

Mid-Wales



Falling between Snowdonia to the north and the Brecon Beacons National Park to the south, Mid-Wales is something of a well-kept secret. This is Wales at its most thoroughly rural, a landscape of lakes, forests, lustrous green fields and small market towns. It's also thoroughly Welsh, with three out of five people speaking the mother tongue. In 1974, Brecknockshire, Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire were combined into the vast new county of Powys, while Cardiganshire kept its boundaries but got back its ancient name, Ceredigion.

Mid-Wales isn't a secret, however, to people seeking out a more environmentally aware existence or an alternative lifestyle. The scenery, space and laid-back feel have been attracting hippies since the 1970s, while the superb Centre for Alternative Technology, situated near Machynlleth, has become the focal point for Wales' green consciousness.

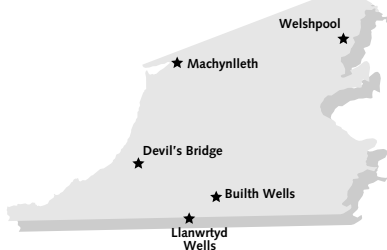
Elsewhere, the candyfloss-coloured university town and seaside resort of Aberystwyth has lots of student-powered fizz, and the trip from here to Devil's Bridge is one of Wales' best steam-train journeys. The lovely Heart of Wales railway line also crosses southern Powys, and this is fine walking, cycling and riding country.

The Mid-Wales cultural scene is also thriving, with Builth Wells the favourite of the old spa towns and home to both the excellent Wyeside Arts Centre and the annual Royal Welsh Show. Eccentric Llanwrtyd Wells, meanwhile, not only lies amid beautiful countryside, but also has established itself as Wales' capital of the quirky festival.

For information about Mid-Wales, see the website www.exploremidwales.com.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Save the planet by going green at the superb **Centre for Alternative Technology**, Machynlleth (p234)
- Take the pulse of the Mid-Wales cultural scene with a visit to the spa town of **Builth Wells** (p218)
- Revel in Welsh history with a stroll through the yew-laden terraces of Welshpool's **Powis Castle** (p228)
- Try snorkelling the bog or real ale wobbling at the increasingly wacky **Llanwrtyd Wells** (p216)
- Relive the age of steam with a ride out to Devil's Bridge on the narrow-gauge **Vale of Rheidol Railway** (p213)



ACTIVITIES

This is unspoilt walking country, with Offa's Dyke Path National Trail, a 177-mile path that runs the length of the Welsh border, the best trail for walkers. Also popular is Wales' newest national trail, the 132-mile Glyndŵr's Way that forms a huge arc through Powys, stretching from Knighton to Machynlleth and back to Welshpool. It takes in some fine countryside and follows in the footsteps of the Welsh hero Owain Glyndŵr. The Cambrian Way is a major walking path that crosses Ceredigion. For more on these trails see p62.

For bikers, Lôn Las Cymru, the Welsh National Cycling Route (Sustrans Rte 8), drops down through the Cambrian Mountains and the Mid-Wales backroads, making it a dream for tourers on two wheels.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The railway lines in Mid-Wales all run daily services, albeit often with reduced frequency on Sundays. The **Cambrian Line** (www.thecambrianline.co.uk) runs from Shrewsbury (England) to Aberystwyth via Machynlleth; the **Heart of Wales Line** (www.heart-of-wales.co.uk) runs from Shrewsbury to Swansea via Llandrindod Wells and Knighton.

Bus transport is patchy, especially in Powys, and services are rare on Sunday. Mid-Wales' major companies are **Arriva Cymru** (www.arrivabus.co.uk) based in Aberystwyth, and **Roy Brown's Coaches** (www.roybrownscoaches.co.uk) in Builth Wells.

For details of travel passes, see (p326).

CEREDIGION

CARDIGAN (ABERTEIFI)

☎ 01239 / pop 4200

With its long, festive main street rising from the river, and a colourful huddle of Georgian and Victorian houses clustered around the ruins of the old castle, Cardigan makes for a pleasant and picturesque stopover. Its position at the northern end of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path sees plenty of hikers coming and going, but there are lots of gentler ways to pass the time, from relaxing on the beach at Poppit Sands, to watching for otters at the Welsh Wildlife Centre.

Aberteifi, the Welsh name for Cardigan, refers to the town's location at the mouth of the River Teifi. In Elizabethan times this was Wales' second most important port, and

by the 18th century one of Britain's busiest seafaring centres. By the late 19th century, however, the railway was displacing sea transport, and the river began silting up.

Orientation & Information

The town centre lies on the northern bank of the River Teifi. From the main bus stop in Finch Sq, it's a 200m walk up Priory St to High St/Pendre, the town's main drag – turn right and then take the first left to find the tourist office.

Cardigan Library (☎ 612578; Pendre; 11 9.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, to 5pm Sat) Free internet access; on the top floor of the shopping arcade.

Cardigan Memorial Hospital (☎ 612214; Pont-y-Cleffion)

Intelligent Computers (11 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) Charges £1.50 per 30 minutes for internet access.

Police station (☎ 612209; Priory St)

Tourist office (☎ 613230; www.tourism.ceredigion.gov.uk; Bath House Rd; 11 10am–6pm Mon–Sat Jun–Aug, 10am–5pm Mon–Sat Sep–Jun) In the lobby of the Theatr Mwdlan.

Sights

The shored-up and overgrown walls of **Cardigan Castle** make for a sorry sight. Long neglected by its private owner – a private house was built within the walls in the 19th century – the crumbling castle was purchased by Ceredigion Council in 2003; plans are under way to restore it and open it to the public. It holds an important place in Welsh culture, having been the venue for the first competitive National Eisteddfod (see p47), held in 1176 under the aegis of Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd.

Just across Cardigan Bridge from the town centre, **Cardigan Heritage Centre** (☎ 614404; Teifi Wharf; adult/child £2/1; 11 10am–5pm mid-Mar–Nov) is housed in a restored 18th-century granary on what was once one of the busiest quays in the port. It explores Cardigan's history from pre-Norman times to the present day, with interactive displays for kids and a riverside café.

The neo-Gothic **Guildhall** (High St) dates from 1860, and is now home to **Cardigan Market**. The field cannon outside commemorates the Charge of the Light Brigade in 1854, which was led by Lord Cardigan (after whom the button-up woollen sweater was named).

Activities

The **Pembrokeshire Coastal Path** (see p197) finishes in St Dogmaels, a mile west of Cardigan town centre. You can hike the final section of



the coast path in reverse from Cardigan Bridge to Ceibwr Bay (9 miles) via Cemaes Head, then cut inland to Moylgrove village (1 mile) and return on the Poppit Rocket bus (see p165).

In the other direction, you can walk or cycle from Cardigan through the **Teifi Marshes** to the Welsh Wildlife Centre (see p210). Start from Finch Sq then head east along Pont-y-Cleifion to the roundabout and turn right, cross the bridge and descend the stairs on the right, then follow the trail east under the bridge (1 mile).

You can hire bikes from **New Image Bicycles** (% 621275; 29-30 Pendre) for £12/18 per half-day/day.

If you fancy taking to the river, head for **Heritage Canoes** (% 613961; www.heritagecanoes.co.uk) at the Welsh Wildlife Centre (p210). They offer guided canoe trips through Cilgerran Gorge on the River Teifi (adult/child £25/15 for 2½ hours).

Festivals & Events

The **Cardigan Festival of Walking** takes place over the first weekend in October, with themed walks around the area, plus talks, exhibitions

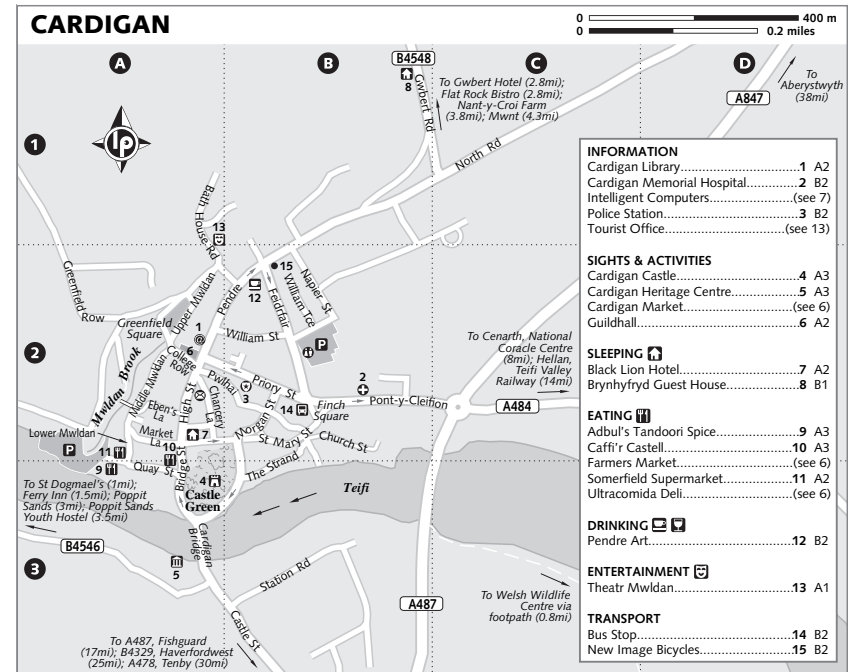
and much quaffing of beer. There's also the one-day **Cardigan River & Food Festival** in the middle of August, with food stalls, cooking demonstrations, a summer pageant and boat races. For information on events in town call % 615554.

A **farmers market** (h 10am-2pm) is held in Pendre Car Park in the Upper Market Hall of the Guildhall on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month, from April to December.

Sleeping

Nant y Croi Farm (% 614024; www.nant-y-croi.co.uk; Ferwig; sites per tent £10-15, B&B per person £25-30) This working farm, 4 miles north of Cardigan, offers B&B in the farmhouse, and camping on a site overlooking the sea. It has its own private cove, and is only 15 minutes' walk along the coastal path from the beach at Mwnt.

Poppit Sands Youth Hostel (% 0870 7705996; Sea View, Poppit; dm £14; h Easter-Oct) Tucked on a hillside overlooking the sweeping beach of Poppit Sands, this hostel is housed in a former inn close to the end of the Pembrokeshire Coastal Path. It's 3½ miles northwest of Cardigan; take bus 405 or 407 from Finch Sq to Poppit Sands, from where it's a half-mile walk.



Brynhryfd Guest House (☎ 612861; g.arcus@btinternet.com; Park Place, Gwbert Rd; s/d £30/45) This large and long-established guesthouse is in a spacious Victorian villa less than ten minutes' walk northeast of the town centre; the hearty breakfast will set you up for the rest of the day.

Black Lion Hotel (☎ 612532; www.theblacklioncardigan.com; High St; s/d/t £40/60/90; ♪) A former coaching inn, the Black Lion has large, comfortable, pine-furnished rooms, some with timber beams and exposed stonework. There's also a family room that sleeps five (£120).

Gwbert Hotel (☎ 612638; www.gwberthotel.net; Gwbert-on-Sea; s/d from £50/80; ♪) With refurbished rooms decked out in stylish shades of cream, chocolate and red, stunning sea views (ask for room 3 or 4) and coastal walks beginning at the front door, the Gwbert – on the coast 3 miles north of town – makes a good out-of-town choice.

Eating & Drinking

Caffi'r Castell (☎ 621882; 26 Quay St; mains £2.50-5; ♪ 9am-6pm) A deservedly busy little corner café, with sunny outdoor tables in summer, the Castell does good coffees, cakes and hot snacks.

Ultracomida Deli (Cardigan Market Hall, High St; mains £3-5; ♪ deli 10am-4pm, café 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sat) This deli counter in the market hall serves hot panini, chunky Spanish tortilla and paella, as well as a perfect café latte made with organic Welsh milk. Sample local cheeses before you buy; it's a great place to shop for picnic food.

Ferry Inn (☎ 615172; Poppit Rd, St Dogmaels; mains £6-7) This is a snug old-fashioned pub overlooking the river on the road to Poppit Sands, with real ale, good food and a great deck for sunny days.

Abdul's Tandoori Spice (☎ 621416; 2 Royal Oak, Quay St; mains £6-10; ♪ 5-11.45pm) Abdul's, which enjoys a loyal local following, is a cut above your usual curry house, with a warm and cosy atmosphere and consistently tasty tandoori dishes.

Flat Rock Bistro (☎ 612638; Gwbert Hotel, Gwbert-on-Sea; mains £8-15) Head three miles north to Gwbert for this stylish bistro with an outdoor terrace, great sea views and a menu of good seafood (roast sea bass with citrus butter), Welsh beef (fillet steak with stilton and port sauce) and a range of sandwiches and snacks.

Pendre Art (☎ 615151; 35 Pendre; ♪ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) This art gallery has an excellent coffee shop serving freshly ground Ferrari coffee and tea with home-baked scones.

For evening pub grub, your best bet is the **Black Lion Hotel** (see above). Self-caterers can

shop at **Somerfield supermarket** (Lower Mwldan; ♪ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun).

Entertainment

Theatr Mwldan (☎ 621200; www.mwldan.co.uk; Bath House Rd) Located in the former slaughterhouse, Theatr Mwldan stages comedy, drama, dance, music and film, and has an art gallery and a good café. In the summer there are open-air productions.

Getting There & Away

Richards Brothers' bus 412 runs to Cardigan from Haverfordwest (£4, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) and Fishguard (50 minutes). Richards Brothers' bus X50 goes to Aberystwyth (£4, 1½ hours, three daily Monday to Saturday).

AROUND CARDIGAN

The **Welsh Wildlife Centre** (☎ 01239-621600; admission free, parking £3; Visitor Centre ♪ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Oct) is an interpretation centre for the Teifi Marshes Nature Reserve, just southeast of Cardigan. The reserve borders the River Teifi and features river, marsh and woodland habitats, and is a haven for birds, otters, badgers and butterflies.

There are several short waymarked trails, most of them wheelchair accessible. There are plans to improve the centre and install live feeds from remote cameras on the reserve and also on Skomer Island (p183) so that you can watch nesting birds without causing disturbance. There's also a shop and café. The centre is about a mile from Cardigan along a riverside path, or 4 miles by road.

The village of Cenarth occupies a picturesque spot on the River Teifi, at the foot of a stretch of rocky rapids. It's home to the **National Coracle Centre** (☎ 01239-710980; www.coracle-centre.co.uk; Cenarth; admission £3; ♪ 10.30am-6pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Thu-Sun Nov & Dec), a collection of coracles (small boats made of hide and wicker) from all over the world, along with exhibits and demonstrations showing how these fragile craft were made and used.

Cenarth is 8 miles southeast of Cardigan, and can be reached by taking First Cymru bus 460 (15 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday) from the main bus stop in Finch Sq, Cardigan.

Pocket-size steam locomotives puff their way along the wonderful little **Teifi Valley Railway** (☎ 01559-371077; www.teifivalleyrailway.co.uk; adult/child £5.50/3.50; ♪ Apr-Oct), a 2-mile stretch of narrow-

gauge line at Henllan (14 miles east of Cardigan). They run to a complicated timetable, so check on the website or with the Cardigan tourist office before making the trip.

First Cymru buses 460 and 461 run from Cardigan to Henllan (40 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday).

ABERYSTWYTH

☎ 01970 / pop 12,000

Thanks to its status as one of the liveliest university towns in Wales, and its excellent range of options for eating out, drinking and taking in some great Welsh culture, Aberystwyth is an essential stop along the Ceredigion coast. It's a particularly buzzy town during term time and retains a cosmopolitan feel year-round. Alongside these facets of Aberystwyth life, the trappings of a stately Georgian seaside resort remain, with an impressive promenade skirted by a sweep of pastel-coloured buildings. Welsh is widely spoken here and locals are proud of their heritage.

When pub culture and student life get too much for you though, the quintessential Aberystwyth experience remains soaking up the sunset over Cardigan Bay and enjoying a moment's contemplation from the promenade.

History

Like many other towns in Wales, Aberystwyth is a product of Edward I's mania for castle-building. The now mainly ruined castle was erected in 1277; like many other castles in Wales it was captured by Owain Glyndŵr at the start of the 15th century and wrecked by Oliver Cromwell's forces during the Civil War. By the beginning of the 19th century, the town's walls and gates had completely disappeared.

The town developed a fishing industry, and silver and lead mining were also important here. With the arrival of the railway in 1864, it reinvented itself as a resort appealing to genteel Victorian sensibilities. In 1872 Aberystwyth was chosen as the site of the first college of the University of Wales, and in 1907 it became home to the National Library of Wales, a building which was dramatically but tastefully redeveloped following a £2.4 million investment grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2001 (see p213).

Orientation

Aberystwyth sits where the River Rheidol and the smaller River Ystwyth empty into

Cardigan Bay, at the end of the railway line that crosses Mid-Wales. Beaches make up the town's entire western side. The train station is located at the southeastern end of town at the bottom of Terrace Rd, a thoroughfare that dissects the town and leads directly to the North Sea seafront by means of a brisk 10-minute stroll.

Regional buses and National Express coaches stop just northeast of the train station on Alexandra Rd; a new stop for Traws-Cambria buses is located immediately east of the station forecourt.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 612125; cnr Terrace Rd & Bath St; ♪ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 10am-6pm daily Jun-early Sep) is located downstairs in the same building as the Ceredigion Museum (see p213). This helpful office has a useful stock of maps and books on local history; staff can help to arrange accommodation.

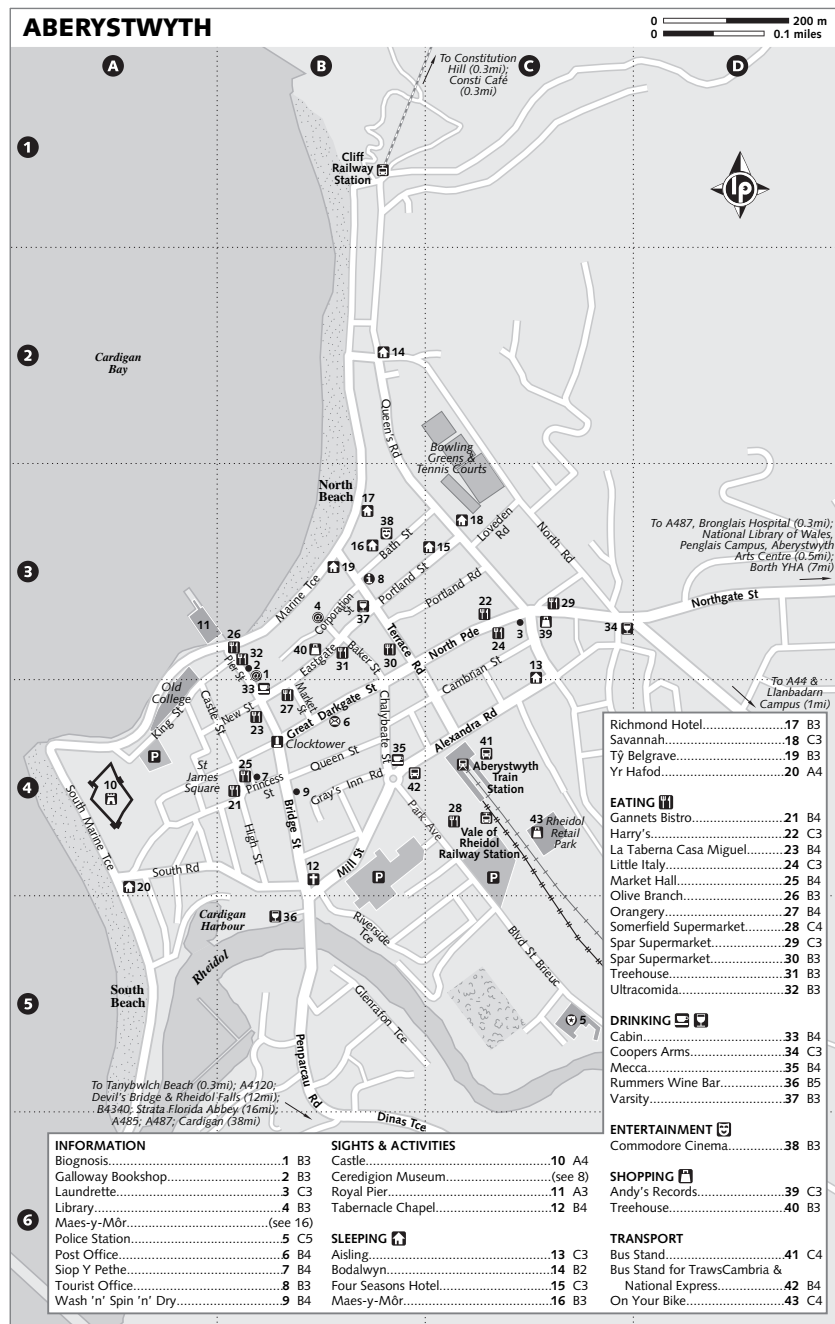
All major UK banks have branches (with ATMs) on Great Darkgate St or around the corner on Terrace Rd. The **post office** (8 Great Darkgate St; ♪ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) has a foreign exchange facility. There's free internet access at the **library** (☎ 617464; Corporation St; ♪ 9.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) and at the community-style centre, **Biognosis**, (☎ 636953; 21 Pier St; ♪ 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri), which charges £3 per hour (£2.50 per hour if you plug in your own laptop) and offers a raft of secretarial services, such as printing and fax.

Siop Y Pethe (Princess St) is a good, small bookshop with some Welsh language books and information on local folklore. **Galloway Bookshop** (Pier St) has an array of maps, guidebooks and novels.

The **University of Aberystwyth** (www.aber.ac.uk), with more than 7000 students, is split into two campuses – one at Penglais, about half a mile northeast up Penglais Rd (A487), and at Llanbadarn, a mile southeast of the centre.

Places to do your washing include **Maes-y-Môr** (Bath St; ♪ 8.30-9pm), which also offers budget accommodation, (see p213); **Wash 'n' Spin 'n' Dry** (Bridge St; ♪ 9-6pm) and **Laundrette** (75 North Pde; ♪ 9-7pm).

In case of emergency, **Bronglais Hospital** (☎ 623131; Caradoc Rd) is about 500m from the centre, off the A44; the **police station** (☎ 0845 3302000; Blvd St Brieuc) is two blocks south of the train station.



Sights & Activities

ALONG THE WATERFRONT

A stroll along Marine Tce, the walkway overlooking North Beach, is the most genteel pursuit on offer and one that harks back to the town's erstwhile halcyon days as a Victorian resort. When you reach the bottom of the 1.5-mile prom, it's customary to kick the white bar, although the locals can't seem to explain the rationale behind this ritual.

North Beach is lined by faintly shabby Georgian hotels, albeit with a couple of notable exceptions. The top-heavy **Royal Pier** lumbers out to sea under the weight of its cheerfully tacky amusements arcade. North Beach is also the main swimming beach as South Beach has few facilities, although both beaches have lifeguards and an EU blue-flag rating. Many locals prefer the stony but emptier **Tanybwch Beach**, just south of the harbour where the Rivers Rheidol and Ystwyth meet. It's a great spot for a bracing stroll and some terrific ozone-fuelled views.

The enigmatic, sparse ruins of the **castle** sit looking out to sea from the corner of the prom, which pivots and leads along South Beach – a more desolate, but still attractive seafront.

CONSTITUTION HILL

At the northern end of North Beach is Aberystwyth's headland, **Constitution Hill** (430ft). Victorian tourists enjoyed a stately ride to the summit from 1896 onwards, and you can too, on the trundling little **Cliff Railway** (% 617642; adult/child £2.50/1.50; 11 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Mar), the UK's longest electric funicular and possibly the slowest too at a G-force-busting 4mph.

From the wind-blown balding hilltop there are tremendous, long coastal views – 60 miles from the Llŷn to Strumble Head – and you can spot 26 mountain peaks including Snowdon. The site has been redeveloped in recent years with new children's attractions, including gold panning and go-karts. The erstwhile Victorian tearooms have been rebuilt in line with environmental considerations and the resulting **Consti Café** (11 10am-5pm Mon-Wed & Sun, to 9pm Thu-Sat; lunch specials around £5, steaks from £10) is a café by day and licensed steakhouse three nights per week. It also features displays of the wildlife you can spot on a, ahem, constitutional around the hill. One relic of the Victorian structure that survived the revamp is a **camera obscura** (an immense pinhole camera or projecting telescope) that allows you to see practically into the windows of the houses below.

VALE OF RHEIDOL RAILWAY

One of Aberystwyth's most popular attractions is a one-hour ride on the **narrow-gauge railway** (% 625819; www.rheidolrailway.co.uk; adult/child return £12.50, £3 each for first 2 children, £6.25 each additional child; 2 departures per day in low season, 4 in summer), one of the most scenic of Wales' many 'little trains'. Old steam locomotives, lovingly restored by volunteers, chug for almost 12 miles up the valley of the River Rheidol to Devil's Bridge (see above). The line opened in 1902 to bring lead and timber out of the valley; the engines were built by the Great Western Railway between 1923 and 1938.

NATIONAL LIBRARY

Half a mile east of town, the **National Library of Wales** (% 623800; www.llgc.org.uk; admission free; 11 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is an imposing hilltop spread of a building, with great views. It holds superb, intelligent, innovative exhibitions – at one of these, visitors were invited to graffiti their comments on the walls – and opened a new visitor centre in 2003. Founded in 1911, the library holds more than five million books in many languages – it's a copyright library so it has copies of every book published in the UK. Among its ancient manuscripts is the oldest existing Welsh text, the 12th-century *Black Book of Carmarthen*. The turn is off Penglais Rd, taking a right just beyond the hospital.

CEREDIGION MUSEUM

The **Ceredigion Museum** (% 633088; Terrace Rd; admission free; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), sharing a building with the tourist office, is located in the Coliseum, which opened in 1905 as a theatre and served as a cinema from 1932 onwards. It has a wonderful spacious, elegant interior, complete with stage, and features entertaining exhibitions on Aberystwyth's history – everything from pianos played for silent films to old chemist furnishings and hand-knitted woollen knickers.

Sleeping

Borth YHA (% 08707 705708; Morlais; dm adult/child £11.95/8.95; 11 mid-Mar–Oct) This Edwardian property situated at Borth, seven miles north of Aberystwyth along the B4572, is best known for its setting: overlooking Cardigan Bay and just a stone's throw from the beach with a blue-flag rating.

Maes-y-Môr (% 639270; 25 Bath St; dm £15) Yes, that is a laundrette. But don't be fooled: venture upstairs from the drying machine and

there's a clean, bright and inviting independent hostel with 15 beds – it's the cheapest place to sleep in the city centre.

Savannah (☎ 651131; www.savannahguesthouse.co.uk; 27 Queen's Rd; s/d from £26/52) Central, cheap and relatively cheerful, this is the pick of the budget options for a bed in the heart of the city centre.

Aisling (☎ 626980; 21 Alexandra Rd; s/d £30/50; 𠁞) The closest B&B to the train station, Aisling (the name means 'a dream' in Irish Gaelic) is a welcoming spot. The rooms may be a bit flowery but the Irish landlady is very knowledgeable about the local area.

Yr Hafod (☎ 617579; 1 South Marine Tce; s/d £30/50) The best of the B&Bs along this stretch of the seafont, this place has basic rooms but great sea views and friendly service.

Bodalwyn (☎ 612578; www.bodalwyn.co.uk; Queen's Rd; s/d/fm £45/65/80; 𠁞 𠁞) This upmarket B&B in a handsome Edwardian house feels like a big, comfy family house. The rooms have tasteful fittings and the owners serve up a huge breakfast (with vegetarian options), making for an all-round comfortable stay – a touch of class while feeling right at home.

Four Seasons Hotel (☎ 612120; www.fourseasons.hotel.uk.com; 50-54 Portland St; s/d £50/75) The sister property to Tŷ Belgrave is older and humbler, offering a comfortable midrange option, located down a quiet sidestreet.

Tŷ Belgrave (☎ 630553; www.tybelgravehouse.co.uk; Marine Tce; s/d/fm £50/75/80; 𠁞 𠁞) The latest opening in town is also by far the smartest, with a very contemporary feel and good facilities – including wi-fi internet to cater for the business market. Rooms are tastefully decorated with a dash of funky boutique-hotel chic while a downstairs bar and lounge area is the place to take in the view across the bay from a comfy leather sofa.

Richmond Hotel (☎ 612201; www.richmondhotel.co.uk.com; 44-50 Marine Tce; s/d from £55/85) The Richmond is a typical seaside hotel with bay-fronted windows overlooking Cardigan Bay. Professional but plain, it's a good family option but these days lacks its former sparkle.

Eating

Ultra Comida (☎ 630686; Pier St; 𠁞 10-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Spanish, French and Welsh produce are the mainstays of this excellent little deli. Currently it's only take-away fare, but the owners are planning an extension for a small restaurant to be added in 2007.

La Taberna Casa Miguel (☎ 627677; 1 New St; tapas £4 per dish, paella for 2 people £18; 𠁞 6.30-10pm Mon-Sat) Spanish cuisine and tapas are the house specials at this popular little eatery one block back from the pier.

Little Italy (☎ 625707; 51 North Pde; mains £8 𠁞 5.45pm-late Mon-Fri, 10am-late Sat & Sun) With red-and-white chequered tablecloths, this is the cosy, wine-bottle-in-baskets kind of Italian eatery. It's also popular, with a big menu of traditional Italian favourites including good vegetarian options. There's also a decent Sunday lunch (£8). Main meals on other days are around the same price.

Orangery (☎ 617606; Market St; mains £10; 𠁞 10am-11pm) The smartest place in town brings a brand-new sense of style to Aberystwyth: think palm trees and wicker chairs arranged around chunky wooden tables strewn with newspapers, all located in the erstwhile Talbot Inn, a 19th-century coaching house. The space is divided between a restaurant, a cocktail bar with bar snacks (around £8) and a family room where children are welcome until 8pm. Quality produce and a lively feel add to the kudos.

Olive Branch (☎ 630572; 35 Pier St; mains £10; 𠁞 9.30am-10pm daily) A newcomer to the local dining scene, this Greek restaurant is open all day for fair-trade Arabic coffee, snack lunches (toasties around £2.50) and traditional Greek dinners with a mix of dips, spreads and hot and cold meze. If the fug gets too much downstairs, head up to the quieter, nonsmoking restaurant on the second floor.

Treehouse (☎ 615791; 14 Baker St; 𠁞 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Located upstairs from an inviting food shop in an attractive Victorian house, this excellent organic restaurant uses locally grown produce. A wide menu of organic fare makes this one of the best places for lunch in town. It's sister venue is the Treehouse fair-trade shop (see opposite).

Gannets Bistro (☎ 617164; 7 St James Square; mains £12; 𠁞 noon-2pm & 6-9.30pm Mon, Wed-Sat) A cheery, long-standing bistro, this bistro offers hearty food in huge portions, with lots of fresh fish, simply cooked. There are decent vegetarian options.

Harry's (☎ 612647; www.harrysaberystwyth.com; 40-46 North Pde; mains £12; 𠁞 6-10.30pm Mon-Sat) Candlelit, warm and friendly, Harry's restaurant is a smart place, serving up an imaginative menu of tasty, well-presented meals to patrons in a relaxed bistro-style setting. Local

fish is a house speciality and there's also a stylish bar area for a pre-prandial sniffer. Upstairs is accommodation, with a maze of cheery and comfortable rooms for visitors (s/d £50/60).

For self-caterers, there are two **Spar supermarkets** (Northgate St & Terrace Rd) and a **Somerfield supermarket** is beside the train station.

A big **farmers market** (and crafts fair) clusters around the **Market Hall** (St James Square) on the third Friday of the month.

Drinking

Mecca (☎ 61288; 25 Chalybeale St; 𠁞 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) This great little café serves up superb espressos and a range of specialty teas and coffees. Directly opposite, the Mecca shop is great for stocking up on caffeine-addict paraphernalia.

Cabin (☎ 617398; Pier St; 𠁞 9.30-5pm Mon-Sat) A simple little coffee shop with lots of pictures of old film stars on the walls, this is a relaxed spot for coffees and snacks.

Varsity (☎ 615234; Portland St; j) Spacious, simple and student-friendly, Varsity has huge pipes running around the ceiling and big windows for watching activity on the street. It's packed on weekend nights and relaxing during the daytime when you can make the most of the free wi-fi internet.

Rummers Wine Bar (☎ 625177; Bridge St) Right by the river, this popular place has seats outside for summer nights, a friendly vibe and some live bands. Bar food is served evenings only.

Coopers Arms (☎ 624050; Northgate St) This popular, friendly pub is good for a pint and a chance to catch some live music.

Entertainment

One of the largest arts centres in Wales, **Aberystwyth Arts Centre** (☎ 623232; www.aberystwythartscentre.co.uk; Penglais Rd; box office 𠁞 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 1.30pm-5.30pm Sun) has excellent opera, drama, dance and concerts (all of which can also be booked at the tourist office), plus a bookshop, an art gallery and a good, albeit slightly uncomfortably stylish, café. The cinema in particular shows a good range of world and foreign-language cinema. The centre is half a mile east of the town centre.

Commodore Cinema (☎ 612421; www.commodorecinema.co.uk; Bath St) shows current mainstream releases in the evening and has a weekend matinee. There's even a bar here for a pre-flick beer.

Aberystwyth Male Voice Choir (Mill St; free entry) rehearses at the Tabernacle Chapel at 7.45pm most Thursdays, except during August.

Shopping

Andy's Records (☎ 624581; 4 Northgate St; 𠁞 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) is a handy independent record shop that also sells gig tickets for bands at the university.

Treehouse (☎ 625116; www.treehousewales.co.uk; 3 Eastgate St; 𠁞 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) The sister property to the Treehouse deli and restaurant (opposite), this great little boutique specialises in organic and fair-trade home-ware and baby goods.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Major bus connections include: Arriva buses 550 and X50 to Cardigan (two hours, hourly), with a change of bus near New Quay. Arriva buses 28 to Dolgellau (two hours 20 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday) via Machynlleth (45 minutes, every two hours). Arriva bus X32 to Bangor (three hours 15 minutes, four daily). Arriva's TrawsCambria bus X40 goes to Cardiff (four hours, twice daily). National Express coach 419 runs once daily to London (seven hours) via Birmingham (four hours).

TRAIN

Aberystwyth is the terminus of Arriva's Cambrian Coast railway line, which crosses Mid-Wales en route to Shrewsbury (£15.90, one hour 55 minutes) via Machynlleth (£3.80, 30 minutes). Services run every two hours (less frequently on Sunday). The Cambrian Coast line also runs to Pwllheli (£10, four hours, every two hours).

Getting Around

The quickest bus to/from the Penglais campus (five minutes, every 15 minutes) is Arriva's bus 501.

On Your Bike (☎ 626532; Craft, Rheidol Retail Park; 𠁞 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) hires out mountain bikes from £12 a day.

AROUND ABERYSTWYTH Devil's Bridge & Rheidol Falls

The dramatic **Devil's Rheidol** (☎ 890233; adult/child £2.50/1.30; 𠁞 9.45am-5pm Apr-Oct, other times access via Number 2 turnstile) spans the Rheidol Valley on the lush western slopes of the 2400ft Plynlimon Fawr (Pumlumon), source of the Rivers

Wye and Severn. Here the Rivers Mynach and Rheidol tumble together in a narrow gorge.

The Mynach is spanned by three famous stone bridges. The lowest and oldest is believed to have been built by the monks of Strata Florida Abbey before 1188. Just above the confluence, the Rheidol drops 90m in a series of spectacular waterfalls. Access to the waterfalls and the old bridges is from beside the topmost bridge, which is itself 300m downhill from the terminus of the Vale of Rheidol Railway. There are two possible walks: one, to view the three bridges, takes only 10 minutes; the other, a half-hour walk, descends 100 steps (Jacob's Ladder), crosses the Mynach and ascends the other side, passing what is said to have been a robbers' cave.

The Vale of Rheidol Railway (see p213) is the most delightful way to reach Devil's Bridge. An alternative is the new Rheidol Cycle Trail, a 22-mile, partly off-road trail that shadows and occasionally crisscrosses the A4120 through the Rheidol Valley.

Strata Florida Abbey

On an isolated, peaceful site southeast of Aberystwyth lies this 12th-century **Cistercian abbey** (% 01974-831261; adult/child £2/1.50; 10am-5pm Apr-Sep). The sparse ruins retain a simple, complete arch, with lines like thick rope, and there are two covered chapels with some 14th-century tiling. The Cistercians were a monastic order with roots in France, and the community at Strata Florida (Ystrad Fflur or 'Valley of the Flowers') was founded in 1164 by a Norman lord named Robert FitzStephen.

After Welsh resurgence in the southwest however, the independent, self-sufficient Cistercians won the support of the Welsh princes. Their abbeys also became a focus for literary activity and influence. The present site was established under Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd, and a number of princes of Deheubarth, as well as the great 14th-century poet Dafydd ap Gwilym, are buried here.

The site is a mile down a farm road from the village of Pontrhydfendigaid on the B4343; the village is 15 miles from Aberystwyth or 9.5 miles south of Devil's Bridge. Bus T21 (£2, 45 minutes) has four daily services Monday to Saturday from Aberystwyth, with four daily services Monday to Saturday running in the opposite direction from Pontrhydfendigaid.

SOUTHERN POWYS

LLANWRTYD WELLS (LLANWRTYD)

% 01591 / pop 800

Llanwrtyd (khlan-oor-tid) Wells is an odd little town: mostly deserted but, during one of its weird and wacky festivals, packed to the rafters with an influx of merrymakers. According to the *Guinness Book of Records*, it is the UK's smallest town – some local residents even claim that to cling onto this status there's a periodic cull.

The one certainty is that, despite its new-found status as the capital of wacky Wales, Llanwrtyd Wells is surrounded by beautiful walking, cycling and riding country with the Cambrian Mountains to the northwest and the Mynydd Epynt to the southeast. When you're not outdoors, the festival of unorthodox events now extends to cover each month of the year.

Theophilus Evans, the local vicar, first discovered the healing properties of the Ffynon Droellwyd (Stinking Well) in 1732 and found it cured his scurvy. The popularity of the waters grew and Llanwrtyd became a spa town. Nowadays, however, its wells have been capped and, outside of the festivals, it's hard to find much by way of vital signs.

Orientation & Information

The town centre is Y Sgwar (The Square), the five-way intersection by the old bridge on which the A483 crosses the River Irfon. Virtually nothing in town is much more than a stone's throw away from here. The train station is a located half a mile south of the tourist office.

The independently run **tourist office** (% 610666; <http://llanwrtyd-wells.powys.org.uk>; Irfon Tce; 10am-6pm Mon, Wed-Sat) is staffed by volunteers and has been keeping erratic hours due to a shortage of staff. When it is open, they sell useful walking and cycling leaflets and offer free **internet access** (£2.50 per hr).

The police station is right next door and a Barclays Bank, directly opposite, is the only bank in town. There's no ATM.

Take your chances with **car parking** – there's a roadside space just over the bridge by the **post office** (10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat).

Activities

The hills around Llanwrtyd are crisscrossed with country lanes, bridlepaths and footpaths, with distractingly beautiful scenery – it's dream

THE BOG STAR

Twenty or so years ago, while mulling over a pint on how to encourage tourism in Llanwrtyd in the dark winter months, some citizens started an inspired roll call of unconventionality. The first of the town's unusual events was the **Man Versus Horse Marathon** in 1980. This has become an annual jamboree each June, and has resulted in some tense finishes – a two-legged runner won for the first time in 2004 (the prize is £25,000).

Very well subscribed are the **Real Ale Wobble** and **Real Ale Ramble** (on bikes and foot respectively), with pint rather than pit stops (both held annually in autumn).

At New Year, the ancient practice of parading a horse's skull from house to house while reciting Welsh poetry (the horse's jaw mouths the words) has been revived.

Most famous of all, however, is the **World Bog Snorkelling Championships**, which attracts an international field. Competitors are allowed snorkels and flippers to get along the 60-yard trench, but may not use conventional swimming strokes. There are prizes for the slowest time as well as the fastest. One runner-up said: 'It's an unforgiving sport, you get bitten by insects, very dirty, smelly and you are wet all day.' Another variation involves cycling through the bog trench (like trying to ride through treacle).

Many of these ideas were generated by Gordon Green, who ran the Neuadd Arms for 26 years. One future proposal is a race between a Celtic and Roman chariot, as part of the Saturnalia Roman Festival in January. Saturnalia currently involves, among other things, tucking into stuffed bull's testicles – a Roman treat.

territory for horse riders, mountain-bikers (with lots of forest trails) and rambles.

The main activity operator in town is the **Red Kite Mountain Bike Centre** (% 610236; www.neuaddarmshotel.co.uk; Y Sgwar) based at the Neuadd Arms Hotel (see right), which runs walking, biking or pony trekking trips. Prices for an all-inclusive weekend start from £90 per person, based on full-board B&B accommodation and two days' guided biking.

Sleeping & Eating

Stonecroft Lodge (% 610327; www.stonecroft.co.uk; DoleCoed Rd; dm £14; bar meals £9; 10am-5.11pm, meals noon-2.45pm Fri-Sun & 6.15-8.45pm daily) This independent, bunk-free hostel is located above a friendly, popular pub with something of a party vibe, real ales, live music and bar meals. There are 28 beds split over nine rooms, some of which are doubles or family rooms providing extra privacy; prices are hiked by a few pounds during events and bank holidays but all bedding is provided. The owner takes an active role in local events and also rents out a self-catering holiday cottage (from £500 for two nights).

Drovers Rest (% 610264; www.food-food-food.co.uk; Y Sgwar; s/d £25/48; café meals 10.30am-5.30pm, dinner 7.30-9.30pm) This restaurant with rooms is better known for the former than the latter with a snug little restaurant serving up the best of local fresh produce. By day it's a relaxed affair but in the evening the dinner is a grander, fine-dining

experience (from £25.95); Sunday roasts (12.30 to 2.30pm; from £10.50) are also excellent. The owners also run regular cooking classes – call for details of the next course.

Neuadd Arms Hotel (% 610236; www.neuaddarmshotel.co.uk; Y Sgwar; s/d £32/55; bar meals £6, set menu from £13.50) The town's big, central inn has basic B&B rooms in a creaky old place, but at least the bar has a roaring fire to keep out winter chills. Eating options are good, with the bar given over to bar meals and a more formal dining room serving a table d'hôte menu. It's also the base for activity weekends organised by the Red Kite Mountain Bike Centre (see left).

Lasswade (% 610515; www.lasswadehotel.co.uk; s/d from £50/70; 10 p) The closest place to the train station, Lasswade is an Edwardian country-house-style property which has good green credentials given its pro-organic stance and nonsmoking policy. The rooms tend towards the floral but there are also some nice touches, such as a sauna and a drying room for walkers' kits. The decent breakfast is served in a conservatory area with great rural views.

Carlton House (% 610248; www.carltonrestaurant.co.uk; DoleCoed Rd; r £60-90; mains £23; 10am-11pm Mon-Sat) This upscale restaurant with rooms has a boutique feel and a mantelpiece that positively groans under the strain of awards for its foodie achievements. The rooms are traditional and tasteful but it's the restaurant that attracts the greatest

critical acclaim for its changing menu, imaginative use of local produce and impressive wine list. Ask about all-inclusive foodie breaks.

Getting There & Away

The best way to reach Llanwrtyd is on the Heart of Wales railway line, as spa guests did a century ago. Services run to Llandrindod Wells (£3.20, 30 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday), and Swansea (£10.50, one hour 55 minutes).

There are scant useful bus services; ask the tourist office for details of rare local bus connections.

BUILTH WELLS (LLANFAIR-YM-MUALLT)

☎ 01982 / pop 2350

Builth (pronounced bilth) Wells is by far the most lively and worthwhile of the former spa towns, with a bustling, workaday feel. Once the playground of the Welsh working classes, today it's based around a few main streets and sits prettily on the river.

While there are few attractions per se, it's a good base for the area, particularly for walkers on the Wye Valley walk and bikers on the Lôn Las Cymru cycle route, with decent eating and dining options. Book well ahead, however, during the **Royal Welsh Agricultural Show** (www.rwas.co.uk), when farmers flock to the town for this annual event, held at the end of July. The show, which was founded in 1904, involves everything from livestock judging to lumberjack competitions. The event is organised by the **Royal Welsh Agricultural Society** (☎ 553683) and held at the Royal Welsh Showgrounds at Llanelwedd, just across the bridge over the River Wye.

There's a massive range of other events held there too, such as the **Bike Show** in May, when a grungy biker crowd roar into town, and the **Dog Show** in August, which attracts around 11,000 mutts.

Gilmery, two miles up the Llandoverly road, is where Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, last of the Welsh Princes of Wales, was killed in a chance encounter with a lone English soldier in 1282. The spot is marked with a sad obelisk of Caernarfon granite.

Orientation and Information

The very helpful **tourist office** (☎ 553307; www.builth-wells.co.uk; The Grow; 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Nov-Mar) is located in the **car park** (£0.40 per hr

by the 18th-century arched bridge, next to a distinctive statue of the Welsh black bull.

Buses stop behind the tourist office, but the nearest train station to Builth Wells is over two miles away: Builth Road station is on the Rhayader road (A470), and Gilmery station is up the Llandoverly road (A483); a **taxi** (☎ 663630) from either costs about £3.

High St is the focal point of the action. The **post office** (9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), next door to the Spar supermarket on High St, has foreign exchange facilities. Banks line High St while the **library** (9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon, Tue & Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 2-7pm Thu, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat), also on High St, has free internet access.

The **Solitaire laundrette** (20 West St; 11am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is located just east of the Greyhound Hotel (see below).

For ordinance survey (OS) maps and information about local history, head for **Foreman's Emporium** (☎ 552034; 25 High St; 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Sleeping

Woodlands (☎ 552354; Hay Rd; s/d £35/50; P) A traditional Edwardian house, this place is set up a private driveway and five minutes further back along the main road from the Lion Hotel (see below). The four rooms, all en suite, offer simple home comforts at a budget price.

Greyhound Hotel (☎ 553255; www.thegreyhoundhotel.co.uk; 3 Garth Rd; s/d £55/75, bar meals £7; P) Situated at the northwest end of town by the Wesley Methodist Church, this is a stately pub with tidy rooms and decent bar food. Catch the local male voice choir rehearsal here on Monday nights (see opposite).

Lion Hotel (☎ 553311; www.lionhotelbuilthwells.com; 2 Broad St; s/d/fm £65/95/100; i P) Recently given a major refit, this smart place now has a much more contemporary look and boasts some disabled-access rooms. The rooms are tastefully decorated, some with views of the River Wye, and the installation of wi-fi internet now attracts a business-traveller crowd. Foodwise the stakes have also been raised, so while the smoky bar area remains the locals' favourite, the dining room now offers both bar meals and finer dining options, with food served all day.

Eating

Cosy Corner (☎ 551700; 55 High St; 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) A simple tearoom with homemade cakes and coffees in an 18th-century, white-fronted building.

Calon Wen (☎ 07765-812739; 3 Groe St; mains £10; 10am-4pm Mon-Wed, 10am-10pm Thu-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) The newest opening in town makes for an interesting addition to the Builth dining scene: a South African café by day and bistro by night. The owners bring a touch of African panache to the menu – local produce meets African recipes – plus there's a daytime selection of homemade cakes, pastries and coffees. The menu changes every day.

Drawing Room (☎ 552493; www.the-drawing-room.co.uk; dinner & B&B from £95 per person per night; i n p) Foodies flock to the boutique restaurant with rooms located four miles from Builth Wells along the A470. The quality of the cuisine is excellent, even award winning, albeit at a steep premium price. Problem is that at these prices you would expect a moderately friendly welcome – but sadly no. Great food if you can put up with the attitude.

For self caterers there's a **Spar supermarket** (9.30am-9pm daily) on High St.

Entertainment

The thriving **Wyeside Arts Centre** (☎ 552555; www.wyeside.co.uk; Castle St; 10am-9pm Tue-Fri, 6-9pm Sat & Sun) is a great little venue with a bar, exhibitions, cinema and live shows. It's located where the A470 comes into the eastern end of town.

Getting There & Away

Roy Brown's Coaches bus 17 (alternate Saturdays) runs between Rhayader (45 minutes) and Cardiff (two hours).

Crossgates Coaches bus 21 runs services to/from Llandrindod Wells (25 minutes, two to four daily Monday to Saturday).

Crossgates Coaches & Roy Brown's Coaches run services to Rhayader (30 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday).

Roy Brown's Coaches bus 55 runs services to Newtown (one hour 10 minutes, once daily).

It's best to check with the local tourist office for up-to-date bus timetables and prices, as these change from season to season, and services are often cut and rescheduled.

HAY-ON-WYE (Y GELLI)

☎ 01497 / pop 1500

Hay-on-Wye, the world's second-hand book capital, is a charmingly eccentric little town. Indeed, the town has many literary associations: Bruce Chatwin's *On the Black Hill* is set in the Black Mountains, and both Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape and singer George Melly claimed that Chatwin wrote the book while staying with them here. Some of the film *American Werewolf in London* was shot nearby, around Hay Bluff; and Iain Sinclair's novel *Landor's Tower* takes a poetic poke at local booksellers.

More recently Hay has become synonymous with its **literature festival** (p222), which sees the small population swell to over 80,000 and an influx of big-name stars come to read from their latest tomes. The former US president, Bill Clinton, was a high-profile visitor in 2001 and christened the event 'The Woodstock of the mind'. Today the whole event is now sponsored by the *Guardian* newspaper and has become a major cultural event.

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

A 17th-century stone farmhouse in the Edw Valley, six miles from Builth Wells along the B467, **Cwm-Moel** (☎ 570271; Aberdwr; r from £30; three-course meal £14) is a great spot to enjoy some famous Welsh hospitality and a chance to blow away the big-city cobwebs. But, unlike your communal garden rural Welsh bolthole, guests at Cwm-Moel have to – quite literally – sing for their supper.

The owner, Eleanor Madoc Davies, has over 30 years experience of teaching music and has been performing since the age of three, when she first formed a vocal harmony group with her sisters for the local eisteddfod. Recently she set up the seven-bed, family-run B&B and, while her husband, Mervyn, looks after the livestock at the farm down the road, she offers one-on-one vocal coaching in her dedicated music room. She offers a free half-hour singing assessment with lessons charged at £25 per hour thereafter – ask about B&B and singing package deals.

For guests in need of inspiration, she even takes groups to see the Builth Male Voice Choir rehearse in an upstairs room of the Greyhound Hotel in Builth Wells (see opposite). The choir formed in 1968 as a rugby choir and now sing internationally. Practice is every Monday night; visitors are welcome to attend for free.

Hay is also now synonymous with self-promotion, thanks mainly to the efforts of Richard Booth, the colourful, self-styled King of Hay (see boxed text opposite), who kick-started Hay literary aspirations when he opened the first bookshop in 1961. In 1971 Booth bought Hay Castle, complete with the Jacobean mansion built within its walls. The castle was damaged by a fire in 1977 and repair work is ongoing.

The small town centre is made up of narrow sloping lanes, peppered by interesting shops, and peopled by the differing types that such individuality and so many books tend to attract. Even outside of festival time, Hay has a vague Glastonbury-festival vibe, with more than its fair share of New-Age types attracted to soak up the alternative ambience. But while it's busy during the day, the evenings tend to be library-quiet – everyone must be reading.

If books are not your bag, Hay is also a great base for exploring the stunning Black Mountains. Indeed, Offa's Dyke and the Offa's Dyke Path run right through the centre of town.

History

Hay has had a tempestuous history, due to its borderlands position almost on the dividing line between England and Wales. In fact, at the time of the Norman conquest it was administered separately as English Hay (the town proper) and Welsh Hay (the countryside to the south and west).

Around 1200 William de Braose II, one of the Norman barons (marcher lords), built a castle here on the site of an earlier one. For the next three-and-a-half centuries Hay changed hands many times. Following the Tudor Acts of Union in 1536 and 1543 (see p32) it settled down as a market town, and by the 18th century it had become a centre of the flannel trade.

Orientation & Information

Hay's small centre contains the castle and most of the bookshops. The border with England runs along Dulas Brook, which crosses under Newport St just north of the centre. Buses stop near the tourist office on Oxford Rd and **car parking** is available (per hr 40p) in a panoramic car park also on Oxford Rd with great views across the surrounding countryside.

The professional **tourist office** (☎ 820144; www.hay-on-wye.co.uk; Oxford Rd; 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-1pm & 2-4pm Nov-Mar) stocks a free guide and map showing all of Hay's bookshops (most bookshops have the map, too). You can also access the internet here (75p per 30 minutes), or there's free internet access at the **library** (Chancery Lane; 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Thu & Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat, 10am-1pm, 2-4.30pm & 5-7pm Mon). Book fans can look for particular books at www.booksearch-at-hay.com.

There's also a **post office** (High Town; 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon, Wed, Fri, 9am-5.30pm Thu, 9am-12.30pm Tue & Sat) and a **laundrette** (Bell Bank; 8am-9pm Mon-Sat). Banks are located along Castle St.

BOOKSHOPS

There are 30 bookshops in Hay, mostly stocking second-hand books – 400,000 in Richard Booth's bookshop alone. Many bookshops cover all subjects, while others concentrate on one speciality. In addition, three bookbinders base themselves locally. Bookshops generally open 9.30am to 5.30pm with extended hours during the festival.

Addyman Books (☎ 821136; www.hay-on-wyebooks.com; 39 Lion St) Stocks books on all sorts of subjects, has a sitting room upstairs and a sci-fi room.

Hay Cinema Bookshop (☎ 820071; www.haycinema-bookshop.co.uk; Castle St) In a converted cinema, this is a cavernous place, stacked with tomes.

Murder & Mayhem (☎ 821613; 5 Lion St) Filled to the brim with detective fiction, true crime and horror.

Richard Booth's Bookshop (☎ 820322; www.richardbooth.demon.co.uk; 44 Lion St) The most famous, and still the best; has a sizable Anglo-Welsh literature section, and a Wales travel section. Booth also runs bookshops in the castle, covering subjects from hobbies to erotica. In the castle grounds is an honesty bookshop (50p per book).

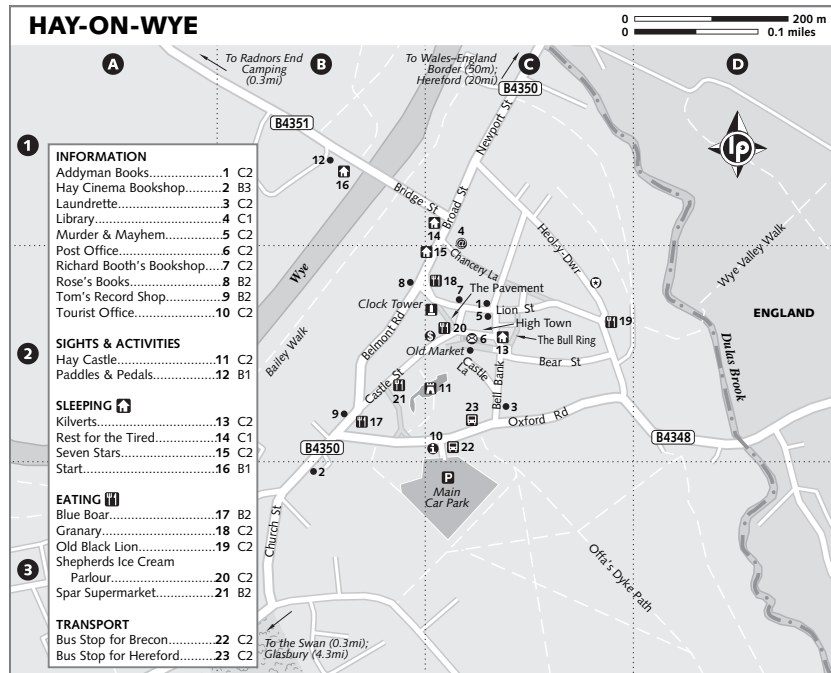
Rose's Books (☎ 820013; www.rosesbooks.com; 14 Broad St) Specialises in rare children's books.

Also worth a look is **Tom's Record Shop** (☎ 821590; www.tomsrecords.com; 13 Castle St), which has some books alongside new and second-hand records and CDs.

Activities

For a change of pace, **Paddles & Pedals** (☎ 820604; www.canohire.co.uk) now run its business from a portacabin in a field close to the Start B&B (p222) and hires out **canoes and kayaks** (half/full day £22.50/35 & £15/20 respectively) for river trips. Don't be fooled by the name – there aren't any bikes for rent.

In Glasbury, 4.5 miles southwest of Hay, **Black Mountain Activities** (☎ 847897; www.blackmountain



RICHARD BOOTH, KING OF HAY

Richard Booth is a larger-than-life character and the dynamic force behind Hay's metamorphosis from declining border town into eminent book capital. A provocative character, he's been called a monarchist, anarchist, socialist and separatist. All of which have some element of truth, and he's definitely a superb self-publicist. After graduating from Oxford he bought Hay's old fire station and turned it into a second-hand bookshop. He bought whole libraries from all over the world and sold in bulk to new universities. He's had setbacks, becoming bankrupt in 1984, but never lost his instinct for a good story. He first hit the headlines when he offered books for burning at £1.50 a car-boot load.

Booth established the world's largest bookshop in the old cinema (now moved to 44 Lion St, and the largest bookshop in Hay) and owns the 900-year-old Hay Castle. His success attracted other booksellers and nowadays 30 or so bookshops cover 2000 different categories.

The idea for a separate state blossomed during a liquid lunch in 1976. Booth announced that Hay would declare independence on 1 April (April Fools' Day). Breconshire Council fiercely dismissed the idea as a Booth publicity stunt, which...fuelled the publicity. On declaration day, three TV stations, eight national newspapers and the world's press covered the event. Booth was crowned king and the Hay navy sent a gunboat (a rowing boat) up the Wye, firing blanks from a drainpipe. Many of the king's drinking pals gained cabinet posts.

All this comedy has a serious undercurrent, and Booth continues to campaign against the causes of rural decline – with particular contempt reserved for rural development boards, supermarkets and factory farming.

Booth has suffered from some health problems recently, but is still very much around. The bookshop, however, has been put up for sale. At the time of writing, no buyer had come forward.

.co.uk; Three Cocks) offers other activities such as climbing, caving and mountain biking with prices from £55 per person per day. They do hire out mountain bikes (half-/full-day £15/25) as well as canoes (half-/full-day £20/30).

Festivals & Events

The 10-day **Hay Festival** (☎ 0870 9901299; www.hayfestival.com; 1 late May-early Jun), held annually, is like a literary Glastonbury, when anyone who's anyone in the world of words descends on the town. It is massively popular and entertaining, with readings, workshops, guest appearances, book signings and a subsidiary children's literature festival. Book accommodation very well in advance – the Swan (below) is currently booked out until 2012 at festival time.

Sleeping

Radnors End Camping (☎ 820780; fax 820780; adult/child £5/3.50; 1 Mar-Oct) Located just half a mile northwest of Hay on the way to Clyro, this is a friendly, helpful place, with tucked-away small green fields. It's an ideal spot for walkers tackling the Offa's Dyke Path.

Rest for the Tired (☎ 820550; www.restforthetired.co.uk; 6 Broad St; s/d £35/50; 1 Mar-Dec) The three en-suite rooms in the family house are simple but welcoming with basic facilities. The guesthouse is located just 25m before the river.

Start (☎ 821391; Bridge St; www.the-start.net; s/d £35/60; 1) This slightly tucked-away little place boasts an unbeatable riverside setting, homely rooms in a renovated 18th-century house and a flagstone-floored breakfast room. The owner can advise on local activities and walks.

Seven Stars (☎ 820886; www.thesevenstars.co.uk; 11 Broad St; s/d £40/55) A well-appointed midrange guesthouse in a converted 16th-century house, the unique selling point of this place is the indoor pool and sauna, which is also open to nonresidents for £3.50. The comfortable rooms continue the sauna theme with wood-plank walls.

Swan (☎ 821188; www.swanathay.co.uk; s/d £77.50/120) The smartest place in town is currently undergoing a programme of refurbishment to create a more contemporary look. The rooms are comfortable and the dining room serves a good menu of upscale cuisine, but the hotel's slightly tired look should finally be banished after the revamp is completed in 2007.

Kilverts (☎ 821042; www.kilverts.co.uk; The Bull Ring; d/tw/fm £80/90/110; bar meals 11 noon-2pm & 6.30-9pm; 1) This two-star hotel at the heart of town has traditional if slightly worn rooms and a busy oak-beamed dining room for à la carte mains each evening.

Eating

Granary (☎ 820790; Broad St; snacks £6; 11 9.30am-6pm) This most popular café-style place in town is bustling and welcoming with street-side tables and a country-kitchen interior. It's child friendly and has an imaginative menu of daily snacks and light lunches, including lots of vegetarian choices: hard to beat for a meal that won't break the bank.

Blue Boar (☎ 820884; Oxford Rd; mains £11; 11 9.30am-11pm, lunch noon-2pm) This bar-cum-restaurant specialises in hearty, home-cooked fare and has an inventive range of dishes, from light bites, such as hummus and pitta bread (£4.95) to traditional Welsh stew.

Old Black Lion (☎ 820841; Lion St; www.oldblacklion.co.uk; mains around £11) Walkers, book-browsers and the literary glitterati all flock to this creaky, converted 17th-century inn, with heavy black beams and warm red walls. The town's best upmarket offering, it serves tiptop elaborate pub food and a fine pint of Old Black Lion ale. There's also B&B accommodation (s/d £50/85) in ten attractive rooms, with heavy wooden furniture.

For self caterers, there's a **Spar supermarket** (Castle St; 11 7.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-10pm Sat & Sun). Nobody should leave Hay without trying the ice cream from **Shepherds Ice Cream Parlour** (☎ 821898; 9 High Town; 11 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) – it's made from sheep's milk for a lighter, smoother taste.

Getting There & Away

The main bus services include Stagecoach bus 39 to Hereford (one hour, five daily Monday to Saturday, three daily Sunday) and Brecon (45 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday, two daily Sunday).

Yeomans Canyon's Travel Beacons bus 40 runs the same Brecon to Hereford via Hay-on-Wye route (six daily Monday to Saturday, two daily Sunday). Prices are subject to change, so it's best to check with the local tourist office.

The nearest train station to Hay is located 21 miles away in Hereford. To call a taxi, try **Border Taxis** (☎ 821266).

LLANDRINDOD WELLS (LLANDRINDOD)

☎ 01597 / pop 4500

Llandrindod (meaning Church of the Trinity) was once a fashionable spa town for taking the waters and, even today, retains an element of the splendid architecture of a Victorian and Edwardian resort, with large parks, wrought iron and red brick. However, Llandrindod has long since had its day and subsequently succumbed to torpidity.

Roman remains at nearby Castell Colleen show that it wasn't the Victorians who first discovered the healthy effects of the local spring waters, but it was the arrival of the Central Wales railway (now the Heart of Wales railway line) in 1865 that brought visitors en masse.

On Wednesday businesses open for only half the day, while Friday is the market day.

Orientation & Information

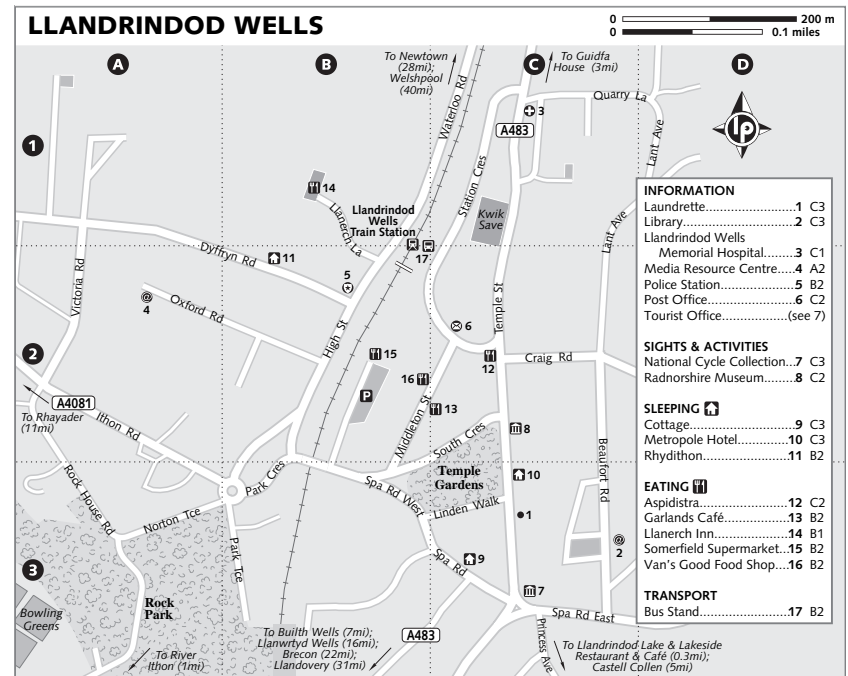
The town sits on the eastern bank of the River Ithon with the A483 (as Temple St) and the railway line plunging right through the town centre. Between the two is the main shopping zone, Middleton St. Most regional

buses stop outside the train station on Station Crescent.

The **tourist office** (☎ 822600; Automobile Palace, Temple St; 11 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), has moved to smart new premises in the same building as the National Cycle Collection. The office produces a useful series of pamphlets about day walks around the town, including the 2-mile circular spa walk.

All major UK banks (with ATMs) are represented along Middleton St, and the **post office** (Station Cres; 11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) is located just south of the train station. You can access the internet for free at the **library** (☎ 826870; Beaufort Rd; 11 9.30am-5pm Mon, Tue & Fri, to 1pm Wed & Sat, to 7pm Thu) or pay for access at **Media Resource Centre** (☎ 822230; Oxford Rd; 11 9am-6pm Mon-Fri; per hour £3), a business and conference centre located 200m west of the train station.

The **Llandrindod Wells Memorial Hospital** (☎ 822951; Temple St) is just north of the centre and the **police station** (☎ 822227; High St) is just behind the train station. A **laundrette** (Temple St; 11 9am-5pm daily) is to be found at the southern end of Temple St.



Sights

ROCK PARK

In 1670 the local spring was given the name the 'Well of the Blacksmith's Dingle', but it was not till the mid-18th century that its therapeutic qualities were discovered. An eminent German doctor had a variety of diseases, drank the waters and was cured, hence the spa became enormously popular. However, the allure of stinky water gradually diminished and it closed in 1972.

You can still soothe your nerves beside **Arlais Brook**, in serene forested, landscaped Rock Park. This is the site of the earliest spa development, though all that remains is the restored Rock Park Spa Pump Room and a small **complementary health centre** (% 822997) offering therapies such as massage and acupuncture. Fill your bottle at the Chalybeate Spring (donated to the public by the Lord of the Manor in 1879) beside the brook – apparently the water is good for treating gout, rheumatism, anaemia and more (chalybeate refers to its iron salts).

LLANDRINDOD LAKE

Just southeast of the centre is a sedately pretty, tree-encircled lake, built at the end of the 19th century to allow Victorians to take their exercise without appearing to do so. The original boathouse is now a private residence, but you can still rent a boat, fish for carp or take lunch at the Lakeside Restaurant & Café (opposite). The centrepiece of the lake is a giant sculpture of a Welsh dragon.

NATIONAL CYCLE COLLECTION

Housed in the Art Nouveau Automobile Palace, the same building as the tourist office south of the town centre, the **National Cycle Collection** (% 825531; www.cyclemuseum.org.uk; Temple St; adult/child £3/1; 10am-4pm daily Mar-Oct, Tue, Thu & Sun Nov-Feb) has a collection of over 250 bikes. The exhibits show the two-wheeled development from clunky boneshakers and circus-reminiscent penny-farthings to bamboo bikes from the 1890s and the vertiginous 'Eiffel Tower' of 1899 (used to display billboards), as well as slicker, modern-day versions. Great effort has been made to put the bikes in context, with re-created Victorian and Edwardian cycle shops, photos and signboards – it's run with infectious enthusiasm. The building was constructed by Tom Norton, a local entrepreneur who started as a bicycle dealer and became the main Austin distributor. The trike

on which Norton used to ride to work is here, with a picture of him on it.

RADNORSHIRE MUSEUM

There's a small and rather low-key **museum** (Temple St; adult/child £1/0.50; 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) to fill you in on the local history of Llandrindod.

Festivals & Events

Llandrindod Wells comes over all historical during its **Victorian Festival** (% 823441), a week of 19th-century high jinks during the last full week before the August bank holiday. Just about everybody puts on period costumes, and transport is by horse and carriage.

There are also several **Jazz Weekends** (% 823700) at the Metropole Hotel, and a popular **Drama Festival** (% 825677) during the first full week of May, when amateur groups from all over the UK come to perform in competitions.

Sleeping

Rhydithon (% 822624; Dyffryn Rd; s/d from £30/50) Charmingly and cheerfully run, with spotless, comfy rooms, this a popular budget choice, even if the rooms do verge on the chintzy.

The **Cottage** (% 825435; www.thecottagebandb.co.uk; Spa Rd; s/d from £33/50) This large, appealing Edwardian house, set in an attractive flower-adorned garden, has comfortable midrange rooms with heavy wooden furniture and lots of original features. The rooms are traditional but comfortable; only seven of the rooms are en suite.

Guidfa House (% 851241; www.guidfa-house.co.uk; Crossgates; s/d from £48/70; 10pm) Located 3 miles northeast of Llandrindod Wells in the village of Crossgates on the A483, this six-room Georgian house is far superior to most of the hotels actually in Llandrindod itself. There's wheelchair access on the ground floor and all the rooms are homely and smart with modern bathrooms. Downstairs is a more traditional guest lounge. The owner cooks up excellent evening meals Tuesday to Sunday (three courses £21).

Metropole Hotel (% 823700; www.metropole.co.uk; Temple St; s/d/fm £79/104/114) The sole upmarket property in town, this historic hostelry (it dates back to 1868) is now a three-star place with family rooms and disabled access. The interior feels rather faded, like much of the town, while the downstairs brasserie has been converted into the slightly incongruous Spencer's Bar with a glass streetside terrace. The hotel is

increasingly aiming for the corporate meetings market and does well out of its leisure complex with a swimming pool and sauna.

Eating

Van's Good Food Shop (% 823079; Middleton St; 10am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 5pm Wed & Sat) This excellent vegetarian deli features the best of local produce with organic fruit, cheese and wine, plus it operates a strong ethical policy on their selection of featured produce.

Garlands Café (% 824132; Middleton St; 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat) A simple, cosy café with traditional snack food for morning coffees or a cheap lunch on the run.

Aspidistra (% 822949; Station Cres; 10am-4.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu-Sat, to 2pm Wed) An old-fashioned café with a time-warp feel, this place has floral tablecloths and lots of basic snack lunches; a strict nonsmoking policy is in force.

Lakeside Restaurant & Café (% 825679; The Lake; 10am-4pm daily) The nicest place in town for lunch is located southeast of the centre by Llandrindod Lake. There's a nice conservatory area, a terrace for outdoor dining and a changing menu of daily specials. It's café-style food, with soups, sandwiches and jacket potatoes all served with a smile.

Llanerch Inn (% 822086; www.llanerchinn.com; Llanerch Lane; bar meals 11am-2pm & 6-9pm) It's mainly just bar food available outside of the café-style places and this 16th-century coaching inn (it's probably the town's oldest building) is the best of the mediocre bunch, serving tasty, good-value bar food, including big Welsh steaks.

For self-caterers there's a large **Somerfield supermarket** (8am-8pm Mon-Wed & Sat, to 9pm Thu & Fri, 10am-4pm Sun) with a car park just southwest of the train station.

Getting There & Around

Bus connections are very limited; it's best to check with the local tourist office for up-to-date timetables and prices. Crossgates runs bus 19 to/from Rhayader (25 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday) and also the bus 21 service to/from Builth Wells (25 minutes, two to four daily Monday to Saturday).

The busiest local route is the TrawsCambria bus 704 from Brecon to Newtown; there are six daily services Monday to Saturday from Llandrindod Wells to Brecon (one hour) and Newtown (one hour).

Llandrindod Wells is on the Heart of Wales railway line, with services to Llanwrtyd Wells

(£3.20; 30 minutes, four trains daily – two on Sunday) and Swansea (£12.70, two hours 30 minutes). To get around, call a **taxi** (% 822877).

RHAYADER (RHAEDR)

% 01597 / pop 2000

Rhayader is a small and fairly uneventful livestock-market town revolving around a central crossroads marked by a towering war-memorial clock. It's a place that appeals to walkers visiting the nearby Elan Valley (see p227) and tackling the 136-mile Wye Valley Walk, which has its northern terminus at Plynlimon Fawr (2469ft), 29 miles northwest of Rhayader; 35 miles of the walking trail falls within Powys.

Rhayader is deserted on Thursdays when businesses trade for only half a day, but market day on Wednesdays attracts a crowd.

Orientation & Information

The town centre is focused around the clock tower at the intersection of North St (A470), East St (A44), South St (A470) and West St (B4518). The **tourist office** (% 810591; off North St; 10am-5pm daily May-Oct, Fri-Wed Nov-Apr) is just north of the tower and based within the Rhayader Leisure Centre. You can check your email for free at the **library** (West St; 10am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-noon Sat).

There are banks dotted along East St, where you'll also find a **post office** (8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) and a **laundrette** (8.45am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Buses set you down at the Dark Lane **car park** (per hour 50p) opposite the tourist office. The nearest train station is situated 10 miles away at Llandrindod Wells.

Activities

The **Clive Powell Mountain Bike Centre** (% 811343; www.clivepowell-mtb.co.uk; West St) is run by Powell, a former cycling champion and coach. It is the venue in town for advice and equipment for a more active break. You can hire a mountain/off-road bike here (£20/15 per day, including helmet and puncture kit), and Powell runs a regular programme of so-called 'Dirty Weekends', activity weekends with all-inclusive prices and B&B from £160 per person, including two days of mountain biking on trails around the Elan Valley.

Sleeping

Wyeside Caravan & Camping Park (% 810183; Llangurig Rd; www.wyesidecamping.co.uk; sites per adult/child from

£4.50/1.50, caravan £9 per person) Located just a short walk from the centre of town, this is a relaxed, grassy site with lovely river views and lots of trees for caravans and tents.

Brynteg (% 810052; East St; s/d £20/40) A good-value budget place, with four plain and cosy rooms, Brynteg is simple but satisfying. The en suite double room has the best outlook with leafy, hill-filled views.

Liverpool House (% 810706; www.liverpoolhouse.co.uk; East St; s/d £25/40) This comfy nine-room guesthouse offers a friendly welcome, albeit with rather floral rooms. It's located just off the main intersection along East St.

Elan Valley Hotel (% 810448; www.elanvalley.co.uk; s/d £32.50/90) A former Victorian fishing lodge, this large white house in the peaceful Elan Valley is two miles outside of Rhayader on the B4518 – head out past the Triangle Inn. It's not an overly grand place but good for families. There has, however, been a change in management recently so call ahead to see if they are still running the popular Fungi Forays, wild mushroom breaks for true lovers of fungi, or check the website www.fungiforays.co.uk. The in-house restaurant serves bar meals from 7pm to 9pm (mains around £12) and does a decent Sunday lunch with roasts (noon to 2pm).

Brynafon Country House Hotel (% 810735; www.brynafon.co.uk; South St; s/d from £43/66) For more of a rural experience, this former workhouse has views of the River Wye and Elan Valley from its stately rooms. There's a range of rooms, some with four-poster beds, some with exposed beams, but all with leafy outlooks. The avocado-tree-canopied bar is popular with day-trippers; mains are around £8. A new attraction is the introduction of 'Plein Air' Painting Safaris that combine a weekend break with art classes – ask the owners for details.

Eating & Drinking

Strand (% 810564; East St; mains £6; 11.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, restaurant to 9pm) The best all-rounder in town is split between a simple café serving coffees and snacks on one side and a pricier restaurant for full meals and grills on the other. It's not complicated fare but it is good for families, with lunch boxes for kids available (£2.50).

Triangle Inn (% 810537; mains £7) This tiny 16th-century pub, located just over the bridge from the town centre, is the pick of the local

places to eat and drink for its unique sense of character and history. In fact, it is so small that the toilets are located across the road, and the ceiling is so low that there's a trapdoor in the floor so that darts players can stand in a hole to throw their arrows. Bar meals are served from 6.30pm to 8.30pm and include daily specials.

Morgan's (% 810564; East St; mains £9) This is a cosy little bistro offering tasty alternatives to the abundance of local pub food, with some imaginative dishes such as grilled Wye trout and a stir-fry of local produce.

Café Cwmdauddwr (% 811343; West St; mains £10) This smart little licensed eatery, actually part of the Clive Powell Mountain Bike Centre (see p225) and housed in the erstwhile Cwmdauddwr Arms, an old pub dating back to 1650, is an excellent place with just six tables. The menu puts the emphasis on vegetarian and organic fare and there's a nonsmoking policy throughout. The mains menu changes on a daily basis, and there's always a selection of delicious deserts. A little gem.

For a pint, try the **Crown** (% 811099; North St; mains £8; 11.30am–2.15pm & 6–9.30pm Mon–Fri, noon–6pm Sat, Sun roasts noon–3pm only), an old-world pub with bar food and real ales.

For self-caterers, there's a **Spar supermarket** (11.30am–10pm Mon–Sat, 7.30am–10pm Sun).

Getting There & Around

Crossgates Coaches run bus 019A/01 from Rhayader to Llandrindod Wells (30 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday) and Builth Wells (30 minutes, one daily Monday to Saturday). Contact the local tourist office for up-to-date prices.

Around Rhayader

GIGRIN FARM RED KITE FEEDING STATION There's been a dramatic Mid-Wales resurgence in the UK's threatened population of red kites (see p54), but these handsome raptors have not quite re-established themselves, so feeding programmes continue.

Red kites are fed at the **Gigrin Farm Red Kite Feeding Station** (% 810243; www.gigrin.co.uk; adult/child £3/1), a working farm on the A470 located half a mile south of Rhayader town centre (or one mile from the Wye Valley Walk). At 2pm GMT (3pm during summer daylight-saving time) meat scraps (from local butchers and a local abattoir) are spread on a field. Altogether anywhere from 12 to 300 kites may partake,

though usually less than 20 at any one time. First come crows, then ravens, then the acrobatically swooping kites – often mugging the crows to get the meat – and later ravens and buzzards. You can watch from a wheelchair-accessible hide.

There's an interpretive centre, with information on red kites and other local wildlife, with recorded night-time footage of badgers, a camera overlooking the feeding site, and marked nature trails.

The appealing 350-year-old working farm, with beautiful wandering white peafowl, also has **camping** (tent/caravan £3/8 per person) and a cosy **B&B** (£30 per week) for up to four people.

ELAN VALLEY

The Elan Valley is filled with strikingly beautiful countryside, split by amazing Edwardian impositions of grey stone on the landscape. In the early 19th century, dams were built on the River Elan (pronounced ellen), west of Rhayader, mainly to provide a reliable water supply for the city of Birmingham. Around 100 people had to move, but only landowners received compensation. In 1952 a fourth, large dam was inaugurated on the tributary River Claerwen. Together their reservoirs now provide over 70 million gallons of water daily for Birmingham and parts of South and Mid-Wales.

Though not a project to warm Welsh hearts, the need to protect the 70-sq-mile watershed, called the Elan Valley Estate, has turned it and adjacent areas into an important wildlife conservation area. The dams and associated projects also produce some 4.2 megawatts of hydroelectric power.

Located just downstream of the lowest dam, three miles from Rhayader on the B4518, is Welsh Water's **Elan Valley Visitor Centre** (% 810898; admission free; 11.30am–5.30pm Mar–Oct) with an interesting exhibit on the water scheme, complete with photos of houses being swallowed up by the waters. There's also wildlife and local history, information on the frequent guided walks and bird-watching trips, and it also provides leaflets on the estate's 80 miles of nature trails and footpaths.

The Elan Valley Trail is an 8-mile traffic-free walking, horse riding and cycling path that mostly follows the line of the long-gone Birmingham Corporation Railway alongside the River Elan and its reservoirs. It starts just west of Rhayader at Cwmdauddwr.

KNIGHTON (TREF-Y-CLAWDD)

% 01547 / pop 3000

Pretty Knighton, just over the border from England, is a walking hub midway along the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail, and the starting point or terminus for the Glyndŵr's Way National Trail, which wends its way via Machynlleth to Welshpool (p228).

Knighton has seen its fortunes rise and fall with the coming of the railway and the growth of livestock farming, then the subsequent decline in population post WWII and failed attempts to turn it into a spa town.

One intriguing piece of local folklore suggests that until the mid-1800s it was possible for a man to obtain a divorce by 'selling' his wife at the square where today the clocktower stands proud. Husbands would bring their spouse to the square at the end of a rope; the last wife was 'sold' in 1842.

Knighton is a small town with limited facilities, making it a place to stop for lunch.

Orientation & Information

The town is centred around a handsome stone clock tower, which was built in 1872 on the main thoroughfare, Broad St. The train station is actually in England, five blocks to the northeast via Station Rd; buses stop by the community centre in Bowling Green Lane where there is also car parking.

The two-in-one **tourist office and Offa's Dyke Centre** (% 528753; West St; 11.30am–5.30pm Apr–Oct, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri Nov–Mar) is located three blocks west of the clock tower. The building houses the Offa's Dyke Centre and there's a large amount of information for walkers, see p62.

There are banks and a **post office** (11.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–12.30pm Sat) all located near the clock tower on Broad St, plus a **Spar supermarket** (11.30am–9pm). Knighton's **livestock market** (Station Rd) comes alive on Thursdays (and sometimes Friday).

Sights

Two miles southeast of town, the hilltop **Spaceguard Centre** (% 520247; www.spaceguarduk.com; adult/child £5/2.50; 11.30am–Sun, 1½-hr tours 10.30am, 2pm & 4pm), in the former Powys Observatory, is a centre for research into asteroids and comets. Tours take in the telescopes, tracking and planetarium shows.

Across Broad St and two blocks down Church St is **St Edward's Church**, with an unusual, rather stumpy 18th-century bell tower.

The traffic-free lane, The Narrows, also known as High St, rises steeply from the central clock tower.

Sleeping & Eating

Horse & Jockey Inn (% 520062; www.thehorseandjockeyinn.co.uk; Wylcwm Place; s/d £35/55; restaurant mains £10, bar mains £7; 11 noon-2pm & 7-9pm) This former 14th-century coaching inn is now a pub-cum-restaurant and B&B with upscale accommodation and a broad menu of meals. The five en-suite rooms are smart and stylish with flat-screen TVs and modern fittings. The bar area has a cosy feel with a large open fire and meals, and by night, the adjoining restaurant serves hearty mains to satisfy every appetite.

Fleece House (% 520168; www.fleecehouse.co.uk; Market St; s/d £37/54) Situated at the top of The Narrows, this former 18th-century coaching inn has cosy rooms with cheery quilted features. It's a good base for tired walkers, with simple facilities.

Butterfingers (% 528692; 8 High St; 11 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) is a simple little coffee shop for snacks and hot drinks on the go.

Getting There & Around

Knighton is one of the stops on the lovely Heart of Wales line, with at least three trains daily (fewer on Sunday) from Llandrindod Wells (£3, 35 minutes) and on to Shrewsbury (£6.30, 55 minutes).

NORTHERN POWYS

WELSHPOOL (TRALLWNG)

% 01938 / pop 6000

This little Severn Valley town was originally called Pool – after the ‘pills’, boggy, marshy ground (long since drained) along the nearby river. It was changed in 1835 to Welshpool, so nobody would get confused with Poole in Dorset.

It's a workaday little town with few distractions in the town centre proper and few inspiring options for people seeking to over-night. More compelling, however, are the peripheral sights, which are the big draw for visitors: the glorious Powis Castle, the narrow-gauge Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway and, for the more open-minded, the supremely flamboyant, not to mention slightly incongruous, Andrew Logan Museum of Sculpture.

Orientation & Information

The centre of Welshpool is a four-way intersection called The Cross. From Raven Sq train station it's a 700m slog east down Raven St (and its extensions, Mount, Broad and High Sts) to The Cross, then left at Church St to reach the **tourist office** (% 552043; 11 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, irregular hr off season) located next to the Vicarage Gardens **car park** (per hr 40p). Regional buses stop on High St, about 400m from the tourist office; National Express coaches stop in front of the tourist office.

From The Cross, Welshpool's **police station** (% 552345; Severn St) is 300m east and the **Victoria Memorial Hospital** (% 553133; Salop Rd) just north. There's free internet access at the **library** (% 553001; 11 9.30am-7pm Mon, to 5pm Tue & Wed, to 1pm Thu & Sat, to 4pm Fri).

High Street is the place to find banks, a **laundrette** (11 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) and the **post office** (11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

Sights

POWIS CASTLE & CLIVE MUSEUM

Cupped by magnificent gardens, the red-brick **Powis Castle** (% 551920; adult/child castle, museum & gardens £9/4.80, garden only £6.60/3.30; 11 castle & museum 1-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-mid-Sep, 1-4pm Thu-Mon mid-Sep-end Oct, house 11am-4.30pm Thu-Mon Apr-Oct, garden 11am-5.30pm Thu-Mon Apr-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Thu-Mon Mar & Oct) rises up from its terraces as if floating on a fantastical bed of moss-green, massive, clipped yew trees. South of Welshpool, just under a mile from The Cross, it was originally constructed by Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn, prince of Powys, and subsequently enriched by generations of the Herbert and Clive families. Today it is operated by the National Trust (NT). The extravagant mural-covered, wood-panelled interior contains one of Wales' finest collections of furniture and paintings. The Clive Museum holds a fascinating and exquisite cache of jade, ivory, armour, textiles and other treasures brought back from India by Baron Clive (British conqueror of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757), allowing a rare insight into the lifestyle of early colonialists.

The baroque garden is peerless, dotted with ornamental lead statues, and features an orangery, formal gardens, wilderness, terraces and orchards.

WELSHPOOL & LLANFAIR LIGHT RAILWAY

This sturdy **narrow-gauge railway** (% 810441; www.wllr.org.uk; adult/child £10.50/5.25; 11 three services daily

Apr-Oct) was completed in 1902 to help people bring their sheep and cattle to market. It runs up steep inclines and through the pretty Banwy Valley. The line was closed in 1956 but reopened four years later by enthusiastic volunteers.

Trains make the 8-mile journey from Raven Square Station to Llanfair Caereinion in 50 minutes and according to a complex timetable of regular services and special weekend events. There are also courses on offer in May, June and September to learn how to drive your very own steam engine – call for details.

MONTGOMERY CANAL

The Montgomery Canal originally ran for 35 miles starting at Newtown and ending at Frankton Junction in Shropshire, where it joined the Llangollen Canal. After sections of its banks burst in 1936 it lay abandoned until a group of volunteers and the British Waterways Board began repairing it in 1969. Today it is 38 miles long and is a centre for day-cruising and boating trips.

The **Heulwen Trust** (% 552563) is a charity that provides free **canal trips** (11 Mon-Fri) for disabled people in an adapted narrow boat along the canal – call for details.

OTHER SIGHTS

Beside the canal wharf to the west of the town is the **Powysland Museum** (% 554656; adult/child £1/free; 11 11am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat & Sun May-Sep, 11am-2pm Sat Oct-Apr), marked outside by a big blue handbag – an Andy Hancock sculpture to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. There's a football mobile by the same artist and also brilliant pillars painted by local schoolchildren and topped by carved birds. Inside, the museum tells the story of the canal and town, with great details – such as the Roman recipe for stuffed dormouse.

Festivals & Events

On the third Sunday in July, Welshpool becomes the unlikely venue for a one-day **Country & Western Music Festival** (% 552563) with spit roasts and line dancing, at the county show-ground near Powis Castle; proceeds benefit the Heulwen Trust (above).

Sleeping

Montgomery House (% 552693; 43 Salop Rd; s/d £30/45) This simple, friendly place is just 300m from the tourist office and has basic but comfortable rooms.

Royal Oak Hotel (% 552217; www.royaloakhotel.info; The Cross; s/d £65/94) By far the smartest place in town, this hotel with lots of history contained within its walls has recently undergone a major refurbishment. The rooms have a stately feel while there are both tasty bar and restaurant meals, the latter served in a refined dining room.

Eating

Buttery (% 552658; 8 High St; 11 9.30am-4.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu-Sat) This nonsmoking traditional tearoom, set in an old timber-framed building, is a quiet spot for a last morning coffee or a light lunch.

Mermaid Inn (% 552027; 28 High St; mains £6) This timber-framed pub has been here for at least 200 years and serves up a menu of decent pub meals.

For self-caterers, there's a **Spar supermarket** (Church St; 11 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-10.30pm Sun) located opposite the tourist office and a **Morrisons supermarket** (Berriew Rd; 11 8am-8pm Mon-Wed & Sat, to 9pm Thu & Fri, 10am-4pm Sun) at the southern end of town.

Shopping

Ashmans Antiques & Old Lace (% 554505; Park Lane House, High St) This is a marvellous antique clothes shop, crammed with hats and ball gowns, and located right next door to the Buttery tearooms.

Coed-y-Dinas (% 555545; Home & Country Centre; 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is a major new development in old farm buildings of the Powys Castle estate. It stocks a huge array of crafts, household and local, organic fresh produce. It's also the base for new horse-drawn canal boat rides along the Montgomery Canal.

Getting There & Away

Arriva bus 75 runs to/from Shrewsbury (45 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday) and Newtown (35 minutes). National Express coach 420 stops daily en route from Telford and Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth.

Welshpool is on the Cambrian railway line from Shrewsbury (£3.70 single, 25 minutes), Machynlleth (£8.40, 50 minutes) and Aberystwyth (£8.70, 1½ hours), with services about every two hours (fewer on Sunday). Check with the local tourist office for prices.

Brooks Cycles (% 553582; 9 Severn St) charges £12.50 a day for mountain-bike hire.

LOCAL VOICES *Andrew Logan*

Andrew Logan started the Alternative Miss World Contest in 1972, a weird-and-wonderful parade of drag queens and transsexuals. The exhibits at his sculpture museum include some extraordinary crowns, and photographs of Logan in costume for his role as both host and hostess of the event.

'I had a dream to open a museum of my work – a place that anyone could visit to taste my vision of joy and celebration of life,' says Logan. 'The museum opened to the public in 1991 under the guidance of Michael Davis as chairman of the board of trustees for the charity. We expanded with educational programmes and community projects, and in 2005 held a series of very successful festivals combining local and international talents.'

'Sadly, today we find ourselves with no funding,' he adds. 'Presently we are looking for volunteers to help us to keep the dream going of a museum like a jewel box on the surface of the earth to inspire young and old.'

Andrew Logan runs the Andrew Logan Museum of Sculpture in Berriew.

AROUND WELSHPOOL**Andrew Logan Museum of Sculpture**

Unlikely as the location is, this supremely flouncy and fascinating **sculpture museum** (☎ 01686-640689; www.andrewlogan.com; adult/child £3/1.50; 11 noon-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep) is devoted to the work of Andrew Logan. The building is actually a former squash court but, since Logan took over the space in 1991, it has played host to a very different display of physical prowess. Today, the museum is a glorious celebration of sequins and camp, with beautiful, frivolous, humorous artworks, including a huge cosmic egg made of fibreglass and a larger-than-life portrayal of fashion designer Zandra Rhodes.

There's a small café area on site for coffees and cakes, plus occasional workshops for children and families – call ahead for details.

The museum is situated five miles south of Welshpool in the tiny village of Berriew; take the Newtown bus 75 (15 minutes) to stop close to the entrance.

NEWTOWN (Y DRENEWYDD)

☎ 01686 / pop 10,000

This former mill town has lots of history but, as a destination, it's a pretty sleepy place these days – absolutely soporific on a Sunday – and one that trades increasingly on its past. The modern buildings are less attractive and the high street has a rather homogenised feel.

Newtown's big claim to fame is that Robert Owen, the factory reformer, founder of the cooperative movement and so-called 'father of Socialism', was born here in 1771, though he left at the age of 10 and only returned just before his death in 1858. Nevertheless, monuments to him now litter the town centre.

Newtown was also once the home of Welsh flannel, and a major UK textile centre. When competition began driving wages down, Wales' first Chartist meeting was held here in October 1838. Pryce Jones, the world's first-ever mail-order firm, got its start here, on the back of the textile trade. But by the end of the 19th century Newtown's boom days were over – and they've never been back. There are several small museums devoted to those long-gone salad days.

Newtown is almost the home of Laura Ashley (she opened her first shop in Carno, 10 miles west of the centre).

Orientation & Information

Newtown sits in a bend of the River Severn (Afon Hafren) alongside the Welshpool-Aberystwyth road. The centre is The Cross, at the intersection of Broad, High, Severn and Shortbridge Sts.

From the train station it's a 600m walk via Old Kerry Rd, Shortbridge St and The Cross, to the **tourist office** (☎ 625580; Back Lane; 11 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Feb, daily Mar-Sep). The Cross backs onto a large public **car park** (per hr 50p), where you'll also find the bus station.

Major UK banks dot The Cross and Broad St; you'll also find a **post office** (Broad St; 11 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) and a **laundrette** (Severn St; 11 8am-8pm).

Sights

Textile Museum (☎ 622024; 5-7 Commercial St; admission free; 11 2-5pm Mon, Tue, Thu-Sat May-Sep) Located in former weavers' cottages and workshops, just north of the river, this museum has impressively re-created rooms to show what living conditions were like in the 1820s. Above the cottages are the workshops – as they were

originally – depicting the children (and adults) of the time at work.

Oriel Davies Gallery (☎ 625041; www.orieldavies.org; The Park; admission free; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), Beside the tourist office is this excellent gallery with temporary contemporary exhibitions. The good little café inside is also the best place to eat in town (see below).

South of the river, at the end of Church St, are the remains of the **Church of St Mary**, where Robert Owen is buried. The tiny **Robert Owen Museum** (☎ 626345; The Cross; admission free; 11 9.30am-noon & 2-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30-11.30am Sat) is in the town-council building where they have made a little arts centre, and has some mementos and a biographical film.

The **WH Smith shop** (24 High St) looks much as it did when it first opened in 1927. Upstairs is a little company **museum** (☎ 626280; admission free; 11 9am-5.30pm), for stationery lovers.

A mound in the riverside park southwest of the tourist office is the remains of Newtown's 13th-century **castle**. The gorsedd stone circle in the park dates from the Royal National Eisteddfod of 1965.

Sleeping

Yesterdays (☎ 622644; Severn Square; s/d £30/45; 11) A block east of The Cross, Yesterdays offers snug beamed rooms with plaid decoration. The building was a former temperance hotel and girl's boarding house before becoming a hotel. Downstairs is an excellent restaurant (open 6pm to 8pm Monday to Saturday, noon to 2pm Sat and Sun; mains £6.50 to £12) with a cottage-style ambience, offering traditional dishes such as Sunday roasts.

Plas Canol Guest House (☎ 625598; New Rd; s/d £35/50) The closest guesthouse to the train station, this is a simple place with basic en-suite rooms and all mod cons.

Eating

Oriel Davies Gallery (☎ 622288; snacks £5; 11 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) The gallery's in-house eatery is a bright and surprisingly good little café with lots of tasty lunch dishes, including plenty of vegetarian options, tapas and warming home-made soups.

Black Boy Hotel (☎ 626834; Broad St; lunch mains £6; bar meals 11 noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm) Simple but hearty pub fare is the order of the day here. Better still, it's one of the few places that is actually open on a Sunday with an excellent, good-value Sunday carvery. It's also a good spot to

sink a pint away from the hubris of the High St chain pubs.

For self-caterers, there's a **Spar supermarket** (Broad St; 11 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, 8am-10pm Sun).

Getting There & Away

Arriva bus 522 runs to Newtown (one hour, four daily Mon to Sat); Red Dragon Travel bus 75 runs to Wrexham (one hour 15 minutes, one daily) via Welshpool (30 minutes).

Newtown is on the Cambrian main line, with trains every hour or two from Machynlleth (£6, 35 minutes), Aberystwyth (£8.70, one hour 15 minutes) and Shrewsbury (£4.50, 40 minutes).

Check with the local tourist office for prices.

AROUND NEWTOWN**Gregynog Hall**

This splendid, 19th-century, mock-Tudor mansion was (from 1924) home of the Davies sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret, who are known for the extraordinary collection of paintings they bequeathed to the National Museum and Gallery of Wales (see p86). Their grandfather was David Davies, a sawyer who turned to mining and who, when prevented by the Bute family (see boxed text, p82) from exporting his coal from Cardiff, built his own docks at Barry and made a pile.

The sisters intended to make the house an arts centre, founding a fine-arts press in the stables and holding an annual Festival of Music and Poetry. In the 1960s the estate was given to the University of Wales, which uses it as a conference centre. Successor to the sisters' festival is the week-long **Gregynog Music Festival** (☎ 650224) held annually in mid-June, with operatic, choral, orchestral and instrumental music performed in the grounds of the house. The house, its interior largely unchanged since Margaret's death in 1963, opens for group tours by appointment.

Gregynog Hall is situated five miles north of Newtown on the B4389.

MACHYNLLETH

☎ 01654 / pop 2200

Small but perfectly formed, Machynlleth pivots around an overwrought clock tower at the heart of town. Edward I gave Machynlleth its charter as a market town in 1291 but it was Owain Glyndŵr setting up his parliament here in 1404 that put it on the historical map.

In recent years, however, Machynlleth has become better known as the green capital of Wales – thanks primarily to the burgeoning Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT; see p234), located 3 miles north of town. The centre has been a huge success and is now, by far, the attraction that keeps Machynlleth on the tourist map.

Following the hippie-chic lead of Byron Bay in Australia, if you want to get your runes read, take up yoga, or explore holistic dancing, Machynlleth is the ideal place for you. Better still, it's surrounded by some meltingly serene countryside to explore, particularly suited to mountain biking (opposite).

Orientation & Information

From the train station it's about 400m walk down Doll and Penrallt Sts to the centre, to the Castlereagh Clock Tower, which is also where buses set you down. The **car park** (per hr 40p) is situated parallel to Maengwyn St behind the library.

The **tourist office** (‰ 702401; Royal House, Penrallt St; h 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun) has moved to a smart new centre. Staff will help visitors

with accommodation and information on local trails, plus the office has a good range of maps and books on local history. The **Machynlleth Book Shop** (Maengwyn St) also has a useful range of books and maps. For information about events around the region, check the free monthly flyer **Dyfi Diary** (‰ 761463; www.ecodyfi.org.uk).

There are banks located close to the clock tower, and a **post office** (Maengwyn St; h 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri; 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) located within the Spar supermarket. Internet access is free at the **library** (‰ 702322; Maengwyn St; h 9.30am-1pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 2-7pm Mon & Fri, to 5pm Tue & Wed).

Nigel's Laundrette (h 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat; 9am-8pm Sun) is located off Maengwyn St behind Maengwyn Café. In case of an emergency, contact the local **police** (‰ 702215; Doll St).

Sights

On Penrallt St is the town's only neoclassical building, the **Tabernacle**, a former Methodist chapel (1880) that's been restored and now forms part of the **Museum of Modern Art for Wales** (MOMA; ‰ 703355; www.momawales.org.uk; admission free; h 10am-4pm Mon-Sat). Welsh artists exhibit here; there is a small permanent collection within

the white-walled galleries. The chapel has the feel of a courtroom, but has good acoustics and is a venue for concerts, theatre and talks.

At the western end of town is a rare example of a late-medieval Welsh townhouse, the **Owain Glyndŵr Centre** (‰ 702827; admission £1; h Apr-Sep), with dry displays that nevertheless tell a rip-roaring story of the Welsh hero's fight for independence. This building was probably built somewhat later than Glyndŵr's parliament but is believed to closely resemble the former venue. At the time of writing it was undergoing refurbishment to re-open with a fresh look for summer 2007.

Activities

CYCLING

There are three waymarked routes from Machynlleth, the Mach 1, 2 and 3, which at 10, 14 and 19 miles respectively, are increasingly challenging, but nonetheless exciting, mountain-bike trails. Beginners should not attempt the Mach 3.

There's also a walking/cycling trail that leads off the A487, just north of the train station, and follows a countryside path, crossing the Millennium Bridge, to lead you towards the CAT by the greenest possible forms of transport.

Festivals & Events

The **Gŵyl Machynlleth** (Machynlleth Festival) takes place during the third week of August at the Tabernacle (see MOMA above), with music ranging from kids' stuff to jazz, plus a lively fringe festival.

Sleeping

Llwyngwern Farm (‰ 702492; Corris; caravan/tent £8/11; h Apr-end Sep) An appealing farm-attached site is set in pretty countryside near the CAT 3 miles north of the town centre along the A487. The site has toilets and a shower block, plus facilities for electrical hook-ups.

Reditreks (‰ 702184; Powys St; www.reditreks.co.uk; dm £15) Mountain-bikers flock to this simple but satisfying hostel, owned and run by the people behind the Holey Trail Cycle Hire shop in town.

Dolgelynen Farm (‰ 702026; www.dolgelynenfarmhouse.co.uk; Pennal; s/d £30/60; h Easter-Oct; n p) This farmhouse has just three plain homely rooms and lovely views. Located on a working farm, follow the A487 from Machynlleth for half a mile. After crossing the Dyfi Bridge, take the first left-hand turn towards Tywyn (A493)

and the first turn left off this road – the farm lane entrance is signposted Dolgelynen.

Maenllwyd (‰ 702928; Newtown Rd; s/d £35/55; p) A large Victorian house with a preponderance of pale-pink rooms, it makes for a reliable midrange option – low on frills but welcoming and homely.

Dyfi Guesthouse (‰ 702562; www.dyfiguest.co.uk; s/d £40/60; n p w) This is the closest B&B to the train station – it's just 200 metres away, but the owners will also pick you up if you call ahead. The modern bungalow-style accommodation is comfortable but the in-house ethos reflects the green nature of the town with great vegan-friendly organic breakfasts and disabled access.

Plas Llwyngwern (‰ 703970; Pantperthog; d/f £45/50) A very welcoming little place, located just 300 metres from the CAT to the north of the centre, it has huge rooms with fantastic views. The building is a grand old house dating from 1750 to 1850 with vast grounds for children to run wild.

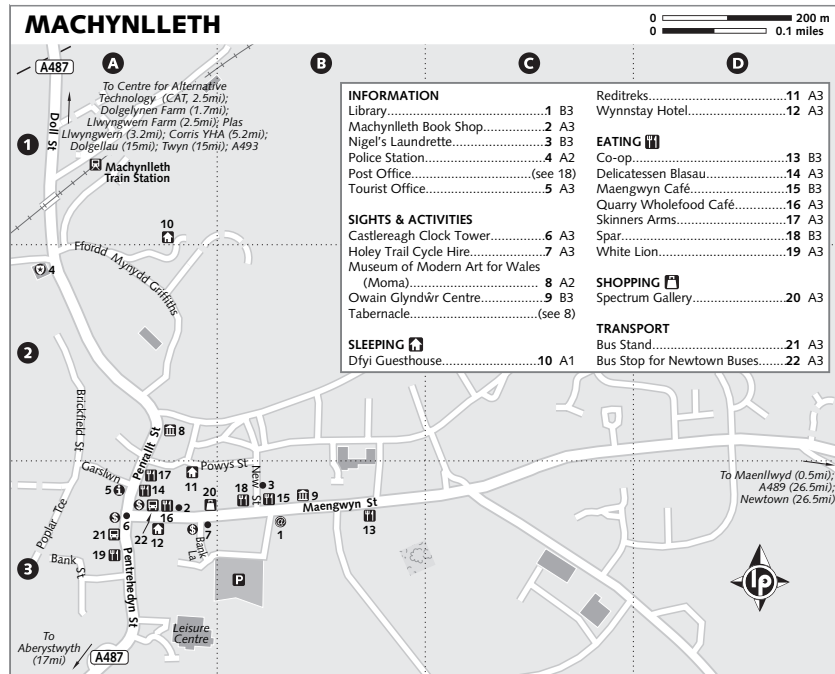
Wynnstay Hotel (‰ 702941; www.wynnstay-hotel.com; Maengwyn St; s/d from £55/80, mains £14; h meals noon-2pm & 6.30-9.30pm; n p) This erstwhile Georgian coaching inn, dating from 1780, remains the best all-rounder in town and the only superior option for a few extra home comforts. The rooms are stylishly furnished with one room featuring a four-poster bed. Downstairs is given over to a rustic bar-eatery area, split between a deep-blue nonsmoking restaurant and a deep-red smoking bar. There are imaginative evening meals and a more informal pizzeria (around £8), which also offers takeaway.

Eating

There are lots of good cafés open during the day, but in the evening it's mainly pub food or takeaway on offer.

Maengwyn Café (‰ 702126; 57 Maengwyn St; mains £4; h 8.30am-5pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 8.30am-4pm Thu, 9am-4pm Sun) Straightforward dishes and décor are the staples of this locals' café. It's simple fare at budget prices, but accordingly very low on frills.

Quarry Wholefood Café (‰ 702624; Maengwyn St; specials £6; h 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Thu) Run by the same people that manage the CAT, this woody, gentle-paced place has delicious, wholesome vegetarian lunch specials, using mostly organic ingredients. It's also fantastically baby friendly with organic baby food on the menu, and changing facilities. The only



downside to its popularity? Queuing for a table.

Skinnners Arms (☎ 702354; Penrallt St; bar meals £7) Popular with locals, this has some of the best bar food in town, great Sunday roasts and local ales. It's a warm and cosy spot with a fireplace to ward off the winter chill.

White Lion (☎ 703455; Pentrehedyn St; www.white.lionhotel.co.uk; mains £9) This big old inn offers good bar meals, served all day in big portions, plus there are lots of fish and vegetarian options.

Supermarkets include a **Spar** (Maengwyn St; 7am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) and a **Co-op** (Maengwyn St; 7 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-4pm Sun). For more of a treat, **Delicatessen Blasau** (☎ 700410; Penrallt Rd; 7 8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) is a superb little deli selling take-away sandwiches, organic produce and fair-trade supplies. Specialising in local produce, they have a huge selection of local wines, liqueurs, whiskies and chocolate.

The town's Wednesday **farmers market** (Maengwyn St) has been going on for over seven centuries and remains a lively affair.

Shopping

Machynlleth has a proud tradition of keeping local, independent shops alive with the main suspects all found along Maengwyn St. The **Spectrum Gallery** (☎ 702877; www.spectrumgallery.co.uk; Maengwyn Street; 7 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a particularly interesting little place with a range of arty crafts and design-led gifts. Keep a lookout for the all-seeing eye that keeps guard over the high street from the shop's façade.

Getting There & Away

The bus stand for CAT, Corris and Dolgellau is on Pentrehedyn St near the junction with Maengwyn St; buses to Aberystwyth stop opposite. Arriva bus 28 runs to Aberystwyth (35 minutes, six daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Dolgellau (35 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, three Sunday). Buses to Newtown stop along Maengwyn St by the Red Lion pub; bus 522 runs to Newtown (one hour, four daily Monday to Saturday). Check prices with the local tourist office.

Machynlleth is on the Cambrian main line route across Mid-Wales, with services roughly every two hours from Aberystwyth (£3.80, 30 minutes) and Shrewsbury (£10, 1½ hours). There are also three services on a Sunday. From Machynlleth the Cambrian Coaster runs up the coast to Pwllheli (£10,

two hours 25 minutes, seven times daily, one Sunday).

Getting Around

Holey Trail Cycle Hire (☎ 700411; www.theholeytrail.co.uk; 31 Maengwyn St; 7 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) hires out mountain bikes from half-/full-day £12/18; the staff is a mine of information on the local cycle trails. The owners also offer bike repairs and run the Reditreks bunkhouse.

AROUND MACHYNLLETH Centre for Alternative Technology

The **Centre for Alternative Technology** (CAT; ☎ 705950; www.cat.org.uk; adult/child £8/4; 7 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct; 10am-4.30pm Nov-Mar, closed first 2 weeks in Jan) is a pioneering environmental centre and the main catalyst for re-branding Machynlleth as the 'green capital of Wales'.

CAT was founded in 1974 – way ahead of its time – to test alternative technologies. Since then, the centre has gone from strength to strength as an ecologically driven laboratory and information source. The centre is a workers cooperative, with about 130 on-site workers and 15 full-time residents.

From the car park you ride 60m up to the site on a **funicular railway** (closed in winter), one of the steepest in the world. The two carriages are connected by a cable over a winding drum; water fills a tank beneath the upper one until it's heavier than the other, and they gently swap places. At the top you disembark by a small, scenic lake with great views across the Dyfi Valley.

To explore the whole site takes about two hours – take rainwear as it's primarily outdoors – and makes for a hugely educational experience for children and adults alike. A variety of displays deal with topics such as composting, solar energy and recycling. Indeed, the whole complex runs mainly on wind, water and solar power, and generates almost no waste. There are workshops and games for children during the school holidays and a vast programme of residential courses for adults throughout the year (course fees start from £30 per hour). Check the website for a range of CAT publications.

You can stay on site with B&B/full-board accommodation (from £22/36 per day), or in two eco-cabins (from £225 per week); the latter are aimed primarily at residential groups. The self-catering cabins are equipped with monitoring facilities, so groups can identify their energy input and output over the week.

LOCAL VOICES *Paul Allen*

Green ideas are spreading across Mid-Wales. The Dyfi Valley has become one of the UK's leading areas for sustainable tourism, with mountain-bike trails, outdoor pursuits, local food producers, small independent shops, cafés and restaurants.

We like to think that the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) has been a major catalyst in this movement.

CAT was established 30 years ago when a bunch of young idealists colonised a derelict slate quarry near Machynlleth. While the outside world thought they were just hippies building houses, the group had a purpose both serious and joyful: to build a community with a lighter impact on the planet.

These young pioneers set out to develop new building and power technologies and test them through normal daily use. These now form a set of practical solutions to the major environmental problems facing the planet.

Today, we receive around 70,000 visitors a year to our 7-acre visitor centre. They enter via our dramatic water-powered cliff railway that carries them up a 60m slope to begin CAT's positive, solutions-driven experience. Interactive displays give a crash course in sustainable technologies and lifestyles. The visitor centre is powered mainly by wind, water and sun, and we recycle almost everything. This includes treating the deposits from visitors with an innovative reed-bed sewage system, returning the goodness to the soil as compost.

CAT's free information service deals with tens of thousands inquiries each year and is often the first port of call for people seeking data and advice. CAT also offers an annual programme of residential courses, taught by academics and other experts with many years' practical experience. Topics include: renewable energy, ecological building, sewage treatment, water supply, organic gardening, composting.

Paul Allen, Development Director, Centre for Alternative Technology

They have their own energy from renewable sources, water supply and sewage recycling systems.

Volunteer helpers are also welcome, but required to book ahead around October time – short-term stays are usually between March and September. Those with a more serious interest can book a free trial week, with the aim of staying as a long-term volunteer (a minimum of six months).

CAT is located 3 miles north of Machynlleth on the A487. Arriva bus X32 (five mins, eight daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday; £1.20 but price is subject to change) runs here en route to Corris, (see below). Arriving by bus, bicycle or train – not car – gets you a discount of £1.

Corris

This peaceful former slate village, located 5 miles north of Machynlleth, is surrounded by hills covered in tall pines.

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Corris Railway (☎ 01654 761303; www.corris.co.uk; 7 weekends & bank hols Apr-Oct) is a narrow-gauge railway built in the 1850s that once carried slate; it closed in 1948. It disintegrated and became overgrown, but enthusiasts began to rescue the line in 1966 and it re-opened for journeys in 2003. The return trip to Maespoeth takes 50 minutes, which includes a tour of the sheds.

Corris YHA (☎ 761686; Old School, Corris; d/f £13/43; 7 Fri-Sun mid-Jan-mid-Feb & Nov-mid-Dec, daily mid-Feb-mid-Nov; 7 9) is a pioneering, energy-efficient independent hostel, housed in a grand greystone former school and set in the village of Corris amid some beautiful countryside. The hostel's vehemently green principles have won it awards, with low-energy light bulbs, organic produce and a strict recycling policy all de rigueur.

Arriva bus X32 from Machynlleth calls here (10 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday, £1.20 but price subject to change).