nights) it offered a three-course dinner in the beautiful Radnor Miles Restaurant, bed and breakfast, full use of the superb Rock Spa and swimming pool – including a 25 minute holistic treatment, and a free bottle of Prosecco on the first night of our stay.

The Metropole is unlike any other large hotel you might visit. From its striking green colour to its wonderfully eccentric décor it's a place to be enjoyed. The staff are warm and friendly

adding to the general feeling of well-being the place imparts.

Llandrindod Wells is the seat of Powys County Council and was developed as a spa town in the 19th century, around the apparent healing qualities of its local spring water.

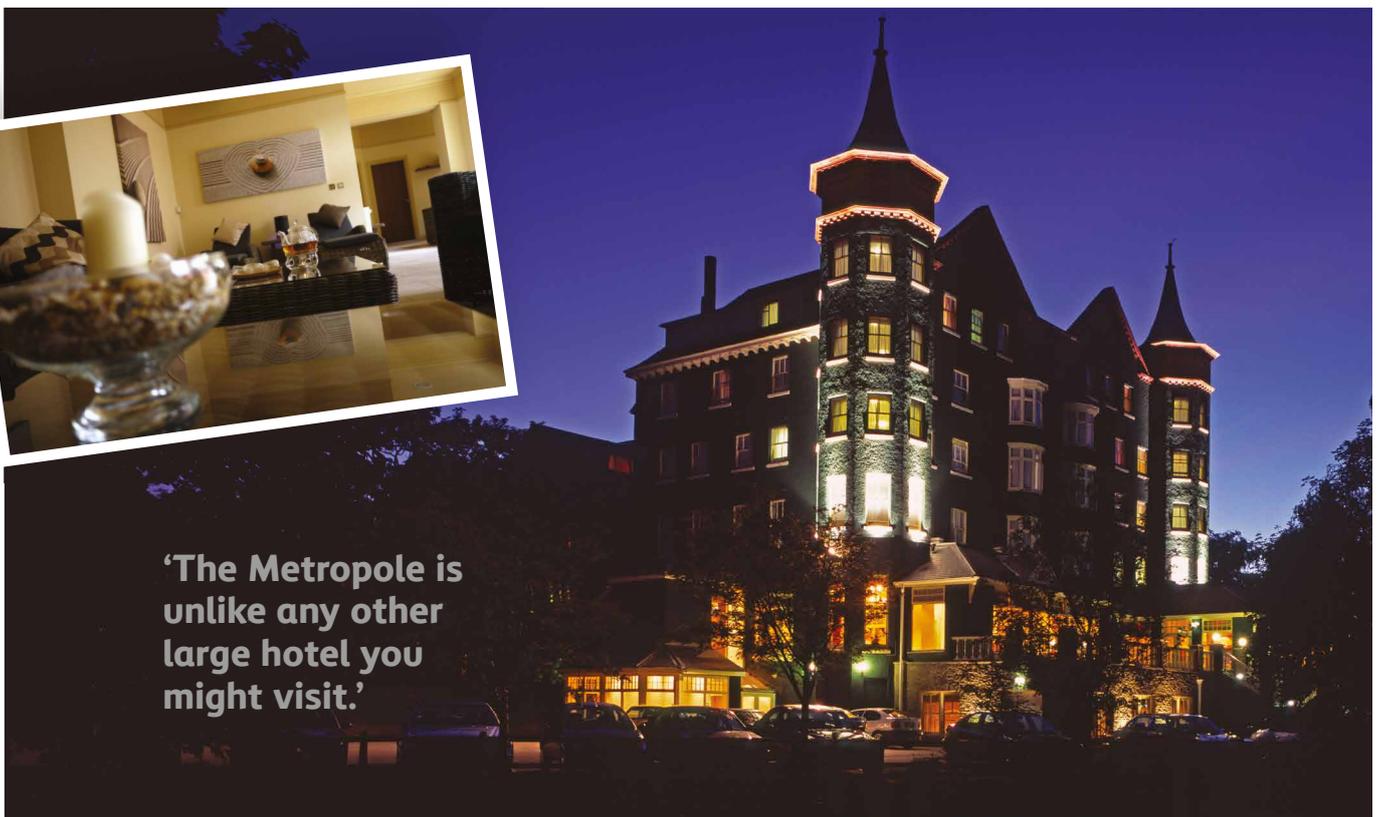
In recent times the recession has taken its toll with two of the town's main businesses – factories producing carpets and stationery products – having closed.

Despite the problems the town still retains its Victorian charm and is an excellent base for exploring the region's lovely countryside and hidden villages.

It's also a pleasant place to enjoy a stroll with plenty of green space and its own, man-made lake – complete with dragon sculpture. The lake was formed from a bog to create a focal



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point for the Pump House Hotel, which in the heyday of the town's spa, was a fashionable place to stay whilst taking the waters! The sculpture is a water serpent and leaping carp. Its scales are made from thousands of copper plates initialled by local people and visitors during the construction of the work.

Llandrindod Wells is also home to an 18 hole golf course and outdoor, international standard bowling greens, which regular host major competitions. The town stages

a Victorian Festival each year at the end of August, featuring open air street theatre and music, historical re-enactments, a fairground and craft fair.

A two night break comes to an end all too soon and before we knew it we were heading north to Liverpool to rendezvous with the Isle of Man Steam Packet's fastcraft Manannan for the journey home. The early evening departure time from Pier Head gave us time to enjoy a leisurely drive back from Mid-Wales – and fit in a bit of last minute shopping – one of the big advantages of having your own car on holiday!



#### Travel:

Isle of Man Steam Packet Company fastcraft Manannan to Liverpool. Douglas to Pier Head in just 2hrs 45 mins.

[www.steam-packet.com](http://www.steam-packet.com)

Tel: 661661 (IOM), 08722 992 992 (UK) or 0044 8722 992 992 (ROI & Outside UK).



#### Tyddyn Llan \*\*\*\*\*

Michelin starred restaurant with rooms, Llandrillo, nr Corwen, North Wales.

01490 440264 [www.tyddynllan.co.uk](http://www.tyddynllan.co.uk)

#### Metropole Hotel \*\*\*\*

Temple Street, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, Mid Wales, LD1 5DY.

01597 823700 [www.metropole.co.uk](http://www.metropole.co.uk)