

Anglesey & the North Coast



The far north of Wales may not be the region most synonymous with tourism but it actually boasts some of the best hidden gems. Walking enthusiasts are particularly well catered for, with the scenic Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path an appealing new option, while fans of adventure sports can indulge in the burgeoning sports scene around Llandudno's West Shore and Llangollen.

Joined to the mainland by two monumental bridges, Anglesey is very different physically from the biblical splendour of neighbouring Snowdonia. This is where Britain's Celts made their last stand against the Romans, and the island is nicknamed Mother of Wales. The island offers a scenic surprise of gentle green slopes, ringed by dramatic sea cliffs and bays, and small windswept settlements. It has a greater concentration of prehistoric sites than anywhere else in Wales. All too many people zip through on the thundering Bangor–Holyhead road for ferries to Ireland, but get off this well-beaten track and you'll be rewarded with some of the quietest, most remote and timeless places in the country.

The North Coast, meanwhile, is home to some prime examples of Welsh heritage. The splendid castle at Conwy has been listed by Unesco as a World Heritage Site, while Bangor is an impressive centre of learning and numerous historic properties are scattered throughout the region. It's the contemporary culture, however, that has been making all the running in recent times. The Victorian resort town of Llandudno, overshadowed by the Great Orme, is shifting demographics to attract a younger, thrill-seeking crowd, while the friendly little town of Llangollen now hosts a major Fringe Festival each summer – a small-scale but highly rewarding answer to Edinburgh's annual culture fest.

For more information about Anglesey, check www.islandofchoice.com; for more information about the North Wales borderlands, check the website www.borderlands.co.uk.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore **Beaumaris** (p278), a charming Georgian town that has reinvented itself as the style and dining hub of Anglesey
- Tackle a leg of the new Isle of **Anglesey Coastal Path** (p280), which starts in Holyhead, and explore the hidden coves and sandy beaches en route
- Get active at **Llandudno** (p292), a former genteel resort reborn as a location for adventure sports
- Take a canal boat ride across the spectacular **Pontcysyllte Aqueduct** (p299), near Llangollen, then head into town for the Fringe Festival
- Stretch your legs with a walk through the **Clwydian Ranges** (p302) and scale the summit of Moel Famau for a view across North Wales



ACTIVITIES

Diversity is the word to describe the choices in this part of Wales. Coastal watersports are available at Holyhead (p290) with boating also possible around Conwy (p290) and Beaumaris (p279). Inland, Llangollen has become a white-water centre (p300) and also offers kayaking and quad biking trips. You can walk and yet still avoid the crowds by heading off into the Clwydian Ranges (p302), and the new circular coastal path around Anglesey (p280) links delightful little villages from its starting point at Holyhead. There's also climbing near Holyhead and cycling is popular; try the Lôn Las Cymru Route (p60). There are nine golf courses on the island and four biking trails, plus course and game fishing.

The king of the walking trails, however, is the Offa's Dyke National Trail, which begins amid the faded seaside glamour of tiny Prestatyn's Central Beach. The **Offa's Dyke Path & Tourist Office** (☎ 01745-889092; Central Beach; 11am-5.30pm Apr-Sep) is located here, and has everything you ever need to know about the path all the way to Chepstow (p116) in the south.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The **North Wales Coast Line** (www.nwrail.org.uk) from Chester (England) to Holyhead provides easy access to the coastal towns, including Llandudno and Conwy, and via Bangor across Anglesey to the Irish ferries hub at Holyhead. The **Conwy Valley Line** (www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk) between Llandudno and Blaenau Ffestiniog via Betws-y-Coed allows rail access through the heart of the Snowdonia National Park.

The bulk of bus services in the region are run by **Arriva Wales** (www.arrivabus.co.uk); other useful operators include GHA, Arriva Cymru and Bryn Melyn.

For details of travel passes, see p326.

THE ISLE OF ANGLESEY (YNYS MÔN)

A parcel of green, gently rolling land that's cut off not only by the sea but also by the mountains of Snowdonia, it's not surprising that Anglesey has a singular character. This was the Celts' last refuge in Britain against the Roman advance, so it's got a fair claim to

being the Welsh heartland. Gerald of Wales quoted the ancient name for the island 'Môn mam Cymru' (Mother of Wales) at the end of the 12th century. Its geography has also given it links with other nations across the Irish Sea.

Inhabited for at least 10,000 years, there is an intense concentration of Neolithic burial sites here. The finest is the burial mound Bryn Celli Ddu (p282), but the one in the most dramatic and evocative setting, above crashing waves on a deserted headland, is Barclodiad y Gawres (p282).

The Celts are thought to have arrived on the island around 500 BC. Their artistic and metalworking skills have been confirmed by a famously rich cache of iron tools, slave-chains, jewellery and other objects (now in Cardiff's National Museum Wales, p86) found at the bottom of Llyn Cerrig Bach in west Anglesey. The Romans finally conquered the island around AD 60.

Anglesey, at 276 sq miles, is the largest island in Wales and England. It has for centuries been North Wales' breadbasket, and still produces more than its share of cereal crops

and beef. In addition to farming, its inhabitants have relied on smuggling, copper and coal mining and quarrying, as well as fishing, for their income.

The island was only linked to the mainland in 1826, when Thomas Telford built the handsome Menai Bridge, the first ever heavy-duty iron suspension bridge. A mile away is the Britannia Bridge, designed by Robert Stephenson (whose father, George Stephenson, developed the steam-powered *Rocket*, the first passenger locomotive) and opened in 1850. This now bears most of the traffic, including the train line between Bangor and Holyhead. Bangor (p285) is the transport hub for the easiest access to the island.

This is the flattest part of Wales, rising to just 219m at Holyhead Mountain, but the coast offers rugged cliffs, some excellent beaches, and coastal water sports at Beaumaris and Holyhead. Beaumaris (p278) is the best base on the island with the greatest array of sleeping and eating options. The only official tourist office on the island is located at 'Llanfair PG' (p281), the town with the inordinately long name but little else.

THE DRUIDS

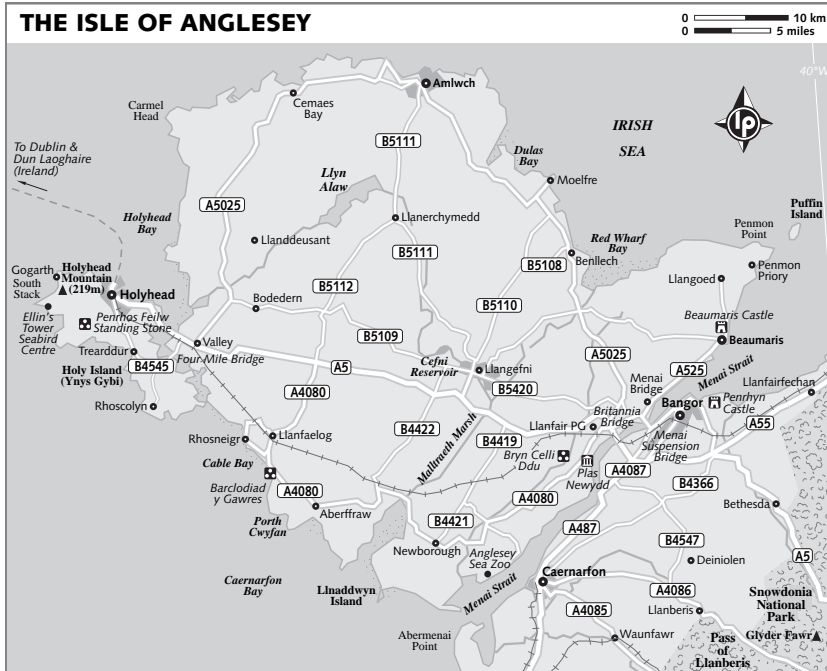
Mysterious and magical, the druidic mystique is assisted by a lack of evidence – they wrote nothing down about their beliefs. It is known that they had charge of Celtic religion and ritual, and were educators and healers as well as political advisors, so were vastly influential. However, the main sources of information about this spiritual aristocracy are Roman scholars, whose accounts are seen through an adversarial glass. The Romans are coloured as a civilising force, and the Celts and druids as bloodthirsty and keen on human sacrifice.

Around 400 druidic gods are known, mainly pertaining to localised cults. Ceremonies were very important, and druids had to undergo 20 years of training. Like Hindus, they believed in reincarnation; Julius Caesar, whose writings on his wars in Gaul in 59–51 BC are one of the main sources on the druids, thought that this accounted for the Celts' bravery in war.

Resistance to the Romans was powered by druidic influence in Britain – hence the Roman antagonism. Anglesey was a major seat of druidic learning because of its strategic placement between Wales, Ireland and France, and was the last place to fall to the Romans. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, when the Romans attacked Anglesey in AD 61, they were terrified by the resident wild women and holy fanatics who greeted them with howls and prayers, and found the altars there covered in the blood of prisoners. The conquerors did all they could to impress their culture on the locals, but the result was inevitably a mix of new and old beliefs.

Druidism became a fashionable interest in the 18th century, and the Welsh poetic tradition is believed to stem from the druids. In 1820 Edward Williams created druidic ceremonies to be performed during the annual Eisteddfod, which accounts for many of the long beards and solemn ceremonies still in evidence at this festival of poetry and literature today.

Their influence did not only permeate poetry and politics: it's said that the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe at Christmas comes from druidic beliefs, as mistletoe was an herb used during childbirth and symbolised fertility.



BEAUMARIS (BIWMARES)

☎ 01248 / pop 2000

Beaumaris has always been the island's principal town and chief port. Today it is a picturesque collection of grandiose, flaking pastel Georgian buildings, with a wonderful waterfront location, looking across to Snowdonia. Busy by day but quiet by night, it has a buoyant feel and lots of infrastructure for tourists, plus a slew of upmarket new openings, including galleries and boutiques. From Beaumaris, it's just 7 miles to Bangor and a 30-minute drive to Holyhead. Traditionally, the superb, fairytale castle, which James of St George built here for Edward I, has been the main draw, but as Beaumaris reinvents itself for a new generation of tourism, it has blossomed as a centre for sailing, walking and water sports.

Orientation & Information

Castle St is the main thoroughfare with most services strung out along the street; buses from Bangor also drop passengers here.

There's no official tourist office but there is an **information kiosk** (☎ 810040; Castle St; 10.30am-4.45pm Mon-Thu Apr-Sep) run by the volunteers in the Town Hall. The staff are very helpful and can provide a useful town map and a guide to walks in the area (a 2-mile history trail to Nant Meigan and a 2-mile sightseeing stroll around local points of interest). However, the kiosk is often closed at weekends due to a lack of volunteers.

There are banks with ATMs along Castle St and a **post office** (Church St), although both operate rather irregular hours. The **library** (☎ 810659; 4-7pm Mon, 10am-1pm Tue & Thu, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Fri, 10am-noon Sat), in the Canolfan community centre next to the council offices, has free internet access.

There's a **laundrette** (Margaret St) beside Sarah's Deli (opposite). For emergencies, **Ysbytu Gwynedd Hospital** (☎ 384384) is nearest, located back over the Menai Bridge in Bangor, and you can contact **North Wales Police** (☎ 0845 6071002).

Sights

BEAUMARIS CASTLE

Windswept and overlooking the Menai Strait, **Beaumaris Castle** (☎ 810361; adult/child £3.50/3; ⌈ 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) is the last of the great royal castles with which Edward I ringed the North Wales seaboard from Flint to Aberystwyth. Originally designed by the great military architect, Master James of St George,

with work running continuously between 1295 and 1330 on the level marshy ground from which it gets its name ('Beau Mareys' means beautiful marsh), the castle is a great unfinished masterpiece of military architecture. The reason? The money ran out before the fortifications reached their full height.

Nevertheless, Beaumaris is the most technically perfect castle in Great Britain – the symmetry of its concentric 'walls within walls' is more perfect than any of the earlier strongholds. The plans included four successive lines of fortifications and no less than 14 major obstacles to any potential attacker.

Today it is a World Heritage-listed site and managed by Cadw (the Welsh historic monuments agency). The effect may seem more picturesque than menacing, but the massive gates with their murder holes (which were used to pour boiling oil on invaders), belie this. It's particularly intriguing to explore the wall passages that link the towers, leading to watching and domestic chambers, latrines (not in use) and to the secluded semi-octagonal chapel royal, where you can still just see traces of its former bright decoration. There is a great walk along the top of part of the inner wall, from where you get a great view both of the castle layout and the breathtaking scenery that surrounds it.

Following recent restoration work, there is now a new entrance with a little souvenir shop and a new ticket office.

PENMON PRIORY

This spiritual, picturesque group of buildings nestle above a striking section of coast. A monastery was established here in the 6th century AD by St Seiriol, a friend and contemporary of St Scybi. The nearby holy well is also thought to date back to this period. The present stone of **St Seiriols Church**, however, dates from the 10th century following the looting and burning of the original church by Norse invaders in AD 971. A simple building, it contains two 11th-century Celtic crosses. The nearby monastic buildings date from the 13th century, and were settled by monks of the Augustine order. The 17th-century **dovecote** is the most extraordinary well-preserved structure, with space for 1000 nests – the birds would have been a source of fresh meat. Inside is a 12ft pillar with steps, which would have supported a ladder to help collect eggs.

The priory is located along the B5109 towards Llangoed by car; it's a 4-mile walk from

Beaumaris, heading northeast along the Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path (see the boxed text *Walking the Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path*, p280).

OTHER SIGHTS

The sensation and pathos of some of the trials that took place at **Beaumaris Courthouse** (☎ 811691; www.angleseyheritage.co.uk; adult/child £2/1.50; ⌈ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Sep) over 300 years adds to the atmosphere of this small, plain building (1614), where you can retrace the prisoner's journey to the dock. For example, a sentence was handed down here on Hugh Hughes to be whipped through the streets of four towns on the island for stealing food. Hammer-beam roof, benches and fittings of the perfidiously picturesque courtroom are all the original ones. The spiky railings that divide the court from the public were added in the early 19th century, as was the octagonal grand jury room.

Appropriately, the same ticket will get you into the **gaol** (☎ 810921; ⌈ 10.30am-5pm Apr-Sep). Built in 1829 by Joseph Hansom (of the cab fame), this is a massive, grey, forbidding witness to Victorian law and order. Its tread wheel (designed for hard-labour prisoners) is the only one in Britain still in place. A nursery above the women's workroom has a slit in the floor through which mothers could, by pulling a rope, rock their babies' cradles without stopping work. Cells are as tiny, and the punishment cell is a windowless, pitch-dark hell hole. In contrast, the condemned cell has a fireplace – a rare (and last-minute) sign of comfort. Executions were huge local attractions (that even had souvenirs), but happily there were only ever two.

The **Museum of Childhood Memories** (☎ 712498; 1 Castle St; adult/child £4/2.25; ⌈ 10.30am-4.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.15pm Sun Apr-Oct), opposite the castle, is one for nostalgia fans. It's an entertaining exercise in celebrating a bygone age with doll houses, clockwork toys, teddy bears, a rocking horse and Disney characters among the exhibits. There's a little souvenir shop next door.

Activities

BOAT TRIPS

Rising out of the sea off the east coast, **Puffin Island** is inhabited by a few puffins and plenty of seals. Operators run summer cruises from Beaumaris pier out here or along the Menai Strait. **Starida Sea Services** (☎ 810251; www.starida.co.uk) runs trips from a kiosk at the entrance to the pier with one-hour Puffin Island or Menai

Strait cruises (adult/child £5/4) on 60-seater boats, or sea-fishing trips (from adult/child £15/10 for two hours), including equipment.

Sleeping

Mountfield (☎ 810380; s/d from £40/60) This handsome 1930s villa is 230m northeast of the Courthouse and opposite the bowling green. All rooms have en suites and good views of the Menai Strait and castle.

Bishopsgate House & Restaurant (☎ 810302; www.bishopsgatehousehotel.co.uk; 54 Castle St; s/d £55/80) Set in a fine Georgian building, the three-star Bishopsgate is elegantly decorated. While rooms are fairly standard, the in-house restaurant serves up a hearty dinner (three courses £16.95) and Sunday roasts (12.30pm to 2.30pm).

Cleifiog B&B (☎ 811507; www.cleifiogbandb.co.uk; Townsend; s/d from £45/65) This new addition to the town's accommodation scene is a little gem: a charismatic townhouse that oozes with character and boasts superb views of the Menai Straits. A former monk's hospice, it's just 275m southeast of Castle St. There are only three rooms but they're all stylishly designed, while the breakfast has healthy options and draws on the best local produce. Great stuff.

Ye Olde Bulls Head Inn (☎ 810329; www.bullsheddinn.co.uk; Castle St; s/4 poster/ste £98.50/112/116) Dating back to 1472, when it was the borough posting-house, Ye Olde Bulls Head once hosted Charles Dickens, and today the bedrooms are all named after his characters. Samuel Johnson was another literary great who kipped here. By far the most stylish and smart option in town, the inn's rooms are modern but tastefully decorated with lots of dark-wood furniture and rustic, autumnal hues. There is an excellent fine-dining restaurant, the **Loft** (⌈ 7-10pm Mon-Sat; 3-course dinner £35), and the more informal **Brasserie** (⌈ noon-2pm & 6-9pm), which is a little kinder on the wallet. Even if you don't stay the night, stop off for a pint of the guest ale in the cosy house bar, set around a roaring log fire.

Eating & Drinking

Sarah's Deli (☎ 811534; 11 Church St; ⌈ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) This excellent local deli has a huge range of local and international produce, including house specialities of homemade quiche, mezze and tapas. There are great hot paninis to take away, plus hamper if you're splashing out.

Neptune Café Bar (☎ 812990; Castle St; mains around £10; restaurant ⌈ noon-2pm & 6-9.30pm) Don't

be put off by the initial chip-shop look: while downstairs is a take-away chippie, upstairs is a smart restaurant specialising in fish mains such as mussels with fennel and garlic.

Pier House Café (☎ 810321; The Front; specials around £10; 𠄎 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun, to 8.30pm daily Jul & Aug) A bright and breezy café right on the seafront with plenty of alfresco tables to

soak up the view, this licensed eatery specialises in fresh fish dishes. There are also big breakfasts and imaginative specials (around £10), such as prawn and chorizo salad. It's a good spot for a sundowner.

Courtyard (☎ 810565; www.courtyardcuisine.com; Regent House, Church St; mains £14.50-21; 𠄎 11.30am-3pm & 6-9pm; C) Another new, upscale opening,

this sleek and stylish restaurant has modern European fare in a very contemporary setting. Main dishes include fish and meat specials, plus there are special menus for both vegetarians and children.

For self-caterers, there's a **Spar supermarket** (Castle St; 𠄎 7am-11pm) and the **Castle Bakery** (𠄎 9am-5pm) for pastries on the go.

Getting There & Around

Arriva buses 53, 57 and 58 run regular services from Bangor (30 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday).

You can hire bikes at the **Iorwerth Rowlands Centre** (☎ 811508; full/half-day £16/9; 𠄎 9am-5pm Mon-Thu, to 4pm Fri).

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☎ 01248 / pop 2500

Coach parties are drawn like moths to a light to this nondescript little village on the A5 simply because it has a very long and very famous name, which means 'St Mary's Church in the Hollow of the White Hazel near a Rapid Whirlpool and the Church of St Tysilio near the Red Cave'. It was dreamt up in the 19th century to get the tourists in. And it worked.

The previous name, Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, would have been hard enough. Locals call it 'Llanfairpwll' and most tourist and transport officials call it 'Llanfair PG'. You should too. The village was the site of Anglesey's first train station (built 1848) and still remains a request stop on the Bangor-Holyhead mainline – you can even buy a large platform ticket as a souvenir.

Llanfair PG is not a place to overnight. The first ever Women's Institute in the whole of the UK and Channel Islands opened here in 1915; little has happened since.

Orientation & Information

The village is a one-horse town strung out along Holyhead Rd. The local **tourist office** (☎ 713177; www.anglesey.gov.uk; 𠄎 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, to 5pm daily Nov-Mar), the only official one on the island, is an excellent source of information on Anglesey. It is located across the car park from the train station, in one corner of a gift-shop complex that has a service-station vibe.

There is a **post office** (𠄎 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 12.30pm Wed & Sat) on

Holyhead Rd, and a Somerfield supermarket at the western end of town.

Sights

Arriving on the island via the Britannia Bridge, the road passes the 1817 **Marquess of Anglesey's Tower** (ticket office ☎ 714393; adult/child £1.50/75p; 𠄎 9am-5pm). This commemorates Wellington's right-hand man at the 1815 Battle of Waterloo, Henry William Paget of Plas Newydd, who lost a leg at the end of the battle. You can climb the 115 steps up to the base to enjoy great views across the island.

The old station building has now been converted to the **Oriel Ty Gorsaf** (☎ 717876; Station Rd; 𠄎 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), an art gallery showcasing Welsh and international glass artists. The shop also has a big range of art books and magazines.

Sleeping & Eating

Penrhos Arms (☎ 714892; Holyhead Rd; bar meals around £9; 𠄎 noon-2pm & 6-9pm) is a simple place located opposite the tourist office.

Getting There & Away

Numerous bus routes from Bangor stop by here, including Arriva buses 4, 9, 42, 43, 44 and 47 (20 minutes).

Mainline trains from Holyhead (£4.90, 40 minutes) and Bangor (£1.80, eight minutes) stop here every two hours. Note: Llanfair PG is a request stop.

SOUTHERN ANGLESEY

☎ 01248

Plas Newydd

Looking out over steeply falling lawns to the Menai Strait and way across Snowdonia, **Plas Newydd** (☎ 71495; adult/child £6/3, garden only £4/2; 𠄎 noon-5pm, garden 11am-5.30pm Sat-Wed Apr-Oct) is a National Trust (NT)-run, 18th-century Gothic masterpiece. The home of the first Marquess of Anglesey, who commanded the cavalry during the 1815 battle of Waterloo, it was built by the architect James Wyatt. The music room and the grand-hall staircase are splendid, but most stunning of all are Rex Whistler's great *trompe l'oeil* dreamscape murals in the former dining room – a busy fantasy version of the views from the house, painted with towns, castles and boats from all over Europe and all ages. Close to one of the fireplaces there is even a portrait of the artist himself, sweeping up leaves.

WALKING THE ISLE OF ANGLESEY COASTAL PATH

In 2006, the inauguration of a major new walking route, the Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path (www.angleseycoastalpath.co.uk), confirmed the island's status as one of the greatest walking destinations in Wales. The new 125-mile coastal walking path, backed by a £1.4m investment from the EU and The Welsh Development Agency, falls within a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty that covers 95% of the coast. The full trail, a 12-day walk appealing to all ability ranges and reaching a maximum altitude of just 219m, passes through a changing landscape of farmland, coastal heath, salt-marsh, cliffs, beaches and even a National Nature Reserve. There are 20 towns and villages along the route of the path.

The trail has its official start/end point at St Cybi's Church (p283) in Holyhead, but the 12 stages can be tackled as individual day hikes, ranging from seven to 13 miles per day. The path is marked with distinctive yellow signs, featuring the Arctic turn, and aims to attract up to 300,000 walkers per year. Some of the stages, particularly the far northern trails from Cemeas Bay to Church Bay, make for bracing strolls against a dramatic backdrop of wild, wind-swept scenery.

Setting out on an introductory walk from Beaumaris, it's an easy 4-mile stroll to Penmon Priory, which is still a working church (p278). From here a path leads north to Penmon Point with great views across to Puffin Island. There's a £2 fee if you arrive by car and a small café with toilets – the only official toilet stop on this leg of the coastal path.

From Penmon, the trail heads toward Llanddona, a 5.5-mile stretch, more inland and comprised of country lanes, which passes Bwrdd Arthur (Arthur's Table), a pre-Roman fortress from around 3000 BC. This is the highest point on the eastern side of the island with spectacular views across to Snowdonia. Llanddona is a Blue Flag beach for bathing (a maritime or freshwater recreational beach that has met stringent quality standards during the whole of the previous bathing season). It is better known, however, for the local folk tale, which tells of the flame-haired Llanddona witches who were washed ashore in the 16th century and settled here.

The last stretch of the day is a tiring 2-mile yomp along the shoreline, but with a major incentive: a celebratory beer at the **Ship Inn, Red Wharf Bay** (☎ 852568; bar meals 𠄎 noon-2pm & 6-9pm). The best place to overnight is nearby Benllech, where **Hafod** (☎ 853092; Almwch Rd; s/d £40/60) is a traditional B&B in an old Edwardian house. For dinner that night, try the **Seaview Restaurant** (☎ 853406; 3-course dinner £11.95), or the **Water's Edge Restaurant** (☎ 852005; 3-course dinner £15.50).

Further along Moelfre is one of the prettiest harbour villages on the east coast, but has witnessed some spectacular wrecks on its shore with the *Royal Charter* sinking off the coast in 1859 and losing 495 lives. Today it is home to the **Seawatch Centre** (☎ 410277; admission free; 𠄎 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr-Sep), a testament to the importance of the sea to the people of Anglesey. Overlooking the sea is a statue to local coxwain Richard Evans, who won the first Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) gold medal in 1959 for a rescue in winds of up to 104mph. He won a second gold medal in 1966 for a daring rescue in winds of 127mph and was named 'Man of the Year' in 1967.

Walkers should equip themselves with a copy of the *OS Explorer Maps 262 (west coast)* and *263 (east coast)* before setting out. In the event of an emergency, contact the **North Wales Police** (☎ 0845 607 1002).

To book a full package, including self-guided walks, accommodation and transport between trailheads, contact **Anglesey Walking Holidays** (☎ 713611; www.angleseywalkingholidays.com), which can arrange trips from £50 per person per day, according to the standard of B&B you choose to book.

For a ghoulish frisson, the section devoted to the Military Museum has an array of relics, including the wooden leg of the first marquis (one of the first articulated limbs ever made) and the blood-spattered, shot-ridden trousers from Waterloo in which he lost the original leg.

Bryn Celli Ddu

This atmospheric burial chamber, in which archaeologists found the remains of Stone Age people, forms one of Anglesey's most important Neolithic monuments. At the centre is a stone chamber roofed by two huge capstones, which was originally covered by a mound of earth. Take a torch and note the spiral design carved into one wall of the inner chamber (this is a reproduction; the original is in Cardiff's National Museum Wales, p86).

You can reach the site by tramping through fields from a car park located on the A4080, just west of Plas Newydd and 2 miles west of Llanfair PG.

Anglesey Sea Zoo

The **zoo** (☎ 430411; www.angleseyseazoo.co.uk; Bryn-siencyn; adult/child £6/5; ⌚ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm mid-Feb-Mar) has shallow pools imaginatively displaying local marine life. There's a lobster hatchery and sea horse-conservation project as well as common sharks, a re-created wreck and a crashing wave exhibit.

The zoo is 7 miles southwest of Llanfair PG on the A4080. Bus 42 from Bangor runs to the entrance (25 minutes), but with a limited service.

Barclodiad y Gawres

This Neolithic site has an incredible setting. It's on top of a rocky sea cliff, overlooking crashing surf, near a small sandy bay. The burial chamber has a long entrance flanked by upright stones, a cross-shaped inner chamber and several side-chambers. This site (whose name translates as 'The Giantess' Apronful') includes some remarkable upright stones bearing spiral and zigzag designs; it seems the chamber was used for ceremonial functions rather than burial ones. The actual mound seen today is a reconstruction of the original.

The site is just off the A4080, about 1 mile south of the village of Llanfaelog. Stop in at Wayside Stores (Llanfaelog) for the key (£5 deposit) and bring a torch.

Porth Cwyfan

From Aberffraw village on the A4080, a lane runs for 1.5 miles down to this dramatic location, a small, wind-blasted cove. On a small, walled island is the so-called 'Church in the Sea', the **Church of St Cwyfan**, which dates back to the 12th century. There's a disused military camp on the far shore.

In a converted farm building in Aberffraw itself there's a little **Coastal Heritage Centre** run by the North Wales Wildlife Trust, with exhibits on local flora, fauna and marine ecology, and a small café.

HOLYHEAD (CAERGYBI)

☎ 01407 / pop 13,000

In its day Holyhead was the terminus of the London to Holyhead road (today the A5), which was created by the Act of Union in 1801 and completed in 1826 by Thomas Telford to enable the mail coaches to make the 286-mile journey in good condition. Today the ferry port of Holyhead has seen better days: a grey and listless little town, its sole function is as a hub for ferry traffic to Ireland – more than 2.5 million passengers per year pass through here. There have been numerous initiatives to clean up the town centre – many without much success. However, the latest project, the redevelopment of the marina area around the sailing club, hopes to capture some of the seafaring charm of the waterfront when completed in 2007.

To see a more attractive side of Holyhead, strike out to explore the surrounding area, which features a beautiful, rocky coastline with huge colonies of sea birds, an observation centre run by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), a two-century-old lighthouse and the foundations of Stone Age dwellings.

The port and surrounding area are actually separated from the west coast of Anglesey proper by sandbanks and a narrow channel on **Holy Island** (Ynys Gybi), a 7-mile stretch of land. It's 'Holy' because this was the territory of St Cybi, a well-travelled monk thought to have lived in the 6th century. Arriving in North Wales fresh from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he was granted land for a monastic settlement by King Maelgwyn of Gwynedd. Indeed, Holyhead's Welsh name Caergybi means 'Cybi's Fort'.

Orientation & Information

The A55 and the North Coast railway line both reach a terminus at the Holyhead train

station, located at the southern tip of the Inner Harbour.

There are two ferry terminals on the inner harbour: **Terminal 1** is connected to the train station for all foot passengers, and some buses stop here too; **Terminal 2** is the hub for car passengers. North of the inner harbour on the Salt Island peninsula (via a dedicated bridge and roadway), **Terminal 3** is reserved for Irish Ferries. A free shuttle-bus service runs all day for foot passengers between Terminals 1 and 3. A new footbridge, The Celtic Gateway, is due to open in 2007, linking Terminal 1 with the pedestrian area along Market St.

The town's **tourist office** (☎ 762622; ⌚ 8.30am-6pm) is in Terminal 1. **Post St** is home to the major banks and the **post office** (⌚ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat), which offers a bureau de change service.

You can access the internet for free at the **library** (☎ 762917; Newry St; ⌚ 10am-5pm Mon, to 7pm Tue & Thu-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat); the internet room closes noon to 1pm. The **Internet Café** (Victoria Tce; per hr £2; ⌚ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) offers basic snacks and lunches, but the main draw is a bank of computers for fast internet access.

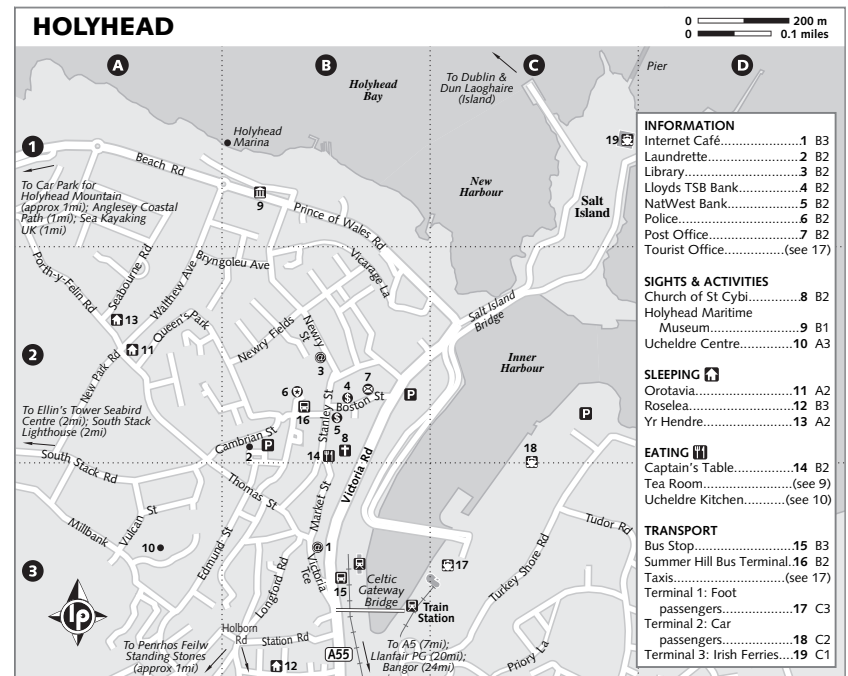
There's a basic **laundrette** (☎ 765391; ⌚ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) off Thomas St in the **short-stay car park** (per hr 40p). Buses stop on Victoria Rd and at the Summer Hill Bus Terminal.

Sights

Overlooking the ferry port from Holyhead Mountain are the recognisable remains of a 4th-century **Roman fort**, from which the town got its Welsh name. It was built as a defence against the Saxons and is one of only a handful remaining in the British Isles. Three of its corner towers are still more or less standing, while the fourth is a restoration.

A Celtic monastic settlement from the 6th century, Holyhead is also the site of the **Church of St Cybi**, begun in the 13th century, and of the ancient chapel of **Eglwys-y-Bedd**, which legend says was built over St Cybi's grave.

The refurbished **Holyhead Maritime Museum** (☎ 769745; Newry Beach; adult/child £2.50/1; ⌚ 10am-5pm), located in what is believed to be the oldest lifeboat house in Wales (c 1858), has model ships, photographs and exhibits on Holyhead's maritime history from Roman



times onwards. The new café/bistro (right) is an excellent place to eat.

Ucheldre Centre (‰ 763361; www.ucheldre.org; Millbank; admission free; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun; p c) is the town's most compelling attraction – a marvellous arts centre housed in a former convent chapel, with films, live music, drama and dance, plus exhibitions and a good licensed restaurant (right). It's a great family-friendly venue with something for all ages.

West of town is **Holyhead Mountain** (219m), the highest point on Anglesey. At its summit are a prehistoric hill-fort called **Caer-y-Twr** and the remains of a 19th-century semaphore station. On a clear day you can see Ireland and the Isle of Man. From a car park at the end of Beach Rd a footpath winds round the mountain; the best access to the site is on the western side. The former Breakwater quarry was converted in 1990 and now forms the mountain's **Breakwater Country Park** (‰ 752428), an ideal picnic spot and vantage point for wildlife spotters.

Further west, you feel as if you've reached the end of the world, with a cliff overlooking crashing waves and the lone **South Stack Lighthouse** (‰ 763207; www.trinityhouse.co.uk; tours 11 10.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep). Located down 400 steep steps and across a narrow bridge over a deep-water channel, the lighthouse was built for £12,000 and the station's oil lamps were first lit in February 1809. It was withdrawn from service in 1984 and is today managed from the Trinity House Operations Centre in Harwich.

Just off the road above the lighthouse, the RSPB-run **Ellin's Tower Seabird Centre** (‰ 764973; Plas Nico; 11 11am-5pm Apr-Sep) is the ideal place to look down at the island's choughs, fulmars, kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills, gulls and, from about mid-April to July, puffins. Follow South Stack Rd for about 2 miles to a car park – it is located at the road's end, where there is also a café.

Activities

The tourist office has a series of brochures with details of walks to sites of historical and archaeological interest in the area. These should be used in conjunction with *OS Explorer maps 262* and *263*. Holyhead is also the starting point for the 311-mile **Lôn Las Cymru** (p60), the Welsh National Cycle Route through the heart of Wales.

Sea Kayaking UK (‰ 765550; Newry Beach Rd; www.seakayakinguk.com) is a kayak manufacturer in Holyhead, which offers weekend residential

sea-kayaking courses for £155 (including full-board accommodation).

Sleeping

There have been some reports about unscrupulous B&B owners in Holyhead taking advantage of travellers stranded by late or missed ferries. Don't just knock on the first door you find.

Orotavia (‰ 760259; www.orotavia.co.uk; 66 Waltham Ave, s/d with shared bathroom £20/45) This bright, simple place is a good option for travellers on more of a budget. The rooms share a bathroom but do have washbasins and a few nice, homely touches, such as tea-making facilities. The friendly owners will arrange to pick up ferry passengers.

Roselea (‰ 764391; www.roseleaguesthouse.co.uk; 26 Holborn Rd; s/d with shared bathroom £25/40; 11) A very simple place with just two rooms, neither of them with en suites. It's very handy for the ferry terminal and train station (a three-minute walk over the bridge) and does a decent cooked breakfast to start the day.

Yr Hendre (‰ 762929; www.yr-hendre.net; Porth-y-Felin Rd; s/d £35/60; p 11) This four-star-rated B&B is something of a local institution and still a cut above the others. Professionally run and homely, the rooms are tastefully decorated – and some feature sea views and flat-screen TVs. A daily breakfast buffet includes local organic produce and healthy options.

Eating

Captain's Table (Market St; snacks £2-5; 11 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Formerly the home of Captain J McGregor Skinner, this simple café is where the locals now eat. It's just for basic snacks but the bacon sandwich is tasty and cheap. Try eating downstairs to avoid the fug of cigarette smoke.

Tea Room at Holyhead Maritime Museum (‰ 769745; Newry Beach; snacks £2-6; 11 1-9pm Tue-Sat, to 5pm Sun & Mon) A smart welcoming bistro with a decent range of snack lunches and more filling dinners, all served up on an alfresco decking area with great views across the marina development.

Ucheldre Kitchen (‰ 763361; Ucheldre Centre; 11 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 2-4.30pm Sun) Part of Holyhead's excellent arts centre, this relaxed, family-friendly spot is ideal for lunch or coffee.

Getting There & Away

Arriva bus 4/X4 runs to/from Bangor (1½ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday); bus 44 (bi-hourly, five daily) runs on Sunday.

Train services run roughly hourly along the North Coast Line via Bangor to Chester (£16.40; 1¼ hours). Services to London run on the Virgin West Coast mainline (4½ hours, five daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). Check www.virgintrains.co.uk for details.

Both **Irish Ferries** (‰ 08705 171717; www.irishferries.com) and **Stena Line** (‰ 08705 421126; www.stenaline.co.uk) operate ferry services to Ireland from Holyhead. Irish Ferries has two daily slow ferries (3¼ hours) and two fast services (one hour 50 minutes). Stena has twice-daily services from Dublin for car passengers (3¼ hours) and four daily services from Dun Laoghaire for foot passengers (1¼ hours). Check the websites for promotional offers. Check websites for details.

THE NORTH COAST

The North Coast is packed with variety, from castles and walled towns to Victorian piers and neon-flanked amusements. Bangor is a handsome university town along the coast with a youthful spark (at least during term time). Beyond is Conwy, an extraordinary walled city

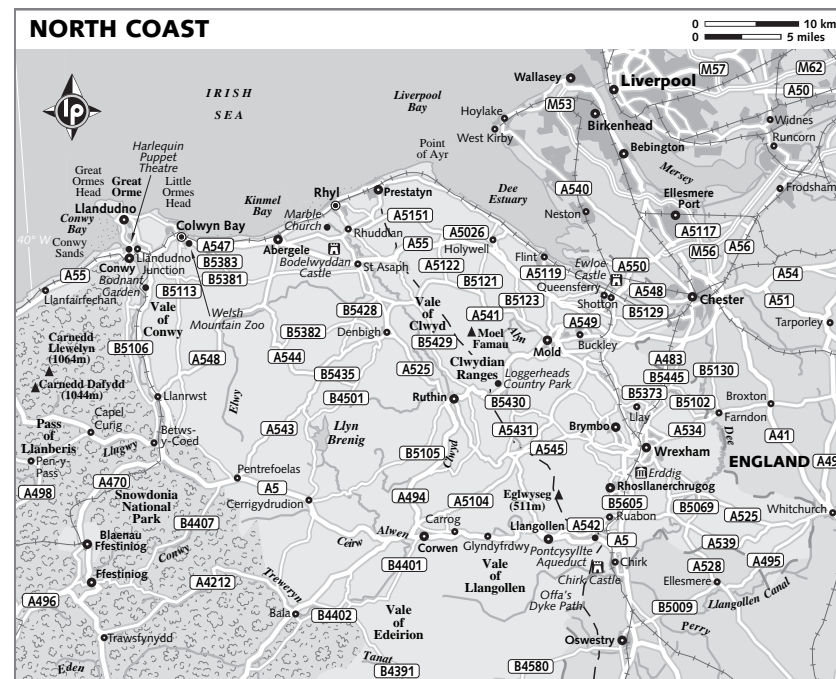
that has one of Wales' World Heritage Site castles. Out on a fingernail of land is Llandudno, a stately Victorian resort busily maintaining its popularity into the 21st century. From here the North Coast serves as a holiday playground for much of the English North and Midlands, with long beaches stacked with caravan parks. But it's worth venturing along the less-travelled inland roads for a true taste of the North.

BANGOR

‰ 01248 / pop 12,000

Bangor is one of the campus centres of the University of Wales and the town's population practically doubles during term time when an influx of 12,000-odd students makes this one of the most important centres of learning in Wales. The town itself will win no beauty contests and relies rather heavily on its raucous student-night drinks promotions to foster a sense of nightlife.

Bangor is a major transport hub, however, with a raft of onward connections to Anglesey and Snowdonia, making it a useful place to break your journey before continuing onwards.



Nov-Mar) may look like a fairytale construction. But it's very much solid, with eight fierce, slightly tapered towers of coarse dark stone and four additional turrets poking from the interior. The castle took just five years (1283–87) to build, with 1500 workers helping at the height of construction, and remains today one of the greatest examples of medieval military architecture in the UK. After the Civil War in the 17th century, it fell into disrepair and the Council of State ordered it to be partially pulled down.

Inside it's more tumbledown than its Unesco partner at Caernarfon (p255), and smaller and simpler in design, but it's still a great place to explore, with layers of ramparts, towers and passages offering a combination of claustrophobic enclosures and awesome views across the walled town and estuary. The grand ruins of the royal apartments and chapel, and the towering shell of the 10m roofless Great Hall are impressive despite their state of disrepair.

In contrast the town walls are fully intact, with 22 towers and three original gateways; you can walk along many sections.

CONWY SUSPENSION BRIDGE

With its Gothic turrets, Thomas Telford's handsome **suspension bridge** (% 573282; adult/child £1/50p; h 11am–5pm) looks, at first glance, like an extension to Conwy Castle. It was completed, however, in 1826, the same year as Telford's other milestone bridge over the Menai Strait – both of them intended to speed the movement of people and goods from London to Holyhead. Like its Menai cousin, it was eclipsed a quarter of a century later by an adjacent steel bridge designed by Robert Stephenson (who also designed the arch where the railway punctures the old town walls). The Conwy suspension bridge is now pedestrian and you can visit its restored tollhouse, furnished as it was over a century ago.

OTHER SIGHTS

Plas Mawr (% 580167; High St; adult/child £4.90/4.50; h 9.30am–5pm Tue–Sun Apr–May & Sep, to 6pm Tue–Sun Jun–Aug, to 4pm Oct Tue–Sun) is the UK's finest surviving Elizabethan townhouse. It was completed in 1585 for the Welsh merchant and courtier Robert Wynn, and the lavish decoration is testament to his social standing. Rugged, whitewashed outer walls give way to a lavish interior: the painted plasterwork is extraordinarily vivid, while the decorated ceilings

and friezes dance with colour and life. A new, free audio tour of the house describes the restoration and the life of the Tudor gentry. A combined ticket with Conwy Castle costs £7/6/22 per adult/child/family.

The very rare, timber-and-plaster **Aberconwy House** (% 592246; Castle St; adult/child £3/1.50; h 11am–5pm Apr–Oct) is the town's oldest medieval merchant's house, dating from around 1300. Today managed by the NT, it has been a coffee house, temperance hotel, bakery and antique shop, but remains startlingly well preserved. An audio-visual presentation shows daily life from different periods of history.

Wales' top art institute, the **Royal Cambrian Academy** (% 593413; www.rcaconwy.org; Crown Lane; admission free; h 11am–5pm Tue–Sat, 1–4.30pm Sun) is in a stylish building with an impressive white-walled gallery that has a full programme of exhibitions by members, plus visiting shows from the National Museum Wales and elsewhere. The academy hosts an excellent arts festival every August with free workshops and events.

The small riverside quay is currently being redeveloped and its attractions are less than compelling. The **Smallest House in Great Britain** (% 593484; Lower Gate St; adult/child £1/0.50; h 10am–9pm Jul–Aug, 10am–6pm Apr–Jun) is a curiosity with dimensions of 72 by 122 inches and a mention in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

More appealing is **Conwy Butterfly Jungle** (% 593149; www.conwy-butterfly.co.uk; adult/child £4/3; h 10am–5.30pm Wed–Mon May–Sep, 10am–4pm Mar–Oct), a nature park with displays of exotic flora and fauna.

Activities

BOAT TRIPS

Conwy River Trips (% 592830; www.conwyboats.co.uk) runs 30-minute sightseeing and nature-watching trips from the harbour, both out through the estuary and upstream into the Conwy Valley (adult/child £4.50/3). However, note that the River Conwy is tidal here, so the timetable varies. Sailing courses and boat hire are available from **Conwy School of Yachting** (% 572999; www.conwy-yachting.com) at the harbour.

Sleeping

Conwy Touring Park (% 592856; www.conwytouringpark.com; site per tent/caravan £10.85/15.86) A spacious park, 1.5 miles south of Conwy on the B5106, this is a green and well-appointed site with great views across to Snowdonia and a good range of services.

Conwy YHA (% 593571; Larkhill, Sychnant Pass Rd; dm adult/child £15.50/10.95, r £40/31; h daily Feb–Oct, Fri–Sun Nov–Jan; v) Located one third of a mile from the centre, this ultra-modern hostel has a raft of services – from a restaurant (breakfast/dinner £3.95/7.90) to an observation desk. There are disabled facilities and family rooms. Ask about low-season promotional deals.

Rowen YHA (% 650089; Rhiw Farm, Rowen; adult/child £10.95/8.50; h Easter–Sep) This farmhouse property set near the rustic village of Rowen is very much a walkers' hang-out. There are only self catering facilities and access is very limited via a steep, narrow lane and best tackled by a 4WD. You can also get here by catching Arriva bus 19 between Llandudno and Llanberis.

Town House (% 596454; www.thetownhousebb.co.uk; 18 Rosehill St; d/tw £55/60) Simple but homely, this six-room place boasts a quiet but central location. The guesthouse closes in December and January.

Gwynfryn (% 576733; www.gwynfrynbandb.co.uk; 4 York Pl; r £55/70) This Victorian property has been newly refurbished with some nice, thoughtful touches, such as in-room fridges and DVDs. The five rooms are all individually styled in different colours and breakfast is served in the secluded garden during summer. The best rooms to be found for families are on the top floor.

Castle Hotel (% 582800; www.castlewales.co.uk; High St; s/d/ste £75/75/92.50) On the site of a former Cistercian abbey, this historic coaching inn turned country-house hotel has characterful rooms (one of them, the Wynn Suite, features a carved four-poster dating from 1570). Children are welcome but may not appreciate the formal ambience.

Old Rectory Country House (% 580611; www.oldrectorycountryhouse.co.uk; r £99–169; p h) With a fantastic setting and panoramic views across the Conwy Estuary and a hidden-away Georgian country retreat feel, this place is just over a mile south of Conwy on the A470. The rooms feature modern bathrooms but suffer slightly old-fashioned decoration, and will appeal to those seeking a more traditional, environment full of character. The Walnut Room is the best for views of the castle. The hotel was traditionally renowned for its high standards of cuisine but, as the owners approach retirement age, it now offers rooms on a purely B&B basis with a minimum two-night stay.

Eating

Tower Coffee House (snacks £2–5) An airy café with great views across the estuary to De-ganwy. Downstairs there's a rather incongruous dungeon-style area – watch out for the shrunken head.

Press Room (% 592242; 2 Rosehill St, snacks £2–6, meals £8–12; h 10.30am–5pm & 7–11pm daily Apr–Oct, Wed–Sun Nov–Mar) An arty café that is great for a coffee stop and lunches, this place has real South American coffee, funky artworks on the walls, a menu of tasty café fare and a garden area for alfresco evenings. It's just by the entrance to the castle and also serves evening meals Thursday to Saturday.

Bridge Inn (% 573482; Rosehill St) For a pub meal, the Bridge has food all day, daily specials and Sunday roasts, albeit in a slightly rough-around-the-edges setting.

Ty Gwyn Hotel (% 650232; Rowen; meals £5–7; h Sat & Sun lunch, Tue–Sat dinner) This pub, 5 miles south-west of Conwy in the village of Rowen, has a gorgeous riverside garden and simple pub food with homemade curries and bar meals. Try to time a visit with the practice session for the local male voice choir, held each Friday at 9pm.

Alfredo Restaurant (% 592381; Lancaster Sq; set menu £14.50) This local institution is now becoming rather tired looking, but it continues to serve up family favourites, such as pizzas (£7 to £8), pastas (£6.25 to £8.25) and meaty mains with an Italian twist (£11 to £14).

Amelies (% 583142; 10 High St) Recently refurbished and renamed after the Audrey Tautou film, this is one of the few decent places in town for lunch; it also offers tasty homemade cakes and coffees.

Bistro Conwy (% 596326; www.bistroconwy.com; Chapel St; mains around £15; h 6.30–9pm Mon–Sat) It may not be the cheapest in town, but this intimate little bistro with a cosy ambience and an attractive setting in a secluded little red-brick cottage offers modern and traditional Welsh cooking. Vegetarians will feel particularly well served by the broad menu.

For self-caterers, try the **Spar supermarket** (High St) and **Edwards Of Conwy** (% 592443; www.edwardsofconwy.co.uk; High St), an award winning butcher-cum-deli with pies and hot meals to take away.

Shopping

Conwy Outdoor Shop (% 593390; www.conwyoutdoor.co.uk; 9 Castle St; h 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) This useful,

San Francisco). There's also a **cable car** (‰ 877205; www.llandudnocablecar.co.uk; £5 return), the longest in Britain, that runs from Happy Valley, above the pier (subject to the weather) and completes the journey to the summit in 18 minutes.

Halfway up the tramline is **Great Orme Mines** (‰ 870447; www.greatormemines.info; adult/child/family £5.30/3.50/5; 11 10am-5pm Feb-end Oct), a Bronze Age copper mine that was possibly one of the most important sources of the metal during that era. It's the oldest Bronze Age copper mine in the world that's open to visitors (the *Guinness Book of Records* confirms this). Take the self-guided tour to explore 4 miles of 3500-year-old tunnels.

LLANDUDNO PIER

This Victorian pier stalks an impressive and genteel 670m into the sea. It was first built in 1857 but collapsed in a storm two years later. Construction of the current pier was begun in 1877; its main use was as a disembarkation point for passengers from Isle of Man steamers (these are long gone). Damaged by fire in the 1990s it has risen again, but its downmarket seaside amusements are a far cry from its Victorian halcyon days.

OTHER SIGHTS

Oriel Mostyn Gallery (‰ 879201; www.mostyn.org; 12 Vaughan St; admission free; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is North Wales' leading venue for contemporary art with fine, adventurous exhibitions in a striking white interior; there are also short art workshops, an excellent craft shop and a café. In 2008, a new expanded gallery will be unveiled.

Home Front Experience (‰ 871032; New St; adult/child £3/2; 11 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun Mar-Oct) is a small museum that looks at life at home during WWII, and offers visitors the chance to try out an air-raid shelter.

The 'real Alice' holidayed in Llandudno, and the connection has led the town to adopt Lewis Carroll. However tenuous the link, the **Alice in Wonderland Centre** (‰ 860082; www.wonderland.co.uk; 3-4 Trinity Sq; adult/child £2.95/2.50; 11 10am-5pm Mon-Sat year round, to 4pm Sun Apr-Oct), with models inspired by the books, is a good one to entertain kids with on a rainy day.

Llandudno Museum (‰ 876517; 17-19 Gloddaeth St; adult/child £1.50/75p; 11 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 2.15-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar) presents local history through an assortment of artefacts and explores themes such as the development of the town as a holiday resort.

Activities

Turbulence (‰ 08456 589656; www.ukkiting.com; 148 Conwy Rd, Llandudno Junction) is the local specialist for adrenaline sports with kite surfing, kite buggying and kite landboarding the main activities. You can arrange lessons from the shop in Llandudno Junction, which also sells outdoors gear.

If you prefer the downhill type of speed, **John Nike Leisuresport** (‰ 874707; www.jnll.co.uk; Wyddfyd Rd, Great Orme) is an artificial ski slope with year-round skiing, snowboarding and toboggan tuition. Ski lessons start from £21/13 per adult/child per session.

Festivals & Events

Llandudno's biggest event is its **Victorian Extravaganza** (www.victorian-extravaganza.co.uk), held over the early-May bank-holiday weekend, with many streets closed off for steam engines, parades, a funfair and more.

For the more adventure-minded, **Kitejam** (www.kitejam.co.uk) is an adventure sports festival held each year in mid-September on the West Shore. It is organised by the people behind Turbulence (see above).

Sleeping

Llandudno Hostel (‰ 877430; www.llandudnohostel.co.uk; 14 Charlton St; dm £15, breakfast £3) There may be no camping facilities in the immediate area, but there is an excellent independently run hostel for a genuine budget option. It's open year round, is friendly and there's even an en-suite room (£36) if you want some privacy. The owners are very knowledgeable about local activities and attractions.

Hawarden Villa (‰ 860447; 27 Chapel St; s/d £22.50/45; p n) Central and friendly, Hawarden Villa has modest but good-value en-suite rooms and traditional fry-up breakfasts. Evening meals are available for £10 and single guests are made to feel welcome.

Hilary Hotel (‰ 875623; www.thehilaryguesthouse-llandudno.co.uk; 32 St David's Rd; s/d £35/58; p n) This large guesthouse has comfortable rooms on a quiet sidestreet. It's a decent midrange option, but aims at over-25s only and does not welcome children or families. Ask the owners about their massage and reflexology services.

Lynton House (‰ 875057; www.lyntonhousellandudno.co.uk; 80 Church Walks; s/d £35/58; p n) Close to the pier and the tramway, this modest place has rooms with whirlpool baths and floral walls; there are three four-poster rooms.

Plas Madoc (‰ 876514; www.plasmadocguesthouse.co.uk; 60 Church Walks; s/d £45/60; p n) This place used to be a fully vegetarian and vegan guesthouse. New owners have now taken over and also cater to nonvegetarian guests, but they do maintain the soya milk and free-range eggs tradition for those who request it. The five en-suite rooms are very contemporary with a clean, airy feel and a small in-room library of DVDs to watch.

Abbey Lodge (‰ 878042; 14 Abbey Rd; s/d £45/75; p n i) A cut above the average seaside guesthouse, this smart, Victorian-style lodge is set in a well-attended garden, pays close attention to detail. The four en-suite rooms feature big, iron-framed beds and marble bathrooms with tubs. The owners are taking an increasingly green policy towards running the place and cater for more corporate clients since installing free wi-fi internet. A good breakfast is served around a large communal table.

Lighthouse (‰ 876819; www.lighthouse-llandudno.co.uk; Marine Dr; s/d from £70/140) Head to bed in the lighthouse, an amazing castle-like structure atop a sheer 100m cliff at the end of the Great Orme promontory. Decorated like a ship on the inside, it has three rooms with bath and binoculars, and breathes living history. Book ahead; you'll have a better chance of a room on a weekday.

Imperial Hotel (‰ 877466; www.theimperial.co.uk; The Promenade; s/d/f £110/140/220; p n w) Now privately owned by the Classic British Hotels group, this is the pick of the old-school seafront hotels and has recently benefited from a major refurbishment that has introduced two disabled rooms. It's a sprawling behemoth of a place with large, comfortable rooms, although

back-facing rooms are a bit dark. Facilities include a health club and the hotel caters increasingly for the conference market.

Escape B&B (‰ 877776; www.escapebandb.co.uk; 48 Church Walks; r midweek £75, weekends £105; p n i) This place is very much in vogue for its funky interior, but suffers from style-over-substance syndrome and fails to offer much of a welcome. Children are definitely not catered for but the owner is planning a new family-friendly property nearby for 2007.

St Tudno Hotel (‰ 874411; www.st-tudno.co.uk; 16 North Pde; s/d from £85/110) A small, award-winning Victorian hotel on the seafront, St Tudno has rooms that are prim yet bold, with lots of colours and big whirlpool baths. They're a bit small at the price, however. The in-house restaurant is one of the best in town, attracting a well-to-do crowd of visiting dignitaries. A seven-course tasting menu costs £49.50.

Osborne House (‰ 860330; www.osbornehouse.com; 17 North Pde; ste £145-175; p) Lavish and finely furnished, this Victorian townhouse on the promenade offers large elegant suites with Egyptian-cotton sheets, DVD, wide-screen TV and fireplace. The stylish in-house restaurant serves a three-course express menu (£17.95) and three-course Sunday lunch (£13.50) among other main meals. Food is served from 10.30am to 10pm Monday to Saturday, and to 9pm on Sunday.

Eating & Drinking

Nineteen (‰ 873333; 19 Lloyd St; 11 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) This relaxed little coffee bar specialises in smoothies, juices, coffees and snacks with big comfy sofas and a jazz-music background.

Ottakar's (‰ 873040; 37-38 Mostyn St; 11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun) The best bookshop in

AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Bodysgallen Hall (‰ 584466; www.bodysgallen.com; s/d/ste £125/175/375; food 11 12.30-1.45pm & 7.30-9.30pm) A stately country-house hotel set in verdant gardens, Bodysgallen Hall is just 2 miles south of Llandudno on the A470. The historic house dates mainly from the 17th century and is a treasure trove of antiques, artefacts and traditions, with a sense of history engrained into every wood-beamed roof. Overall it's the little touches that make the place stand out, such as the silver tea strainer for afternoon tea. Food is served from 12.30pm to 1.45pm and 7.30pm to 9.30pm. The owners also produce a tree brochure tracing a route through the grounds with panoramic views across to Conwy Castle. Meanwhile, in the grounds, a very contemporary spa has a range of specialist treatments – from a primal radiance spa facial to a detoxifying algae wrap. Ask about promotional rates for spa breaks and winter weekends. Beware: this is not a child-friendly hotel and under 12s are positively frowned upon. While the restaurant is open to nonguests, this is not the place to bring the family.

town has a great little café upstairs serving fair-trade coffee, a perfect complement to a browse through the nearby travel section.

Moulin Rouge Café (104 Upper Mostyn St) A simple café for drinks and snacks, and it has internet facilities – spend £3 and get 20 minutes of free internet access.

Hambone Food Hall (% 860084; Lloyd St; 11 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) A fantastic little deli with eat-in or take-away sandwiches, salads and drinks.

Fat Cat Café Bar (% 871844; 149 Upper Mostyn St) The sister property to the Bangor venue (p288), the local member of the Fat Cat chain serves up beers and pub food in a modern café-bar setting.

Fountains Bar & Café (% 875600; 114 Upper Mostyn St) This high-ceilinged café-bar serves beers, wines and cocktails, plus a good menu of pub-style food, including wraps and burgers. Try the house special – a hot beef and onion baguette (£5.95).

Greenery (% 877193; Lloyd St; mains around £5; 11 7.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, to 10pm Jul & Aug; C) With plastic greenery and green tables, this is a no-frills, family-friendly, all-round eatery for snacks, mains, vegetarian options and a kid's menu. Good value and no-nonsense stuff.

Romeo Ristorante Italiano (% 877777; 25 Lloyd St; fish specials around £15) With plastic-looking plants and red tablecloths, this friendly local Italian eatery serves pizzas, pasta and lasagne. Try the fish specials.

Richard's Bistro (% 875315; 7 Church Walks; 11 5.30pm–late Tue–Sat) An upmarket bistro for dinner, this stylish little place offers heavy dishes featuring lots of game and adventurous combinations of flavours.

Number 1 Bistro (% 875424; Old Rd; 11 5.30–9.30pm Mon–Sat) There's a touch of France about this stylish, dark-red, woody bistro with an imaginative menu including venison and ostrich, plus lots of fresh fish. The early evening set menu offers two/three courses for £12/15 before 6.30pm.

For self-caterers there are two **Londis supermarkets** (Madoc St & Upper Mostyn St) as well as various coffee bars and snack joints in the **Canolfan Victoria Shopping Centre** (Mostyn St; 11 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat).

Upper Mostyn St is the place to head to for nightlife, with a slew of late-night venues.

King's Head (% 877993; Old Rd) For a quieter pint, try the King's Head. Overlooking the tramway station, this Victorian pub is one of the oldest in town and also serves decent bar meals.

Entertainment

Venue Cymru (% 872000; www.nwtheatre.co.uk; The Promenade; 11 box office 9.30am–8.30pm Mon–Sat plus prior to performances) has recently undergone an expansion programme and is now one of North Wales' leading performance venues. It offers everything from West End musicals to the Welsh National Opera, plus dance, drama, comedy, pop and classical music, on the UK's second-biggest stage (after Brighton). There's even a free shuttle bus service available – call the box office for details.

Cineworld Llandudno (% 08712 002000; www.cine.world.co.uk) is a major cinema complex close to Llandudno Junction train station.

Getting There & Away

BUS
KMP Coaches' bus 9/9A runs from Llandudno to Bangor (55 minutes, every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday) and Menai Bridge (two hours). Arriva's bus 5/5X runs from Llandudno to Caernarfon (1¼ hours, every 30 minutes, hourly Sunday) via Conwy (25 minutes).

Connections to/from Snowdonia are run by the Snowdon Sherpa service: route S2 arrives via Llandudno Junction (four daily Monday to Saturday) from Betws-y-Coed and Llanberis.

National Express coach 545 passes through Llandudno twice daily to London (about nine hours) via Chester, and from Pwllheli, Porthmadog, Caernarfon and Bangor; coaches stop at the Mostyn Broadway coach station.

TRAIN

The Conwy Valley line from Llandudno and Llandudno Junction (£1.70, eight minutes) heads to Blaenau Ffestiniog (£5.50, 1¼ hours, every two hours) via Betws-y-Coed (single £4.10, 45 minutes, at least five times daily Monday to Saturday).

Arriva Trains Wales has direct services from Llandudno to Manchester (£20.10, 2¼ hours, 15 daily) via Chester (£11.70, one hour). For other destinations on the London–Holyhead mainline, change trains at Llandudno Junction, which is £3 by taxi from Llandudno station.

Llandudno Junction is served by Virgin Trains direct from London's Euston station (from £15.50, 3½ hours), with more options if you change at Crewe. Trains also run to Holyhead (see p284).

Getting Around

Snowdonia Cycle Hire (% 878771; www.snowdonia.cyclehire.co.uk; per half-/full day £11/16) offers bicycle hire and will deliver and collect within 6 miles.

Taxis (% 878787) are waiting outside the train station.

AROUND LLANDUDNO

Four miles east of Llandudno at Rhos-on-Sea, the **Harlequin Puppet Theatre** (% 548166; www.puppets.inuk.com; The Promenade; adult/child £5/4; 11 shows 3pm daily during school holidays, 3pm Mon–Wed & Fri plus 8pm Wed during summer holidays) is the UK's only permanent marionette theatre.

Six miles east at Colwyn Bay the **Welsh Mountain Zoo** (% 532938; www.welshmountainzoo.org; adult/child/family £7.75/5.50/23.40; 11 9.30am–5pm Mar–Oct, to 4pm Nov–Feb) is a good day out for families, with a range of animals from bears to tigers amid attractive gardens. There's also a new condor house in collaboration with a conservation project from Ecuador.

LLANGOLLEN

% 01978 / pop 3500

Set in the scenic Vale of Llangollen and featuring the River Dee as its gurgling heart, Llangollen is a slightly odd blend of cultured cool and gritty realism, perfectly illustrated by its culinary options, which range from foodie-friendly places to avoid-at-all-costs greasy spoons. The vale was part of the London to Holyhead stagecoach route in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the road ran through the middle of the town (now Bridge and Church Sts).

Traditionally Llangollen was a favourite day-trip destination for tourists in search of culture and Devonshire teas. In recent times, however, the town has made efforts to smooth over its rougher edges by building the profile of its increasingly respected Fringe Festival and celebrating the cachet it enjoys as host to the International Musical Eisteddfod, a six-day jamboree of music and dance that attracts folk groups from all over the world.

What's more, the abundance of walking trails and a growing array of activity-based excursions reflect the way that Llangollen is changing as a destination – and it is all the more interesting for it.

Orientation & Information

Llangollen sits astride the River Dee (Afon Dyfrdwy), about 6 miles by road from the English border; the nearest big town is 11

miles away in Wrexham. The A5 road, successor to the stagecoach route, skirts the southern edge of town, while the Llangollen Canal is a stone's throw from the river on the other side. The town is easily navigable on foot and bus connections stop on Market St opposite the **short-stay car park** (per hr 40p).

The town's excellent **tourist office** (% 860828; The Chapel, Castle St; 11 9.30am–5.30pm) is housed in the former chapel that also contains the **library** (11 9.30am–7pm Mon, to 5.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri, to 12.30pm Sat Apr–Oct, 9.30am–5pm Fri–Wed Nov–Mar), where you may access the internet for free. There are regular art exhibitions staged here and the building also houses the Fringe box office during the festival.

Around town there are bank branches of **Barclays** (Castle St), **NatWest** (Castle St) and **HSBC** (Bridge St). The **post office** (Castle St; 11 9am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) is opposite the NatWest bank. The **Blue Bay Laundrette** (Regent St; per load £4.70; 11 9am–6pm Mon–Sat) offers a service wash.

The **police station** (% 860222; Parade St) is round the block from the tourist office. There's a small **Cottage Hospital** (% 860226; Abbey Rd); the nearest accident and emergency services are in Wrexham, 11 miles away.

The mannerly **Court Yard Books** (11 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) is down an alleyway in the Courtyard pedestrian area among a slew of knick-knacks shops.

Sights

PLAS NEWYDD

The Ladies of Llangollen lived at **Plas Newydd** (% 861314; adult/child £3/2; 11 10am–5pm Apr–Oct) for almost half a century. Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby transformed the house into their own private romantic hybrid of Gothic and Tudor styles, complete with stained-glass windows, carved-oak panels and formal gardens. English and Welsh audio guides are now included in the ticket price and a new educational centre with an artist-in-residence is now based in the grounds. The house is a quarter of a mile southeast of the tourist office. Don't confuse this place with the stately home of the same name on Anglesey (p281).

VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY

Located at the foot of the Horseshoe Pass, the dignified ruins of the **Valle Crucis Abbey** (% 860326; adult/child £2.50/2; 11 10am–5pm Apr–Sep) represent one of Wales' last Cistercian

monasteries. Founded in 1201 by Madog ap Gruffydd, ruler of Northern Powys, its serene setting and now largely Gothic form (including a huge rose window) predates its more famous sibling at Tintern (p115). It suffered several fires during the Middle Ages – partly at the hands of Edward I, following the abbot's support for Llywelyn ap Gruffudd – and then later during the Owain Glyndŵr uprising.

Things looked up in the 15th century, and the buildings were extended. In 1525 the estate was valued and found to be the second-richest abbey in Wales, but it was one of the first abbeys to be closed by King Henry VIII in 1536. Dissolution and robbery accelerated the building's ruin. The 13th-century west front of the abbey church still stands, retaining a

beautifully carved doorway and impressive remains of the transepts and presbytery. Best preserved of all is the east range, rebuilt in the late 14th century, and the vaulting arches of the chapter house.

The site is 2 miles from Llangollen on the A542 with no bus connections.

LLANGOLLEN CANAL

In the 18th century canals and the horse-drawn barge were the most efficient way of hauling goods over long distances but, with the advent of the railway, most of them fell into disrepair. The Llangollen Canal fared better than most because it was used, for years more, to carry drinking water from the River Dee to the Hurlleston Reservoir in Cheshire.

Today it's again in use, carrying visitors up and down the Vale of Llangollen. In addition, the old towpaths offer miles of peaceful, traffic-free walking. And the canal itself is part of the attraction, thanks to the great civil engineer Thomas Telford (1757–1834).

To collect water for the canal from the River Dee, Telford designed an elegant curving weir called **Horseshoe Falls**. The adjacent riverbank is a tranquil picnic spot. It's about 2.5 miles west of Llangollen. You can get there on foot along the canal towpath via the Llangollen Steam Railway (a 15-minute walk from Berwyn station), on bus 98, or by car along the A542 (turn left onto the B5103 after about 1.5 miles).

However, Telford's real masterpiece is the **Pontcysyllte Aqueduct**, completed in 1805 to carry the canal over the Dee. At 316m long and 38m high, it is perhaps the most spectacular piece of engineering on the entire UK canal system and the highest canal aqueduct ever built. The first stone of the aqueduct, which connected the rivers Severn, Mersey and Dee at the height of the Industrial Revolution, was laid in 1795.

More recently it was nominated by the government as a World Heritage Site. If accepted by Unesco, the aqueduct will join Stonehenge and the Tower of London on the list of 27 World Heritage Sites in Britain.

The aqueduct is about 4 miles east of Llangollen, near the village of Froncysyllte – walk along the towpath, or drive out on the A539 Ruabon road.

Llangollen Wharf (☎ 860702; Wharf Hill; www.horse-drawnboats.co.uk) arranges two options: a short excursion on the canal by **horse-drawn narrow**

boat (adult/child £4.50/2.50, 45min return; ⚓ 11am–4.30pm Apr–Oct) and **motorised narrow-boat trips** (adult/child £9/7, 2hr; ⚓ from 12.15pm Apr–Oct). Trip options include travelling one way from Llangollen to Froncysyllte, a return from Froncysyllte to Bryn Howel crossing the aqueduct, or a single to Llangollen Wharf – you can combine any of these trips to travel by boat there and back. Return transport to Llangollen is provided where necessary. Only the horse-drawn narrow boats are wheelchair accessible. You can also hire self-steer boats from £100 per day.

LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY

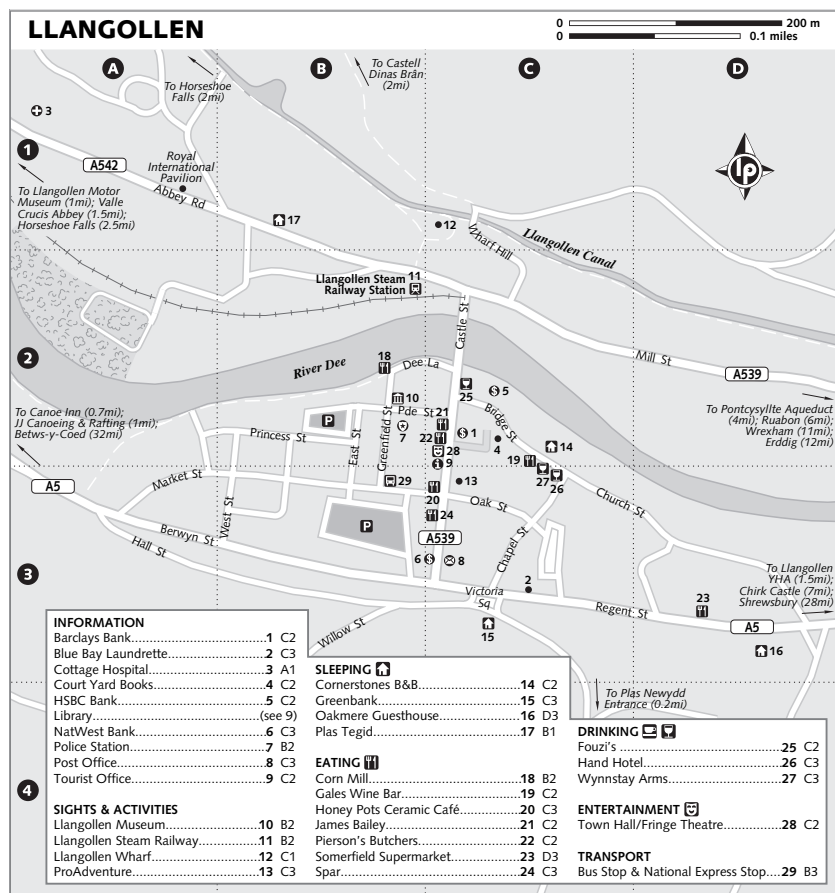
The delightful standard-gauge **Llangollen Railway** (☎ 860979, timetable 860951; www.llangollen-railway.co.uk; adult/child/senior £8/4/6, 80min return) was once part of the Ruabon to Barmouth main line. Closed down in 1968, it was brought back to life seven years later by keen volunteers, and now runs on an 8-mile stretch up the valley from Llangollen via Berwyn (near Horseshoe Falls) to Glyndyfrdwy and Carrog.

Departures run year round, with a minimum of three departures per day between 11am and 3pm, and there are a variety of special events throughout the year (for example, steam-drawn trips with mince pies at Christmas and a heritage diesel railcar weekend in early spring).

The station is just across the river from the town centre and tickets are sold in the station café.

CASTELL DINAS BRÂN

A spectacular hill-top site, 229m above the Dee Valley and to the north of Llangollen, Dinas



THE LADIES OF LLANGOLLEN

The Right Honourable Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby, the 'Ladies of Llangollen', lived in Plas Newydd from 1780 to 1829 with their maid, Mary Carryl. They had fallen in love in Ireland, but their aristocratic Anglo-Irish families discouraged the relationship. In a desperate bid to be allowed to live together the women eloped to Wales, disguised as men, and set up home in Llangollen to devote themselves to 'friendship, celibacy and the knitting of stockings'.

Their romantic friendship became well known yet respected, and they were visited by many national figures of the day, including the Duke of Wellington, the Duke of Gloucester, William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott. Wordsworth called them 'sisters in love, a love allowed to climb, even on this earth above the reach of time'. He was less accepting of Plas Newydd itself, however, which he described as 'a low-browed cot'.

The ladies' relationship with their maid, Mary, was also close – most unusual for those days. Mary managed to buy the freehold of Plas Newydd, and left it to them when she died. They erected a large monument to her in the graveyard at the Church of St Collen on Bridge St, where they are also buried. Lady Eleanor died in 1829; Sarah Ponsonby was reunited with her soulmate just two years later.

Brân marks the remnants of an Iron Age fort and the tumbledown ruins of a castle whose history is shrouded in mystery. It may have been built in the late 12th century by Madog ap Gruffydd, the Welsh chieftain credited with the building of nearby Valle Crucis Abbey (p297). The castle fell to the forces of Edward I in 1277 and remained in English hands for two centuries, after which it went to ruin.

The attraction for visitors today is the fantastic panorama – northeast to the limestone escarpments of Eglwysg Mountain, southwest to the rounded Berwyn Mountains, west to Snowdonia and east into the flattening Marches. The site is an exhilarating but strenuous 45-minute walk up from near Llangollen Wharf, taking the marked footpath at the north end of the canal bridge. Offa's Dyke Path also passes within a mile of Llangollen on the far side of Dinas Brân and crosses the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Llangollen Museum** (% 862862; www.llangollenmuseum.org.uk; admission free; 10am–5pm Thu–Tue, 1–5pm Wed) has a small collection for fans of local history.

About a mile out of town on the A542 at Pentrefelin is the **Llangollen Motor Museum** (% 860324; www.llangollenmotormuseum.co.uk; adult/child £3/1; 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Mar–Oct), featuring over 30 classic vehicles from the 1920s to the 1970s, a 1950s garage with pumps, and the owner's living room.

Activities

For walkers, branded signs around town mark out the new **Llangollen History Trail**, a 6-mile, or four-hour, circular trail following the history of the town and the surrounding Dee Valley. For a longer stroll, the **Dee Valley Way** is a 15-mile trail split into five sections that follows the course of the River Dee from Corwen to Llangollen. Allow 1½ days to cover the whole trail.

Both walks offer a chance to spot local fauna, such as birds of prey. Arm yourself with a copy of *OS Explorer Map 255* before setting out and see www.deevalleywalks.com for details of both walks.

For fans of water sports, Llangollen is an increasingly popular activity centre. In town, **ProAdventure** (% 861912; www.proadventure.co.uk; 23 Castle St) has kit for sale and offers a range of courses, including a white-water kayaking taster day (from £90), a rock climbing day

(from £80) and family adventure days (from £220).

Less than a mile west of Llangollen on the A5, **JJ Canoeing & Rafting** (% 860763; www.jjraftcanoe.com; Mile End Mill, Berwyn Rd) offers a range of activities and instruction year round, such as canoeing (from £95 per day), kayak instruction (from £40 per two hours) and gorge walking (from £40 per day). You can bring your own equipment and use the river for a £5 water fee.

Festivals & Events

The **International Musical Eisteddfod** (% 862000; www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk) celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2006. Dylan Thomas praised the first event, declaring that the 'town sang and danced, as though it was right.' It now takes place in the Royal International Pavilion, a purpose-built pavilion just less than a mile northwest of the centre, for six days each July. It's a massive, multilingual affair, with over 12,000 performers from over 50 countries and crowds of more than 150,000 people.

The **Llangollen Fringe Festival** (% 860600; www.llangollenfringe.co.uk) has grown in stature to something akin to a mini version of the famous Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The event enters its 10th year in 2007 with talks, poetry, music and theatre, the majority of performances taking place at the **Town Hall** (Castle St).

Sleeping

Llangollen YHA (% 860330; Tyndwr Rd; dm full-board £24.95) This hostel now only caters for groups and offers a set-price all-in deal. It's a great setting in an old Victorian manor house and is surrounded by woodland, but it's rather a slog on foot at 2 miles southeast of town. A taxi out to the hostel costs £4.

Plas Tegid (% 861013; Abbey Rd; s/d with shared bathroom £25/50; 10am–end Sep) A welcoming place with simple, good-value rooms during the high season only.

Greenbank (% 861835; www.greenbank.uk.com; Victoria Sq; s/d/annex used as 2 doubles £30/50/100) Walk into Greenbank and first impressions are positive: there's a cosy private dining room for group dinner parties. Upstairs the threadbare aesthetics are less inviting. But for simple rooms close to town, this place does well out of groups coming for local activities and sports, especially for its two annexed cottages, where groups can split the cost. The B&B runs an appealing steakhouse in the evenings with mains and à la carte specials from around £10.

Cornerstones B&B (% 861569; www.cornerstones-guesthouse.co.uk; 15 Bridge St; s/d/f £35/60/75; p n) For an intimate but relaxed stay, this converted 16th-century house has three individually styled rooms with sloping floorboards and oak beams. The River Room is a double with views overlooking the River Dee while The Suite comes with a sofa bed suitable for conversion to a family room. Some nice homely touches, such as in-room DVDs and big, cooked breakfasts, give this place the edge.

Oakmere Guesthouse (% 861126; www.oakmere.llangollen.co.uk; Regent St; s/d £45/60) Set back from the A5 Shrewsbury Rd, along a genteel gravel drive, this charismatic Victorian property in a refined setting is a little on the formal side. The rooms are comfortable but best of all is a cheery conservatory area with views across the well-groomed gardens.

Eating

Honey Pots Ceramic Café (% 869008; www.honeypots.com; 18 Castle St; c) Excellent little café with an artistic motif: upstairs you can paint your own pot over coffee for £3.50, plus the cost of the pottery – excellent for families. There are also hand-painted pots for sale.

Corn Mill (% 869555; Dee Lane; mains £7.45–14.75; 10am–9.30pm) With its young, buzzy feel, excellent riverside location, and stripped floorboards and exposed stone walls, the Corn Mill has the broadest appeal in town. The water mill still turns at the heart of this converted mill while an outdoor deck above the river makes a great lunch spot in summer. The food is superior fare with the odd tasty surprise, such as a range of desert wines and enticing vegetarian options.

Gales Wine Bar (% 860089; www.galesofllangollen.co.uk; 18 Bridge St; mains around £10; 10am–11pm Mon–Sat; n) With 30 years of history as a wine bar and a 100-strong wine list that spans the globe, this wood-lined eatery, with a huge log burner, is a friendly and popular spot with a relaxed feel. Inventive mains make the most of local produce with daily changing menus based around lamb, steaks and fish. The owners also accommodate (singles/doubles £50/60) in comfortable rooms with a continental breakfast.

Pierson's Butchers (% 860650; Castle St) sells hot food and the adjacent delicatessen, **James Bailey** (% 860617; Castle St) has home-made pies – try a Welsh Oggie (a meat, potato and onion pasty).

For self-caterers, there's a **Somerfield supermarket** (Regent St; 10am–8pm Mon–Thu & Sat, to 9pm Fri, 10am–4pm Sun).

Drinking & Entertainment

Fouzi's (% 861340; Castle St) This espresso bar with a few Italian-influenced snacks in the newly revamped Royal Hotel complex is a simple but useful drop-in for a caffeine fix.

Wynnstay Arms (% 860710; Bridge St; bar meals 10am–8.30pm Mon–Sat; c) The liveliest pub is the Wynnstay Arms, with real ales, a beer garden, bar menus friendly to vegetarians and children, and Sunday roasts served from noon to 4pm.

Hand Hotel (% 861616; Bridge St) This place hosts the Llangollen Male Voice Choir each Friday evening. Head to the bar around 9pm and catch them in full voice over a pint of Plessey Bitter.

Shopping

Tuesday is market day, with produce, handicrafts and more in the car park on Market St.

Getting There & Away

Bryn Melyn bus X5 and GHA Coaches 555 run every 15 minutes to/from Wrexham (30 minutes) via Ruabon (15 minutes) from Monday to Saturday; Arriva's 5A service and GHA X94 runs 10 and two services respectively, with roughly hourly departures on Sundays.

National Express coach 420 runs daily from Llangollen to London via Birmingham and Shrewsbury, leaving at 7.45am – you can buy tickets at the tourist office.

Llangollen's train station serves the Llangollen Railway (see p299) only. The nearest main-line station is at Ruabon, 6 miles east on the Shrewsbury–Chester mainline.

AROUND LLANGOLLEN

Chirk Castle

Southeast of Llangollen near the English border, **Chirk Castle** (% 01691-777701; adult/child £7/3.50, garden only £4.50/2.20; castle 10am–5pm Mar–Sep, to 4pm Oct, gardens 10am–6pm Mar–Sep, to 5pm Oct) is a NT property with sweeping views over the English borderlands. This handsome Marcher fortress (built in 1310) was bought in 1595 by the Myddelton family, who adapted it for more comfortable living and still live there today. It has fine formal gardens, with sculpted hedges lining the pathways and a farm shop with estate and local produce.

The castle is 2 miles west of Chirk village, itself 6 miles from Llangollen.

Erdiddig

The Yorke family home for over two centuries (until 1973), **Erdiddig** (% 01978-355314; adult/

child/family £8/4/20, grounds only £5/2.50/12.50; h house noon-5pm Sat-Wed Apr-Sep, plus noon-5pm Thu Jul & Aug, noon-4pm Sat-Wed Oct & Mar, garden 11am-5pm Sat-Wed late Mar-early Apr & Oct, 11am-6pm Sat-Wed Apr-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Sat-Thu Jul & Aug, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Nov & Dec) gives an unusually illuminating look into the life of the British upper classes in the 19th century, and perhaps the best insight in the UK into the 'upstairs-downstairs' relationship that existed between masters and their servants.

The Yorkes were known for the respect with which they treated their servants. Below the stairs are portraits and photographs of servants through the years, and a collection of household appliances of the time.

Today the property is managed by the NT with much of the family's original furniture on display in the fine staterooms and the numerous outbuildings home to a variety of displays and shops. A formal walled garden has been restored in Victorian style and features rare fruit trees, a canal and the National Ivy Collection. Complete with two café-style restaurants and extensive woodland walks, it makes a good family outing.

Erddig is about 12 miles northeast of Llangollen in the village of Rhostyllen, signposted off the A483.

A WALK IN THE CLWYDIAN RANGES

Most walkers tend to rush on past the Clwydian Ranges in their haste to get to Snowdonia, making it a lesser known area for walking. But it's very manageable with well-marked paths and ideal for a half- to full-day's walking from nearby bases such as Llandudno or Llangollen. Many of the walks are less than 8 miles and some criss-cross the Offa's Dyke Path, verging mainly on the western side of the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The trailhead for many of the walks is best accessed from the **car park** (per day £5) at the **Loggerheads Country Park Centre** (h 10am-4.30pm Sat, Sun & school holidays, 10am-4pm at other times), which is located on the A494 Mold to Ruthin Rd.

One of the best walks is an easy and well-marked 5-mile romp up Moel Famau (555m), the highest point on the Clwydian Ranges. The Jubilee Tour, the ruined monument at the top of Moel Famau, was built in 1810 for the 50th jubilee of King George III and offers a spectacular 360° view across the Northwest from Liverpool to the Cheshire Plains. From the summit there are also clear views over to Snowdonia and Cadar Idris. The original monument, a 35m obelisk, was the first Egyptian-style monument to be built in Britain.

The walk ends in the pretty village of Cilcain at the **White Horse** (bar meals h noon-2pm & 7-9pm), a converted 16th-century coaching inn, and the ideal place to rest up, although the selection of beers is disappointing. The pub featured in the film *Hilary and Jackie* as a location shoot for some interior scenes and is now marked as part of the North Wales Film & Television Trail (see the boxed text, opposite).

From Cilcain the 2-mile Leete path is a woodland trail leading back to Loggerheads Country Park Centre – cross over the bridge at the bottom of the village and it's signposted on the right-hand side.

OTHER NORTH COAST HIGHLIGHTS

This area of the coastline, with its wall-to-wall caravan sites, fish and chips shops and run-down seaside resorts, does not put Wales' best face forward. But following the North Coast train line from Chester (England) to Holyhead (Anglesey) does reveal a few hidden gems. Don't bother stopping at the tacky seaside resorts along the way, but instead seek out these worthwhile diversions from the journey.

Ewloe Castle

One of the great Welsh castles, **Ewloe Castle** (Cadw; Wepre Park; admission free) is hidden away in a hollow, making it come as quite a surprise when you stumble upon it – unusual in a country where most castles dominate hill-tops. You walk through the woods to find the honey-and-red-coloured ruins – making for an unusually serene site. Most likely built in the middle of the 13th century by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, you can make out the D-shaped Great Tower that was typical of Welsh castles of that era. The eerily remote location may account for the strange phenomena that have been reported here, such as mysterious lights, the sound of marching men and ghostly singing.

THE NORTH WALES FILM & TELEVISION TRAIL

It all started with the filming of the *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* in 1958 in Beddgelert. The film, starring Ingrid Bergman and Burt Kwok (better known for his role in the *Pink Panther*), blazed a trail for other filmmakers and stars to follow. Kwok returned to Beddgelert in 2004 to unveil the first of the film plaques in the main street and, hence, the North Wales Film & Television Trail was born.

Today nine plaques trace a route across North Wales that follows in the footsteps of the stars. A further 20 plaques are planned along the trail that stretches from Llandudno to Blaenau Ffestioniog via Menai Bridge in Anglesey. Big-name stars who have graced the trail include Angelina Jolie in *Snowdonia (Tomb Raider 2 – Lara Croft and the Cradle of Life; 2003)*, Emily Watson and Rachel Griffiths in *Cilcain, near Mold (Hilary and Jackie; 1998)* and David Tenant and Peter O'Toole at Chirk Castle (*Casanova; 2005*). There's even a plaque in Llanberis in memory of Sid James and Kenneth Williams (*Carry On Up The Khyber; 1968*).

In recent years Wales has become a popular location for film and TV directors, and tourism officials identified the trail as a way to boost tourism, especially in the often-overlooked North Wales borderlands region. The Wales Screen Commission is responsible for the Film & Television Trail, while the Movie Map was commissioned by Tourism Partnership North Wales. It's estimated that the North Wales initiative will lead to film buffs boosting the region's economy by an extra £1 million annually, with many visitors coming from the United States.

The locations link together to form a route across North Wales. See regional chapters for details of local transport and check the website www.moviemapnw.co.uk for a full list of the locations of the plaques. For more details, see www.walescreencommission.co.uk.

The castle is situated off the A55. The nearest train station is at Shotton, on the North Coast line.

Bodelwyddan Castle

This Welsh outpost of the **National Portrait Gallery** (NPG; % 01745-584060; www.bodelwyddan-castle.co.uk; adult/child £5/2; h 10.30am-5pm daily Jul-Sep, 10.30am-5pm Tue-Thu Mar-Jul & Sep, 10.30am-4pm Thu, Sat & Sun Jan-Mar & Nov-Dec) occupies a magnificent limestone-turreted house set in parkland. Nineteenth-century life is brought alive here, with much of the house built between 1800 and 1852 and the building designed by architects including Joseph Hansom of Hansom cab renown. The building houses exhibits

from London's Victoria and Albert Museum and from the 19th-century collection of the NPG as well as many contemporary pieces.

The 1st-floor galleries have been refurbished and now house intriguing temporary exhibits.

Across the road is the distinctive landmark of the white **Marble Church** with its towering 62m spire that looms over the region. The interior is characterised by the marble arcades that give the church its name, while the churchyard tells a story of local men and international victims of WWII.

The castle and church are both situated on the A55 Expressway from Chester to Bangor, or the nearest train station is Rhyl on the North Coast line.

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