

# Snowdonia & the Llŷn



Snowdonia never ceases to inspire. From the spectacular mountain scenery to the welcoming Welsh hospitality in small villages among the peaks, Wales' rural heartland is one of the most attractive and visited areas of the country. It's not just about panoramas, however. Snowdonia is also a hub for activities, with walking, climbing and a new penchant for water sports the main drawcards.

Away from the hiking trails, there's the glorious Portmeirion, an Italianate village nestling on the North Wales coast; Edward I's formidable castles at Caernarfon and Harlech, part of a joint Unesco World Heritage Site with those at Beaumaris and Conwy; and lively hubs for active travellers at Betws-y-Coed and Bala.

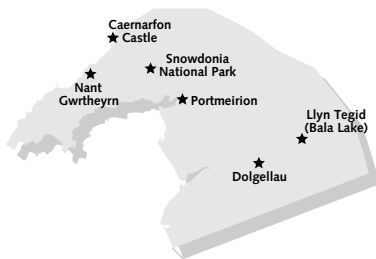
The northwest is the most traditionally minded and heavily Welsh-speaking corner. Indeed, modern Gwynedd is more than 70% Welsh-speaking, while old Gwynedd was a stronghold of the Welsh princes. The Snowdon highlands sheltered Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in the 13th century and Owain Glyndŵr in the 15th during their struggles against the English.

With such a formidable mountain shield, it's little wonder that the Llŷn Peninsula has held with even greater confidence to old Welsh ways, making it the one of the lesser-known areas, but one worthy of discovery.

For more information about the region, check the website [www.visitsnowdonia.info](http://www.visitsnowdonia.info).

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore **Snowdonia National Park** (opposite), a crescendo of mountains, lakes and valleys. This dramatically beautiful area is the UK's second-largest national park (after the Lake District).
- Visit **Portmeirion** (p252), a beautiful celebration of kitsch
- Soak up the history with a stroll around the World Heritage Site of **Caernarfon Castle** (p254)
- Try your hand at white-water sports, or try to spot the monster of the lake at **Llyn Tegid** (p245)
- Stretch your legs around **Dolgellau** (p241), climbing Cader Idris or tackling the Precipice Walk
- Venture to the end of the earth and learn a new language in the process with a trip to the **Welsh Language & Heritage Centre** (p274) at Nant Gwrtheyrn



## ACTIVITIES

One of the best regions in Wales for getting out and about, Snowdonia is prime climbing, cycling, mountain biking, walking, scrambling country, while the Llŷn is one of the best areas in Wales for water sports, including sailing (p256, p247), surfing (p270) and wakeboarding (p271). Just contemplating the list of activities could tire you out.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

The region's biggest bus operator is **Arriva Cymru** ([www.arrivabus.co.uk](http://www.arrivabus.co.uk)) for bus connections between major towns; service is poor on Sundays. Most of the services to trailheads within Snowdonia National Park are operated by **Snowdon Sherpa** ([www.gwynedd.gov.uk/bwsgwynedd](http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/bwsgwynedd)), a park-run association of local companies, whose dedicated blue-liveried buses run on a network of routes around the park, making it easier for people to leave their cars outside the park. Buses run on fixed schedules every hour or two (less often on Sunday).

Railway travel is more important here than in many parts of the country, thanks to the **Cambrian Coast line** ([www.thecambrianline.co.uk](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk)), which runs right down the coast from Pwllheli on the Llŷn Peninsula to Machynlleth in Mid-Wales; and the **Conwy Valley line** ([www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk](http://www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk)) in the north. The **Rheilffordd Ffestiniog Railway** ([www.festrail.co.uk](http://www.festrail.co.uk)) links them.

For details of travel passes, see p326.

## SNOWDONIA

### SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK (PARC CENEDLAETHOL ERYRI)

Snowdonia National Park was founded in 1951 (Wales' first national park), primarily to keep the area from being loved to death. This is, after all, Wales' best-known and most heavily used national park, with the busiest part of the park around Mt Snowdon (1085m). Around 750,000 people climb, walk or take the train to the summit each year, and all those sturdy shoes make trail maintenance and repair a frantic job for park staff. The Snowdonia Society (see the boxed text Local Voices, p264) estimates that the park is visited an average of 10 million times each year.

The Welsh name for Snowdonia, the Snowdon highlands, is Eryri (eh-*ruh*-ree). The Welsh call Snowdon itself Yr Wyddfa (uhr-*with*-vuh), meaning Great Tomb – according

to legend a giant called Rita Gawr was slain here by King Arthur, and is buried at the summit (for more on King Arthur, see p77).

Like Wales' other national parks, this one is very lived-in, with sizeable towns at Dolgellau, Bala, Harlech and Betws-y-Coed. Two-thirds of the park is privately owned, with over three-quarters in use for raising sheep and beef cattle. While the most popular reason for visiting the park is to walk, you can also go climbing, white-water rafting, pony trekking, even windsurfing.

The park is the only home to two endangered species, an arctic/alpine plant called the Snowdon lily (*Lloydia seotina*) as well as the rainbow-coloured Snowdon beetle (*Chrysolina cerealis*). The gwyniad is a species of whitefish found only in Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake), which also has probably the UK's only colony of glutinous snails (*Myxas glutinosa*).

## Orientation & Information

Although the focus is on Mt Snowdon, the park – some 35 miles east to west and over 50 miles north to south – extends all the way from Aberdovey to Conwy.

The park's **administrative head office** (% 01766-770274; [www.eryri-npa.co.uk](http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk); Penrhyndeudraeth) is situated 4 miles east of Porthmadog, although it's not a public enquiries office. This office manages six local tourist offices, including Betws-y-Coed, Dolgellau, Beddgelert and Harlech, where you can pick up a copy of *Eryri/Snowdonia*, the park's free annual visitor newspaper, which includes information on getting around, park-organised walks and other activities.

The office also runs – under licence from the Met Office – its own 24-hour **weather service** (% 08709-000100; [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)). Most tourist offices also display weather forecasts, as do several outdoors shops in the area.

## Activities

### WALKING & CLIMBING

Mt Snowdon (p239) is the main destination for walkers and Llanberis (p263) the favoured base. For climbers, Cader (or Cadair) Idris (p244), near Dolgellau, is the most popular and rises to 892m. Choose your time carefully to escape the crowds. There are gentler walks in the forests and hills around Betws-y-Coed (p260).

The park information centres and some tourist offices stock useful brochures on each of the six main routes up Snowdon, while Dolgellau and a few other offices have

a similar set on the three main routes up Cader Idris.

Be prepared to deal with hostile conditions at any time of the year; the sudden appearance of low cloud and mist is common, even on days that start out clear and sunny. Never leave without food, drink, warm clothing and waterproofs, whatever the weather. Carry *and* know how to read the appropriate large-scale OS map for the area, and carry a compass at all times. Also be aware that even some walks described as easy may follow paths that go near very steep slopes and over loose scree – the Pyg Track up Snowdon, for example. If the weather turns for the worse, consider taking the train down.

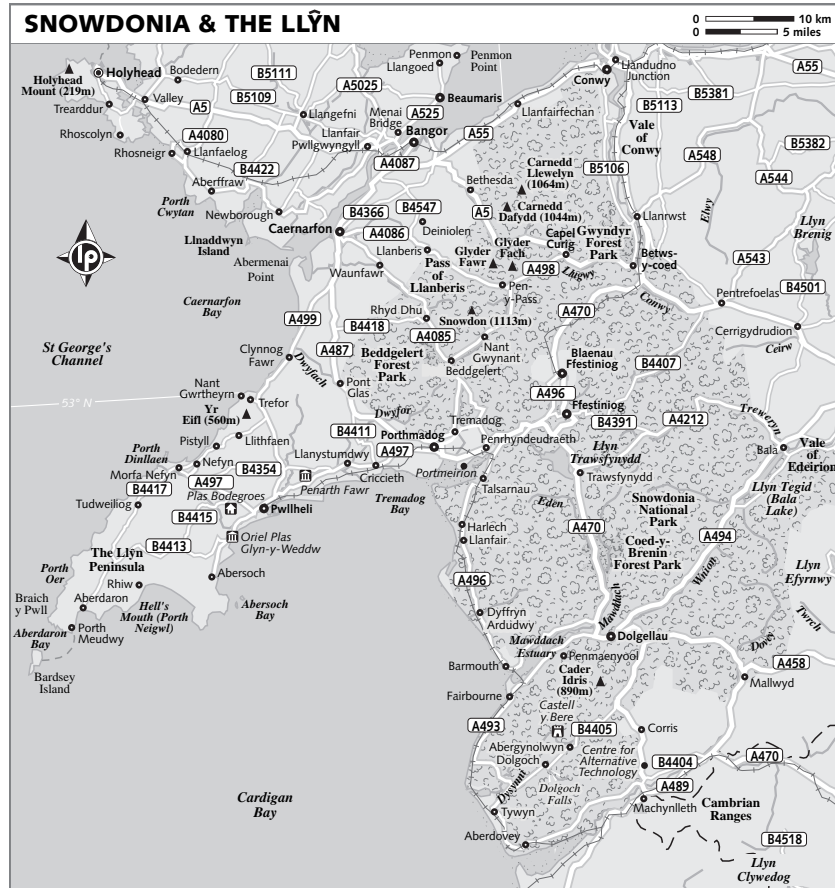
There are dozens of private outfits offering guided or self-guided Snowdonia walks and

walking holidays, often with luggage transport; details of various organisations are listed throughout this chapter.

### CYCLING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

There are good routes for cycling and mountain biking through **Coed Y Brenin Forest Park** (% 01341-422289), near Dolgellau, **Gwydyr Forest Park** (% 01492-640578), near Betws-y-Coed, and **Beddgelert Forest Park** (% 01492-640578).

**Lôn Las Cymru**, the Welsh National Cycle Route (Sustrans route 8; see p60), runs from Dolgellau, via Porthmadog and Criccieth, to Caernarfon and Bangor. Much of it runs alongside two county-built, dedicated walking and cycling paths on either side of Caernarfon.



The heavy use of bridleways (paths shared by walkers, cyclists and horse riders) for off-road cycling to the summit of Snowdon has led to erosion and fears for walkers' safety. Restrictions are now in place and cycling is not allowed from 10am to 5pm May to the end of September. Traffic on A-roads in summer can make cycling hazardous, so stick to B-roads or unclassified roads.

### NARROW-GAUGE RAILWAY JOURNEYS

One of the attractions of this area is the large number of narrow-gauge railways, many of them originally built to haul slate out of the mountains. The scenic **Ffestiniog Railway** (p250) runs from Porthmadog up to Blaenau Ffestiniog; the rack-and-pinion **Snowdon Mountain Railway** (p265) from Llanberis goes to the summit of Snowdon; and the **Talylyn Railway** (p243) from Tywyn heads inland to Abergynllyn, on the southern side of Cader Idris.

For Getting There & Around information, see p237.

### BARMOUTH (Y BERMO)

% 01341 / pop 2500

During summer Barmouth comes across as a typical kiss-me-quick seaside resort – all chip shops and dodgem cars. Out of season,

however, it has a very different feel, with a mellower vibe offsetting the brash neon of high summer. Whatever the season, this small town makes a good base for walkers, with its solid infrastructure for tourists.

Clinging to a headland at the mouth of the immense Mawddach Estuary and fronted by a vast breathtaking beach, Barmouth is a great place for getting your cobwebs blasted away by the salty wind, for views out to sea and back across the estuary to a tableau of Snowdon's peaks, and for breezy trips by ferry or fishing boat. Barmouth Bridge, Wales' only surviving wooden rail viaduct, spans the estuary, and has a fantastic pedestrian walkway across it. Behind the town rises Dinas Oleu, Wales' answer to the Rock of Gibraltar, the first property ever bequeathed to the National Trust (NT; in 1895) and an irresistible temptation for walkers.

### Orientation & Information

The hub of the action is grouped along High St and into the Old Town along Church St. Buses stop on Jubilee Rd, right across Beach Rd from the train station, which anchors the bottom end of town at the tip of Station Rd and opposite the police station. Taxis wait outside the train station, and the main **car park** (per hr £0.50) is just behind the seafront.

### SCALING SNOWDON

Views from Mt Snowdon are stupendous on a clear day, with the peak's fine ridges dropping away in great swoops to sheltered *cwm*s (valleys) and deep lakes. Even on a gloomy day you could find yourself above the clouds. Be warned that midsummer weekends can be busy. Often it's just the summit, with its incongruously mundane café, that's really crowded, but you may also encounter queues across Crib Goch.

There are six main walking routes to the top. The easiest – and least interesting – is the **Llanberis Path**, heading southwards from Llanberis along the Snowdon Mountain Railway line (five hours up and back). Almost as easy, the shortest of all and the safest in winter, is the **Snowdon Ranger Path**, which leads northwards from the Snowdon Ranger Youth Hostel near Beddgelert (five hours).

From Pen-y-Pass YHA at the top of Llanberis Pass on the A4086, two tracks run westwards to the summit. The **Pyg Track** (5½ hours) is more interesting but involves some scrambling, while the **Miner's Track** (five hours) starts out gently but gets steeper. Pen-y-Pass has the advantage of starting higher up, but parking is limited.

The undemanding **Rhyd Ddu Path**, the least-used route, runs from the Caernarfon–Beddgelert road (five hours); the trailhead can be accessed from the Welsh Highland Railway station (see p256). The most challenging route is the Watkin Path, northwards from Nant Gwynant, 3 miles northeast of Beddgelert on the A498 (seven hours) – trailhead parking is plentiful.

For some fine variants on the trails see the Snowdonia chapter of Lonely Planet's *Walking in Britain*. The Snowdon Sherpa bus stops regularly at trailheads for all of these walks, and if all this sounds like far too much effort, hop on the Snowdon Mountain Railway all the way to the summit (see p265) – once it reopens in 2008.

The new and very professional **tourist office** (☎ 280787; 10am-6pm daily May-Sep, 9.30am-5pm daily Mar-Apr & Oct, 9.30am-4pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat Nov-Mar) is now in the train station's concourse. It sells leaflets on local walks, train tickets for mainline connections and offers an accommodation service.

There's a **post office** (High St; 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) inside Martin's newsagent; it is fringed by banks. The **Barmouth Laundry Centre** (High St; 10.30am-6.30pm) is on High St. There's free internet at the **library** (Talbot Sq; 10am-noon & 3-7pm Mon, 2-4pm Tue, 2-6pm Thu & Fri), located just behind the **police station** (Talbot Sq).

## Sights

### FAIRBOURNE

Nearby Fairbourne has a lovely, long beach, but little else to offer except a pleasant enough journey across the estuary. From April to September, regular **railway ferries** (adult/child return £2.50/1.50) make the five-minute crossing across the estuary to another sandy beach at Penrhyn Point to connect with Wales' only seaside narrow-gauge railway, the steam-hauled **Fairbourne & Barmouth Steam Railway** (☎ 250362; www.fairbournerailway.com; Beach Rd; adult/child £6.90/3.90; 1-3-8 services daily Apr-Sep plus occasional other services). The line heads south along the coast for 2.5 miles to Fairbourne, and was built in 1895 to move materials for the construction of Fairbourne village.

There's a restaurant at Penrhyn Point, and a café and the take-it-or-leave-it **Rowen Indoor Nature Centre** (☎ 250362; Fairbourne station; admission free; 10.30am-4.30pm). There is a mainline station for the Cambrian Coast train line at Fairbourne.

### QUAYSIDE

The sweep of old Barmouth down by the quay is good for walks and blasts of fresh air. The ferry also departs from here for Penrhyn Point. The little round house is Ty Crwn, once a jail where drunk and disorderly sailors could cool off until morning.

Volunteers run the small **Barmouth Lifeboat Station** (☎ 281168; The Promenade; admission free; 10am-4pm), which tells many a brave rescue story.

### MAWDDACH ESTUARY

The glorious Mawddach Estuary is a striking sight: a mass of water flooding out to sea, flanked by woodlands, wetlands and the romantic mountains of southern Snowdonia. Around its edge, the **Mawddach Trail** is an easy walk or cycle from Barmouth via Penmaen-

pool to Dolgellau – a distance of 11 miles with a marvellous stretch right across the estuary on the Barmouth Railway Bridge.

There are two Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) reserves in the estuary valley, rich in oak wood, and popular haunts for herons, pied flycatchers, woodpeckers, ravens and buzzards, as well as dragonflies and butterflies. For more information, visit the **RSPB Information Centre** (☎ 422071; Penmaenpool; 11am-5pm May-Aug), which is housed in the old signal box adjacent to the George III Hotel and displays maps on reserve trails.

## Activities

Apart from the Mawddach Trail (left), you can scramble up any one of several alleys running uphill off Church St and you'll find the town gets more and more vertical, with better and better views, and old houses nearly on top of one another.

Carry on up to a network of trails, all across 258m Dinas Oleu. Bear eastwards around the headland – on one of these paths or from the far end of Church St – to the popular **Panorama Walk**, which has the best of the estuary views. Alternatively, follow Church St onto the Barmouth Bridge and cross the estuary on its pedestrian walkway for wonderful views down the estuary; the latter forms part of the Mawddach Trail. For more details of walks, ask at the tourist office.

Biking excursions are available via **Snow Bikers** (☎ 430628; www.snowbikers.com), starting with a one-hour taster session (£18 per person). **RIB Rides** (☎ 281366; www.rib-rides.com) offers 30-minute bursts around the harbour (from £10 per person); the organisers also run the Richmond House guesthouse (opposite).

## Festivals & Events

The international **Three Peaks Yacht Race** (☎ 280298; www.threepkaysyachttrace.co.uk), held in late June, has been an annual event for more than 25 years. Contestants sail to Caernarfon where two crew members run to the summit of Snowdon; then they sail to Whitehaven in England and run up Scafell Pike; and finally to Fort William in Scotland, with another run up Ben Nevis – 390 nautical miles of sailing and 75 miles of fell running. The record so far is an astonishing two days, two hours and four minutes, achieved in 1998.

During the first three weekends in August, the **Barmouth Harbour Festival** features bands, street theatre, music, fireworks and more.

There's the **Barmouth Walking Festival** (www.barmouthwalkingfestival.co.uk) in mid-September and an annual **Barmouth Arts Festival** (www.barmouthartsfestival.co.uk) held in early September.

## Sleeping

**Aber House** (☎ 280624; High St; s/d £30/55; 1) From the outside, this regal 200-year-old house looks like a stately pile. Inside, the four rooms are comfortable, albeit a little on the chintzy side, but none have en suites. Still, the place has a homely feel and the owners cater for vegans and vegetarians at breakfast. Watch out for the aggressive dog.

**Wavcrest Guesthouse** (☎ 280330; 8 Marine Pde; s/d £30/60; 1) There's a string of modest B&Bs along Marine Pde with sea views, but Wavcrest is a cut above the rest. The best rooms have sea views while recent refurbishment has brought some nice touches, such as under-floor heating and new flat-screen TVs with Freeview channels. The generous breakfast makes use of local, organic and fair-trade products.

**Dros-y-Dwr** (☎ 280284; www.barmouthbandb.co.uk; 6 Porkington Place; s/d £40/60; 1) The favourite choice for hikers, bikers and walkers, this friendly little place (just three rooms, two en suite) has a drying room for wet kit and big vegetarian-friendly breakfasts. Best of all, however, is the tiny, deep-red library that overlooks the sea – pull up a chair, browse through a book and soak up the view.

**Richmond House** (☎ 281366; www.barmouthbedandbreakfast.co.uk; High St; s/d/f £45/60/80; 1 i) The smartest place in town is a handsome townhouse with a stylish interior and big, contemporary rooms. Thoughtful touches include in-room DVD players and free Kit-Kat biscuits supplied along with tea- and coffee-making facilities. There's wi-fi available and an attractive garden area for summer lounging on chunky, wooden furniture. The owners also organise boat trips (see opposite).

## Eating & Drinking

**Goodie's Coffee Shop** (High St; meals around £5; 11.30am-3.30pm) A simple café for teas and coffees all day, plus light lunches in a bright, cheery eatery.

**Wannabe's** (☎ 280820; King Edward St; meals around £5; 10.30am-5pm Mon-Tue, Thu & Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; 1) This great, relaxed café is a cut above the average coffee shop with daily lunch specials and hot sandwiches served among leather sofas and daily newspapers. The owners also sell their homemade preserves, chutneys and

jams on the premises and there's internet access (£1 per 30 minutes).

**Inglenook** (☎ 280807; Harbour Lane; mains about £8) Set in a 17th-century building off Church St, this longstanding place is best for its seafood, notably lobster and crab.

**Bistro** (☎ 281009; Church St; mains around £10; 10.30am-9.30pm Thu-Tue; 1) The top-end place in town is now completely nonsmoking and looking smart; it offers a broad menu of fresh local produce and a comprehensive wine list.

For a pint, the **Tal y Don** (☎ 280508; High St) and the **Royal Hotel** (☎ 281682; King Edward St) are both decent pubs serving a good selection of bar meals (mains around £12).

For self-caterers, there's a **Co-op supermarket** (10.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) by the train station and a **Spars supermarket** (10.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-11pm Sun) on High St opposite Wannabe's.

## Entertainment

The town's cultural life is concentrated on the small theatre-cum-arts centre **Theatr y Ddraig** (☎ 281697) with its occasional programme of cultural activities. Ask in the tourist office for more information.

## Getting There & Away

Barmouth is the western terminus of Arriva's bus X94 inter-regional service from Wrexham (1½ hours) via Llangollen (1¼ hours) and Dolgellau (20 minutes, eight daily Monday to Saturday, three Sunday). Express Motors bus 38 runs to/from Blaenau Ffestiniog (one hour) and Porthmadog (one hour 20 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday).

Barmouth is on the Cambrian Coast railway line, with trains from Machynlleth (single £5.80, 50 minutes, roughly hourly) and Porthmadog (£4.30, one hour 10 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday).

Mainline trains to Fairbourne (£1.50, 10 minutes) run regularly – take the train out there, then walk back over the bridge.

## DOLGELLAU

### ☎ 01341 / pop 2800

Dolgellau is a place steeped in history with lots of historic architecture and a genteel feel. It's thought the Welsh hero Owain Glyndŵr met with fellow rebels here, although the likely venue (on Bridge St) is now derelict and forgotten.

The Dolgellau area also has historical links with the Society of Friends or Quaker movement (with its philosophy of direct

communication with God, free of creeds, rites and clergy). After George Fox – the most influential exponent of the Friends' philosophy – made a visit in 1657, a Quaker community was founded here. Converts, from simple farmers to local gentry, were persecuted with vigour because their refusal to swear oaths – in particular to the king – was considered treasonous. Many eventually emigrated to William Penn's Quaker community in America.

Dolgellau was a regional centre for Wales' prosperous wool industry in the early 19th century. Many of the town's finest buildings, sturdy and unornamented, were built at that time, and the town centre hasn't changed all that much since. Local mills failed to keep pace with mass mechanisation, however, and decline set in after about 1800. The region bounced back when the Romantic Revival of the late-18th century made Wales' wild landscapes popular with genteel travellers. There was also, surprisingly, a gold rush here when waves of hopefuls descended to pan for gold.

Today, however, this grey-slate, charmingly gruff little market town relies on tour-

ism. Dolgellau is an ideal base to climb Cader Idris (892m) or to explore the lovely Mawddach Estuary. Recently, the town has also smartened up its act with new and more sophisticated places to sleep and eat. It has a lively feel and enough facilities to make it a great base for activities in the Snowdonia National Park.

### Orientation & Information

Dolgellau sits at the confluence of the River Wnion (a tributary of the Mawddach) and the smaller River Arran. The A470 passes just north of the town centre, which is located south of Bont Fawr (Big Bridge; built 1638).

Buses stop on Eldon Sq at the heart of town and there's a car park just south of the River Wnion, next to Bont Fawr. This is also the home to the efficient **Tourist Office & National Park Information Centre** (% 422888; Eldon Sq; h 10am-5.30pm daily Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Thu-Mon Oct-Mar). The office sells an excellent range of maps, local history books and leaflets charting the trails for a climbing excursion to Cader Idris (see the boxed text Climbing

### IN THE AREA: TALYLLYN RAILWAY & TALYLLYN LAKE

The narrow-gauge **Talyllyn Railway** (% 01654-710472; www.talyllyn.co.uk; Wharf Station, Tywyn; adult/1 child with adult/child without adult £11/2/5.50; 2-8 services daily; h Apr-Oct plus some seasonal excursions) was opened in 1865 to carry slate from the Bryn Eglwys quarries near Abergynolwyn. In 1950 the line was saved from closure by the world's first railway preservation society. It's one of Wales' most enchanting little railways and puffs for 7.3 scenic, steam-powered miles up the Fathew Valley to Abergynolwyn. There are five stations along the way, each with waymarked walking trails (and waterfalls at Dolgoch and Nant Gwernol); leaflets on these are available at the stations. Your ticket entitles you to all-day travel.

At the lower terminus of Tywyn Wharf, the **Narrow Gauge Railway Museum** (% 01654-710472; www.ngrm.org.uk; Wharf Station, Tywyn; adult/child £1/0.50; h 11am-3pm Apr-Oct, plus extended hr when trains running) is one for the history buffs, with shiny narrow-gauge steam locomotives and the story of the volunteers who preserved the railway.

About 2 miles northeast of Abergynolwyn along the B4405 is **Talyllyn Lake**, a substantial and tranquil body of water edged by fields and hills and overlooked by Cader Idris. It's stocked with trout and popular with anglers.

Cader Idris, p244). Upstairs there's a permanent **exhibition** (admission free) on the region's Quaker heritage in a suitably dour wood-paneled room.

If you find the tourist office closed, a small bookshop **Siop Y Dydd** (% 421133; Eldon Sq; h 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) has maps and some local information. The **post office** (Smithfield St; h 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) is inside the town's Spar supermarket and there's also a **laundrette** (h 9am-7pm Wed-Mon) further along the same street. For internet access, head for the **Web** (% 422022; Smithfield St; per hr £3; h 10am-5pm), which has wi-fi access, simple coffees and snacks.

The banks are sprinkled liberally around town, and include **HSBC** (Eldon Sq), **Bardays** (Lion St) and **NatWest** (Bridge St).

### Sights

**Ty Siamas, the National Centre for Welsh Folk Music** (% 421800; www.tysiamas.com; Idris Hall, Eldon Sq) was under construction at the time of writing and due to open spring 2007. A major new attraction, it's the first centre of its kind in Wales and celebrates Dolgellau's hosting of the first ever Welsh folk festival in 1952. Idris Hall, the former market hall on Eldon Sq, will house the centre and the initial programme offers a mix of performance, exhibitions, workshops and facilities for tourists. The centre is named after Elis Sion Siamas, a harpist from Dolgellau who was the royal harpist to Queen Anne between 1702 and 1714. He was one of the first people to introduce the triple harp in Wales.

### Activities

#### WALKING & CYCLING

The beautiful 11-mile **Mawddach Estuary Trail** is a flat (and in places wheelchair-accessible) path that's great for walking or cycling. Running through woods and past wetlands on the southern side of the Mawddach Estuary, it begins in town at the car park and runs past the **RSPB Information Centre** (% 01341-422071; Penmaenpool; h 11am-5pm May-Aug), 2 miles west of Dolgellau.

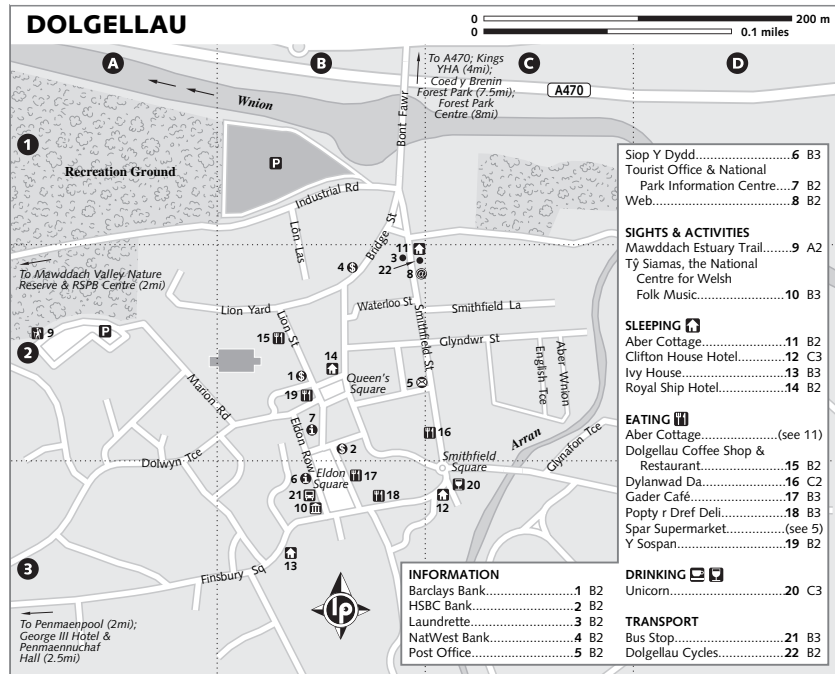
The **Precipice Walk** is a 4-mile hike along a flat stretch running around the steep flanks of Moel Cynwch, which provides superb estuary views. The path starts near Cymer Abbey, a 13th-century ruin located 2 miles north of Dolgellau.

### Festivals & Events

**Sesiwn Fawr** (% 0871 230 1314; www.sesiwnfawr.co.uk) is a three-day jamboree of Welsh folk music and beer that fills Dolgellau's main square on the third weekend in July. 'The Mighty Session' has lived up to its name – the festival has grown in stature in recent years and is now ticketed with an extensive sideline in family-friendly events and activities. During the festival, accommodation prices across Dolgellau are at a heavy premium.

### Sleeping

Local legend says that anyone who spends the night on top of Cader Idris will awake either mad or a poet. If you would like something more conventional, there's a wide choice of accommodation available.





## CLIMBING CADER IDRIS

Cader Idris (892m), or the 'Seat of Idris' (a legendary giant), is a hulking, menacing-looking mountain with the requisite mythology attached. It's said that Hounds of the Underworld fly around its peaks, and strange light effects are often sighted in the area. However, climbing it is less taxing than launching up Snowdon, and the reward is great views. The usual route is the **Dolgellau** or **Ty Nant Path**, southeastwards from Ty Nant Farm on the A493. The farm is 3 miles west of Dolgellau, just beyond Penmaenpool. It's a rocky but safe, straightforward route, taking about five hours there and back.

The easiest but longest route (5 miles each way, six hours return) is the '**Tywyn**' or **Llanfihangel y Pennant Path**, a gentle pony track that heads northeast from the hamlet of Llanfihangel y Pennant, joining the Ty Nant Path at the latter's midpoint. Llanfihangel is 1.5 miles from the terminus of the Tallyllyn Railway (p243) at Abergynolwyn.

The shortest (3 miles) but steepest route is the **Minffordd Path**, running northwest from the Dol Idris car park, a few hundred metres down the B4405 from Minffordd, itself 6.5 miles from Dolgellau on the A487 Machynlleth road. This route, taking around five hours there and back, requires the most caution, especially on the way back down. Stout shoes are essential.

Before embarking on any climb, check for the latest information and weather conditions from the Dolgellau tourist office (p242). Inexperienced climbers should consult specialist advice before undertaking any activity.

**Kings YHA** (% 0870 7705900; adult/child £11.95/8.95; h Easter-Oct) A great spot for peace, quiet and outdoor pursuits, this country-house hostel, northwest of Dolgellau, is gloriously remote – just don't expect a mobile phone signal. To get there, Arriva's bus 28 stops at Abergwynant, 1.5 miles west of Penmaenpool, from where it's a 1-mile walk south through a spooky wood.

**Ivy House** (% 422535; Finsbury Sq; s/d £37/58) This central, rather twee B&B in a grey-stone house, has six comfy rooms (four with en suites) and traditional facilities.

**Aber Cottage** (% 422460; www.abercottagegallery.com; Smithfield St; s/d £30/60; p n i ) Just south of the bridge, this superior cottage-style guesthouse has spotless rooms and an efficient welcome on a year-round basis. The owners' artworks adorn the walls, lending a gallery feel to communal areas. Expect hearty breakfasts, served in the tearoom (see opposite), where a strict 'no chips or burgers' policy operates.

**Royal Ship Hotel** (% 422209; Queen's Sq; s/d £50/87.50) The décor of this 19th-century, ivy-covered coaching inn looks a bit faded while the communal areas are given over to serving bar meals with chips galore. It remains a centrally located staple in the midrange category, although new management could breathe life into an old dame past her prime.

**Clifton House Hotel** (% 422554; Smithfield Sq; s/d £50/70) Big changes are afoot at this central hotel, formerly the town jail. The new owners are promising a fresh new look for 2007

to transform the place from a simple B&B to more of a boutique hotel. The extensive refurbishment will not alter the wheelchair-accessible room downstairs and the cosy cellar restaurant, which opens to the public for lunch and dinner (mains around £10 to £15).

**George III Hotel** (% 422525; www.georgethird.co.uk; Penmaenpool; s/d £60/98; bar meals h noon-2pm & 6-9pm; p ) All aboard for a trainspotter's dream – this quirky hotel is partly housed in the former waiting room, ticket office and station master's house of the old Cambrian Railway station. Rooms in the latter are rather small but cottage-style rooms, located on the former platform one, are superior. And if railway sleepers don't grab you, the view will: nine of the 11 rooms have fantastic vistas out across the Mawddach estuary, which is accessible via a 115-year-old toll bridge.

**Penmaennuchaf Hall** (% 422129; www.penhall.co.uk; Penmaenpool; s/d from £65/130; p ) With imposing furnishings and elaborate gardens, this stately country-house hotel is the former pile of Bolton cotton magnate, James Leigh. It's an imposing setting and ideally placed for the country set, although it does feel a bit sniffy and formal for a casual weekend break. The 14 rooms have a lavish air with drapes and soft furnishings but also feature in-room mod cons such as CD players. Four-course dinners (£35) are available, and children over six years old are welcome; ask about midweek breaks and special promotions.

## Eating & Drinking

**Gader Café** (% 423425; Eldon Sq; h 9am-4pm) This is a straightforward, belly-filling café and bakery with good sandwiches.

**Dolgellau Coffee Shop & Restaurant** (% 423040; Lion St; mains around £6; h 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) No-frills toasties, breakfasts and a surprisingly large menu of vegetarian options are on offer at this big café-style place. It's nothing fancy, but family friendly for kids.

**Y Sospan** (% 423174; Queen's Sq; lunch specials around £4, bistro mains around £11; h 9am-9.30pm Tue-Sun, 9am-5.30pm Mon) In the old town hall, book-lined and woody, this relaxed eatery is split between a small downstairs tearoom for coffees and lunches, and an upstairs wine bar bistro.

**Aber Cottage** (% 422460; Smithfield St; snacks £3-4; h 10am-5pm, evening meals to order) Like stepping back into your grandmother's living room, this super-cosy tearoom-cum-gallery is big on knick-knacks and great food. It's best for lunch with homemade soup (£3) and sandwiches (£4), plus friendly service. It also offers B&B (see opposite).

**Dylanwad Da** (% 422870; 2 Smithfield St; mains around £14; h 5-9pm Tue-Sat Jun-Sep) A long-standing favourite on the Snowdonia scene, this low-lit upscale eatery has a healthy wine list and an imaginative menu for a tasty dinner. For a caffeine hit on the run, it also now boasts a small coffee shop, **Ty Coffi** (h 10am-4pm).

**Poptyr Dref Deli** (% 422507; Smithfield St) A fantastic deli for take-away sandwiches and one of the few left with the original bakery out the back. Support it to keep a rare example of local industry alive. The house speciality is the honey bun – be quick, they're usually sold out by 11am. For self-caterers, there's also the **Spar supermarket** (Smithfield St).

**Unicorn** (% 422742; Queen's Sq) For a pint, try the no-nonsense Unicorn to meet the locals over a real ale; it also has simple bar meals (around £6).

## Getting There & Around

There are several Arriva Cymru bus services: **X32 or 2** To/from Caernarfon (1½ hours, three daily).

**94** To/from Barmouth (20 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday and two on Sunday), continuing onto Bala (35 minutes).

You can hire a bike from **Dolgellau Cycles** (% 423332; Smithfield St; per half/full day £13/20); the owner can help advise on local cycle routes.

## AROUND DOLGELLAU Mawddach Valley Nature Reserve

Set in oak woodlands along the northern side of the Mawddach Estuary, this **RSPB nature reserve** (admission free) is open year round. Permanent residents include ravens and buzzards, while spring visitors feature redstarts, wood warblers and pied flycatchers. There is a 2.5-mile trail and a wheelchair-accessible half-mile trail. The reserve is 2 miles west of Dolgellau on the A493. There's an **information centre** (% 01341-422071; h 11am-5pm late-May–Aug) by the Penmaenpool toll bridge.

## Coed y Brenin Forest Park

This woodland park, 7.5 miles north of Dolgellau, is laced with 25 miles of cycle trails – some of the best in Wales. It was all-purpose built with the help of the Forest Enterprise Wales. There are beginner and family routes, and it's also a venue for regular rallies. The **Forest Park Centre** (% 01341-440742; www.forestry.gov.uk/wales) is 8 miles north of Dolgellau on the A470 Blaenau Ffestiniog road. The centre produces an excellent leaflet with details of the various bike trails.

## BALA (Y BALA)

% 01678 / pop 2000

The town of Bala is synonymous with beautiful **Llyn Tegid** (Bala Lake), which sits at the northeastern end of town and was formed during the last Ice Age when glaciers blocked up the valley of the River Dee (Afon Dyfrdwy) with debris. This is Wales' largest freshwater lake – 4 miles long, three-quarters of a mile wide and, in places, over 43m deep. The town, 18 miles northeast of Dolgellau, sits where the River Dee flows out of the lake and is joined by the River Tryweryn.

Bala is big on folk tales, (see the boxed text *The Legend of Teggie*, p246). One such tale, an alternative to the glacial version of events, says the valley was once the home of a cruel and dissolute prince named Tegid Foel. One night, at a banquet thrown by the prince, the harpist kept hearing a small bird urging him to flee the palace. He finally did so, fell asleep on a hilltop, and awoke at dawn to find the palace and principality drowned beneath the lake.

Bala was a centre for the Welsh wool industry during the 18th century but today it's better known as a gateway town to the Snowdonia National Park. It has also recently built a reputation as a centre for water sports. The tiny

main street is often bustling with visitors in summer and increasingly dotted with adventure sports and outdoors shops. The proximity to the lake and availability of top-notch adventures makes it a very lively little place.

Though founded by the Normans in 1310, Bala today is staunchly Welsh and a predominantly Welsh-speaking town – about 80%. Local hero and MP Thomas Edward Ellis, the Liberal Member of Parliament elected in 1886, was a prominent contemporary of Lloyd George (see p36) in the movement towards an independent Wales at the end of the 19th century. One of Ellis' friends was Michael D Jones, founder of the Welsh colony in Patagonia.

### Orientation & Information

The town is essentially one long street (the A494), called Pensarn Rd at the southwestern end, High St through the centre and Station Rd on the other side. The centre is the intersection of High and Tegid Sts, by the White Lion Royal Hotel; buses stop along High St.

The **tourist office** (% 521021; Pensarn Rd; 10am–5.30pm Thu–Mon Apr–Oct, 10am–4pm Fri–Mon Nov–Mar) is about a third of a mile southwest of the centre and next to the leisure centre. There are banks along the high street, and a **post office** (High St; 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–12.30pm Sat) opposite the White Lion Royal Hotel. **Café Cwpwrdd Cornel** (% 521851; 64–66 High St; per hr £3; 10.30am–5pm), next to Barclays Bank, has internet access plus simple coffees and snacks.

The **car park** (per hr 50p) is behind the Rainbow's End café at the southern end of town.

### Sights

#### BALA LAKE RAILWAY

The genteel narrow-gauge **Bala Lake Railway** (% 540666; www.bala-lake-railway.co.uk; adult/child return £7/3; 10 Apr–Oct) was opened in 1868 to link mainline stations at Bala and Dolgellau. In 1965 the entire route from Barmouth to Llangollen was shut down and Bala station was closed. Volunteers reopened the 4.5-mile stretch from Bala to Llanuwchllyn in 1971, with vintage locomotives departing from a little station at Penybont, half a mile from Bala town centre, off the B4391. There are now up to four daily services skirting the lake for a scenic 90-minute return journey.

### Events

**Wa! Bala** (www.wabala.co.uk) is a music festival held annually in mid-September in a similar vein to the Sesiwn Fawr Dolgellau (p243), with events based around a marquee at the northern end of town.

### Activities

#### WHITE-WATER RAFTING

Due to the damming of the River Tryweryn in the 1960s, this and the River Dee are among the few Welsh rivers with fairly reliable white water – making for year-round opening. The **Canolfan Tryweryn National Whitewater Centre** (% 521083; www.ukrafting.co.uk; Frongoch; 10.30am–7pm Sat & Sun, 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri Dec–mid-Oct) runs skills and safety courses, and rafting trips on a 1.5-mile stretch of the Treweryn that is almost continuous class-III white water with class IV sections. The centre is 3.5 miles northwest of

Bala on the A4212. Bookings are best made at least two days in advance, and are subject to cancellation in the event of insufficient releases from the dam – call to check the day before. New weekend adventure breaks offer multi-activity packages, such as the High Slide (combining rafting with canyoning). Prices are from £138 per person, including B&B – ask about midweek discounts.

The owners will help advise on local accommodation options and the site boasts a **café** (10.30am–7pm Sat & Sun, to 4pm Mon–Fri) for snacks between activities.

### OTHER ACTIVITIES

**Bala Adventure & Watersports Centre** (% /fax 521059; www.balawatersports.com; Foreshore, Pensarn Rd) is a one-stop activity and retail centre, located behind the tourist office by the lakeshore. Courses include windsurfing, sailing, canoeing, white-water rafting, mountain biking, rock-climbing and abseiling trips (prices for all courses start from £33/55 per half-/full day). Gear rental is also available.

**Yr Afan** (% 521888; 33 High St; 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) is a friendly outdoor shop, which also helps to arrange canyoning courses.

### Sleeping

**Bala Backpackers** (% 521700; www.bala-backpackers.co.uk; 32 Tegid St; dm Sun–Thu/Fri/Sat £10/11/12, breakfast £3; 10.30am–7pm Sat & Sun, 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri Dec–mid-Oct) This popular backpackers' hang-out is low on frills but big on budget facilities and makes no pretence otherwise. The beds are all singles with bedding provided and laid out in large rooms divided by curtains for greater privacy. The best beds are located in the upstairs dorm, which is lighter and airier than those downstairs. There's a drying room, a communal kitchen and a TV lounge. Note: the owner enforces a strict no smoking policy and a midnight curfew.

**Glanllyn** (% 540227; www.glanllyn.com; sites per tent/caravan £12/15; 10 mid-Mar–Oct) A well-appointed camp site and caravan park 3 miles out on the A494 Dolgellau road and also close to the lake, this is the pick of the local budget options.

**Cynwyd YHA** (% 0870 7705786; The Old Mill, Cynwyd; adult/child £13.95/9.95; 10 May–Sep) This is the nearest hostel, some 10 miles northeast of Bala on the A494 and B4401. Built in a former wool mill by a river, it has basic facilities and is favoured by walkers and bikers. Arriva bus X94 provides the nearest public transport link.

**Abercelyn Country House** (% 521109; www.abercelyn.co.uk; Llanydyl; s/d £35/70) Located on the A494 Bala

to Dolgellau Rd, 1 mile from the centre of Bala, this B&B is not the easiest to spot (clue: look out for the squirrel), but it's worth the effort. Stylish rooms, a homely atmosphere and a lovely setting in gardens with a gurgling brook make this a great midrange option. Ask about special offers for hire of the self-catering cottage.

**White Lion Royal Hotel** (% 520314; www.welsh-historic-inns.com; 61 High St; s/d/f from £70/95/110) The grand old dame in town is a stately affair, refurbished in 2005 for a fresh look, but retaining its sense of history: Queen Victoria once stayed here and George Borrow wrote in *Wild Wales* (see Travel Literature, p20) that his breakfast here was the finest of any in his 1854 walking tour of Wales. The rooms are refined while the gloriously characterful lounge bar (with lots of Welsh cats in hats and dark-wood carved settles) serves decent bar meals. It's also a sister property to the Black Boy Inn (p257) in Caernarfon.

### Eating

**Rainbow's End** (% 521937; High St; 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun) For a coffee on the go, this friendly little café serves basic coffee and snacks above a craft shop.

**Caffi'r Cyfnod** (% 521260; High St; 10.30am–5pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4pm Sun) The oldest café in Bala is a regular place for breakfasts and cheap snacks with a slightly stuck-in-time feel.

**Y Tyfnod** (% 521260; High St; 10.30am–6pm Mon–Wed & Fri, to 8pm Thu, to 7.30pm Sat, to 6.30pm Sun) Snacks, leather sofas, Sunday papers and good coffee are a winning formula at this laid-back, central café. It's a nice little spot to watch the world go by.

**Ty Coffi** (10.30am–5pm; snacks around £4) Offers snacks, coffees and pavement tables at an adjacent building, and is a popular spot for families pushing buggies.

**Plas Coch Hotel** (% 520309; www.plascoch.com; High St; mains around £7; 10.30am–2pm & 6–9pm) This large pub on the main drag has an extensive menu of tasty bar meals and lots of fish and grill mains, plus vegetarian options.

**Plas-y-n-Dre Restaurant** (% 521256; High St; mains £8.95–15.95; 10.30am–2pm & 6.30–9.30pm) The décor in this smart eatery is a tasteful take on country-kitchen chic, finished with soft-leather chairs. The menu has lots of interesting Welsh dishes, including fresh Menai mussels, plus lots of traditional choices for a hearty dinner.

For self-caterers there's a **Somerfield supermarket** (High St; 10.30am–8pm Mon–Wed & Sat, 8am–9pm Thu & Fri, 10am–4pm Sun) to stock up on supplies.

### THE LEGEND OF TEGGIE

The beast of Llyn Tegid, or Bala Lake, has been reported since at least the 1920s and has been variously likened to a crocodile or a small dinosaur. Affectionately known as Teggie, this Welsh answer to the Loch Ness Monster prompted a three-day search by a Japanese film crew in 1995, but their minisubmarine failed to find any sign of the elusive beast.

One man who claims to have seen the beastie from the deep, however, is local farmer Rhodri Jones, whose sheep farm extends to the lake's foreshore. 'One night in the summer of 2006 I was heading home from the fields when I saw something making concentric ripples. The lake was very still, pretty spooky in the dusk and the water was very calm. That's when I saw the top of a creature about the size of a crocodile moving through the water.'

Since then Jones has spoken to other local farmers and found that many of them have stories of mysterious sightings and evidence they have collected dating back over 60 years.

'Bala is a landlocked, volcanic lake and there are species of fish living there that are only to be found in the lake,' says Jones. 'I think there's something special about the waters, but we live in a narrow-minded world where people are afraid of the unexplained. Still, humanity always needs a mystery.'

## Getting There & Around

The main connection through Bala is Arriva Cymru's bus X94, which runs daily from Barmouth (40 minutes) to Wrexham (2½ hours) with seven daily services Monday to Saturday, and three Sunday, passing through Bala.

**Roberts Cycles** (% 520252; High St; per day £16), about 200m northeast of the White Lion Royal Hotel, rents out mountain bikes.

## HARLECH

% 01766 / pop 2000

Sleepy Harlech is best known for the mighty, grey-stone towers of its castle, framed by gleaming Tremadog Bay and with the mountains of Snowdonia as a backdrop. Some sort of fortified structure has probably surmounted the rock since Iron Age times, but Edward I removed all traces when he commissioned the construction of the castle. Harlech was also the destination of the ships of Matholwch, who sailed with his armies from Ireland in the tales of the *Mabino-gion* (see p75 for details of this book).

Today Harlech is a small town with a smattering of antique shops, but it lacks overall infrastructure. Most visitors come for the castle and a stroll on the beach in fine weather. It's not such a good base, however, so grab a coffee, visit the castle, and then best move on.

## Orientation & Information

The town's oldest area, along High St and home to the majority of facilities for tourists, is located uphill and to the north of the castle. From the train station it's a strenuous 20-minute climb on one of several stepped tracks up to High St, or about half a mile by road. Buses stop by the car park situated opposite the Weary Walkers café, from where the castle is just a few minutes' walk north along High St.

The **tourist office** (% 780658; High St; h 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) is on High St next to the Harlech Emporium, a gloriously retro old sweetshop. There's also a small **post office** (High St; h 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, h 9.30am-5pm Sat), a HSBC bank with ATM and a **Spar supermarket** (High St; h 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun).

## Sights & Activities

**Harlech Castle** (% 780552; adult/child £3.50/3; h 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) is an intimidating yet spectacular building. Edward I finished it in 1289, the southernmost of his 'iron ring' of

fortresses designed to keep the Welsh firmly beneath his boot.

Despite its might, the storybook fortress has been called the Castle of Lost Causes because it has been lucklessly defended so many times. Owain Glyndŵr captured it after a long siege in 1404. He is said to have been crowned Prince of Wales during one of his parliaments in the town, before envoys from Scotland, France and Spain. He was in turn besieged here by the future Henry V.

During the Wars of the Roses the castle is said to have held out against a siege for seven years and was the last Lancastrian stronghold to fall. The siege inspired the popular Welsh hymn *Men of Harlech*, which is still sung today with patriotic gusto. The castle was again besieged in the Civil War, finally giving in to Cromwell's forces in 1647.

The grey sandstone castle's massive, twin-towered gatehouse and outer walls are still intact, and make the place seem impregnable even now. You can climb the gloomy towers onto the ramparts. The finest exterior view (with Snowdon as a backdrop) is a few minutes' walk back past the adjacent car park.

Today Harlech castle joins its contemporaries at Caernarfon (p255), Conwy (p289) and Beaumaris (p278) as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

## Sleeping

**Castle Hotel** (% 780529; www.harlechcastlehotel.co.uk; Castle Sq; s/d £35/60) Located directly opposite the castle, this hotel props up the budget end of the market with rather old-fashioned two-star accommodation. The best of the rooms are 3 and 4, which look straight out at the castle's gatehouse. For the price, the location is superb.

**Byrdir House** (% 780316; www.byrdir.co.uk; High St; d/tw £63/69, with shared bathroom £24/48) Newly refurbished, this welcoming place next to the church has given its otherwise simple B&B rooms a fresher, more modern look. It's at the bottom end of town and popular with the walking crowd.

**Castle Cottage** (% 780479; www.castlecottageharlech.co.uk; s/d from £65/90; h Dec-Oct; p n ) An excellent restaurant with rooms, this place is a neat cut above anything else in town. The rooms are spacious in a contemporary style with exposed beams, in-room DVD players and a bowl of fresh fruit for each guest. The restaurant focuses on fresh local produce and an imaginative menu, including lots of local seafood –

try the Barmouth lobster. You can enjoy a three-course dinner here from £29.

## Eating

**Weary Walker** (% 780751; High St; mains around £5; h 9am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Apr) Bacon butties and mugs of coffee are the preferred fodder for walkers, hikers and outdoors types at this small but friendly little spot. There's a daily lunch menu.

**Cemlyn Restaurant** (% 780425; High St; h 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; r ) Good views and a delicate-coloured interior are the trademarks of this small non-smoking teashop. It's simple fare overall – but try the Welsh rarebit for a tasty snack (£4.20).

**Plas Café** (% 780204; High St; lunches around £5, mains £17; h noon-2pm & 6-9pm) Boasting the finest view of any restaurant in town – across to the castle and down to the sea – the Plas Café has its best vantage point from the outside terrace. It has sandwich lunches and hearty dinner mains.

**Castle Restaurant** (% 780416; Castle Sq; lunches around £5, mains £12; h 10.30am-9pm) Right by the castle, this more refined place has a cosy feel and broad menu of traditional fare for light lunches and dinner. It's the smartest option in town for those looking for a treat.

## Entertainment

**Theatr Ardudwy** (% 780667; www.theatrarudwy.com; box office h 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 9.30am-5pm Fri, plus 1hr prior to any live event) With films, dance, theatre and music, Theatr Ardudwy is a lively arts centre.

## Getting There & Away

Arriva's bus 38 comes from Barmouth (30 minutes, 16 daily Monday to Saturday, three services on Sunday) and heads onto Blaenau Ffestiniog (40 minutes, 12 daily Monday to Saturday).

Trains run on the scenic Cambrian Coast line to Harlech from Machynlleth (£7.50, one hour 20 minutes) and Porthmadog (£2.10, 40 minutes) every two hours or so.

## PORTHMADOG

% 01766 / pop 5000

Given its abundance of transport options, Porthmadog (port-*mad*-uk) is a good base for exploring the Snowdonia National Park. The town itself may not be the most aesthetically spectacular place, but it does retain a busy, workaday feel with the hub of the action strung out along the bustling High St, which runs for half a mile through the middle of town.

The town was founded by an 1821 Act of Parliament granting permission to slate magnate William Alexander Madocks – after whom the town is named – to reclaim estuary land and create a new harbour.

Madocks had begun by laying a mile-long causeway called The Cob across Traeth Mawr, the estuary at the mouth of River Glaslyn. Some 400 hectares of wetland habitat behind The Cob was drained and turned into farmland. The resulting causeway provided the route Madocks needed to transport slate on the new Ffestiniog Railway down to the new port.

In the 1870s it was estimated that over a thousand vessels per year departed from the harbour and, at the peak of 1873, over 116,000 tons of Blaenau Ffestiniog slate left Porthmadog for ports around the world.

Today Porthmadog is the southern terminus for one of Wales' finest narrow-gauge train journeys, the **Rheilffordd Ffestiniog Railway** (p250). It's also a popular, not to mention slightly cheaper, place to stay for visitors to the village of Portmeirion (p252), a fantasy-style pocket of *la dolce vita* Italy in North Wales.

Porthmadog is proud of its status as a bastion for small, local businesses with several shops and the local cinema all privately owned by members of the local community.

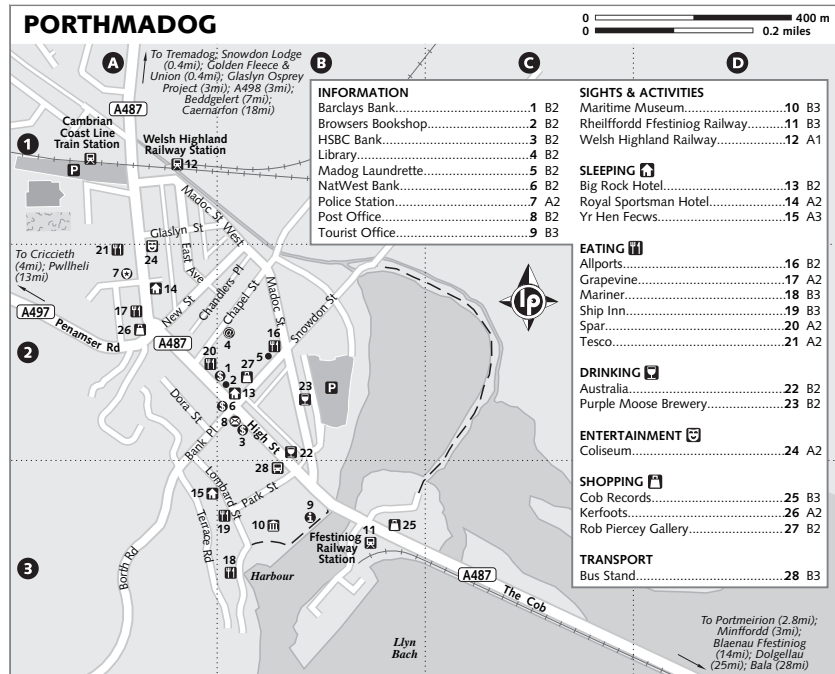
## Orientation & Information

The Cob is the only direct road to Porthmadog from the southeast. It's subject to major traffic congestion in summer after a much-vaunted bypass failed to materialise. The Ffestiniog Railway station and the Welsh Highland Railway station top and tail the town at the southern and northern ends of High St respectively.

The **tourist office** (% 512981; High St; h 10am-5pm Thu-Tue Nov-Mar, 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-6pm daily Jul & Aug) is a busy little office located at the intersection of The Cob and High St. Banks are located along High St near the intersection with Bank Pl, as is the **post office** (h 8.45am-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 8.45am-12.30pm Sat).

Free internet access is available at the **library** (% 514091; Chapel St; h 10am-noon Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Mon-Tue & Fri, to 4pm Wed). **Browsers Bookshop** (% 512066; 73 High St; h 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has a good selection of books and maps for walkers and fans of local history. To wash your kit post hike, try **Madog Laundrette** (34 Snowdon St; h 9am-7pm).

The **police station** (% 512226; High St) is centrally located; the nearest hospital is currently



in Minffordd, 3 miles east, although a new hospital was under construction in Porthmadog at the time of writing.

## Sights

### RHEILFFORDD FFESTINIOG RAILWAY & WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY

The **Rheilffordd Ffestiniog Railway** (% 516000; www.festrail.co.uk; all-day rover ticket adult/concession £16.50/13.20) is a fantastic, twisting and precipitous 13.5-mile narrow-gauge railway that was built between 1832 and 1836 to haul slate down to Porthmadog from the mines at Blaenau Ffestiniog. Horse-drawn wagons were replaced in the 1860s by steam locomotives and the line was opened up as a passenger service. Saved from years of neglect, it is one of Wales' most spectacular and beautiful narrow-gauge journeys. Because it links the Cambrian Coast and Conwy Valley main lines, it also serves as a serious passenger transport option. Nearly all services are steam-hauled. A standard all-day rover ticket offers unlimited travel.

The same company also runs the sibling **Welsh Highland Railway** (% 513402; www.whr.co.uk; all-day ticket adult/child £4.95/2.95) from Porthmadog

to Pen-y-Mount, and Caernarfon to Rhyd Ddu (for more information, see p256). Extensions to the network to Blaenau Ffestiniog and Porthmadog are planned for completion by 2009 for links to Snowdonia National Park.

Both railways organise regular events and showcases. A combined three-in-one ticket (adult/child £30/24) is available for use across the whole network.

## OTHER SIGHTS

The **Glaslyn Osprey Project** (www.rspb.org.uk; 1 Apr-Aug) is the newest attraction in the area. It was founded after a pair of ospreys, regular visitors to Wales on migration from Africa, first nested near Porthmadog in 2004. A round-the-clock protection scheme now operates during the breeding season while a public viewing site is open at Pont Croesor with telescopes and live footage from the nest-cams. The project is located on the B4410, a turning off the A498 Tremadog road.

Next to the tourist office, the tiny **Maritime Museum** (% 513736; adult/child £1.50/0.75; 11am-5pm Jun-Sep) has a low-key pocket history of the highs and lows of topsail schooners and other sailing ships in a wharf-side slate shed.

## Sleeping

**Yr Hen Fecws** (% 514625; www.henfecws.com; 16 Lombard St; s/d from £42/59) In the midrange B&B market, this welcoming restaurant with rooms is hard to beat. The seven en-suite rooms are simply decorated but have feature exposed-slate walls and fireplaces. Downstairs, the inviting restaurant, all red walls and dark wood floors, serves traditional evening meals from 6pm to 10pm.

**Big Rock Cafe & Hotel** (% 512098; www.bigrockcafe.co.uk; 71 High St; s/d/f £35/65/90; P C ) A new arrival in town with a very contemporary feel compared to the more traditional local B&Bs, Big Rock is a family-friendly guesthouse with eight en-suite rooms. Downstairs, the owners run a café (open 9.30am to 5pm, Monday to Saturday; open to 7pm Wednesdays and Fridays) with fair-trade products and lots of smoothies. The owners take an interest in Christian faith issues.

**Royal Sportsman Hotel** (% 512015; www.royalsportsman.co.uk; 131 High St; s/d £48/74; P ) Some of the rooms in this traditional pub feel a bit old-fashioned and frayed around the edges, but the hotel does offer a great base for exploring the area. The building is full of character, having been constructed in 1862 as a coaching inn. Ask about promotional deals and special breaks. There's also an inhouse restaurant

(mains around £16), which serves bar meals from noon to 2.30pm and 6pm to 9pm Monday to Saturday.

## Eating

**Grapevine** (% 514230; 152 High St; mains £8-14; 11am-9pm Mon & Wed-Sat, to 5pm Tue, 11am-4pm Sun) A no-frills spot with a sun terrace out deck, this welcoming locals' place offers snack lunches, traditional mains and a kid's menu for families.

**Ship Inn** (% 512990; 14 Lombard St; mains around £8; 11am-2pm & 5-9.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-2.30pm Sun) A great local pub with a traditional feel and decent real ales, the Ship Inn has a wide menu of hearty pub fare, including speciality grills and curries.

**Mariner** (% 512569; 10 Cornhill) A very small BYO eatery by the harbour, the Mariner is a café by day and a restaurant specialising in fresh fish by night. The tables outside are an attractive feature on sunny evenings.

For self-caterers there are two supermarkets in Porthmadog: **Tesco** (High St; 11am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) and **Spar** (95 High St; 11am-11pm). For a traditional fish supper, **Allports** (% 512589; 38 Snowdon St; 11.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) is an award-winning fish 'n' chip shop with a local following.

## A PINT OF PORTHMADOG'S FINEST

The **Purple Moose Brewery** (% 515571; www.purplemoose.co.uk; Madoc St) is one of approximately 30 microbreweries across Wales. From humble beginnings the venture is now very much a working business with a small staff of four and contacts to supply pubs across North Wales from Anglesey to Harlech. In August 2006 the Snowdonia Ale won the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) award for Champion Beer.

Brewing started in June 2005 with a one-off special pale ale at 3.5%. The brewery now produces three standard beers in both cask conditioned and bottle conditioned formats: Snowdonia Ale (3.6%), Madog's Ale (3.7%) and Glaslyn Ale (4.2%). During the winter they also produce Dark Side of the Moose (4.6%). The Madog is a traditional bitter, while the Snowdonia and Glaslyn are more refreshing ales with a fruity, hoppy aroma and a lighter, golden-brown hue.

The founder, Lawrence Washington, originally hails from Cheltenham but was a long-time volunteer on the local Ffestiniog Railway. As such, he decided to set up the business in Porthmadog, relying on the support of friends from the local community. Today the brewery produces 360 gallons per brew with two to three brews per week.

'There has been very little in the way of enterprising local breweries in Wales for years, hence very little choice,' explains Washington. 'We basically realised that people were thirsty for more options aside from Bass and Brains and set out to fill a niche in the market.'

Currently there is a small brewery shop with memorabilia and souvenirs. The team plans to develop this into a visitor's attraction with exhibitions and information about the brewing process in the next few years.

For information about Penderyn, Wales' only whisky distillery, based just south of Brecon, see p71.



## Drinking & Entertainment

**Australia** (% 510931; 31 High St) For a pint, Australia is a lively, rough-and-ready place with simple bar meals (noon to 8pm daily).

**Coliseum** (% 512108; High St) A classic, old-fashioned picture house showing the latest releases.

## Shopping

The most famous local institution is **Kerfoots** (% 512256; www.kerfoots.com; 138-140 High St; h 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun), an independent department store, established 1874, with a range of household goods. There's also a useful little **coffee shop** (h 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.15am-3.30pm Sun).

The **Rob Piercey Gallery** (% 513833; Snowdon St; h 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 12.30pm Wed Oct-Mar) showcases the work of Piercey, a local artist and member of the Watercolour Society of Wales, who specialises in mountain landscapes.

**Cob Records** (% 512170; www.cobrecords.com; Britannia Tce; h 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is a great little independent record shop with a healthy collection of Welsh bands and music (for more on music, see p46).

## Getting There & Away

The Snowdon Sherpa bus provides useful links to Snowdon trailheads and elsewhere. Bus S97 runs to Betws-y-Coed via Beddgelert and Pen-Y-Pass; buses stop along High St by the park. National Express coach 545 passes

through daily at 8am en route to London via Llandudno, Bangor and Caernarfon; coaches stop by Tesco at the north end of town.

Express Motors bus 1 runs roughly hourly (fewer on Sunday) from Blaenau Ffestiniog (30 minutes) to Bangor (one hour) via Caernarfon (50 minutes). Arriva bus 3 runs to Pwllheli (every 20 minutes, 40 minutes) via Cricheft (25 minutes) for connections across the Llyn Peninsula.

Arriva's TrawsCambria coach X32 leaves daily at 10.20am for Aberystwyth (2¼ hours) and runs onto Cardiff (seven hours); it stops along High St outside the Australia pub.

Porthmadog is on the Cambrian Coast line with trains to Machynlleth (£8.60, two hours, every two hours) and Pwllheli (£3, 30 minutes, every two hours).

## AROUND PORTHMADOG Portmeirion

% 01766

Set on its own tranquil peninsula on the Snowdonia coast, **Portmeirion village** (www.portmeirion-village.com; adult/child £6.50/3.50; h 9am-5.30pm) is a gingerbread, cake-decoration collection of buildings with a heavy Italian influence. Founded in 1926 by the late Welsh architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, it's located 5 miles from Plas Brondanw, his ancestral home. Clough collected bits and pieces from disintegrating stately mansions to create this weird

and wonderful seaside townscape. There's glorious attention to detail and absurdity in each and every one of the nooks and crannies.

The project was completed in two phases – 1926–1939 and 1954–1976, when it was deemed to be finished. Clough reached the ripe old age of 90 years old at this time and had designed and built many of the constructions himself. The buildings are all listed and the whole site is today a Conservation Area. It celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2006.

Clough's lifelong concern was with the whimsical and intriguing nature of architecture, his *raison d'être* to demonstrate how a naturally beautiful site could be developed without defiling it. His life's work now stands as a testament to beauty, something he described as 'that strange necessity'. He died in 1978, having campaigned for the environment throughout his life. He was a founder member of the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales in 1928 and served as its president for 20 years.

An **audio-visual show** (h 10am-5.30pm), just off the central piazza to the right of the Arc de Triomphe, has a commentary by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis himself. A series of brochures, leaflets and plans are available for collection from the Tollgate.

Today the grounds are open daily; guests staying in the two Portmeirion hotels are admitted free. There are seven **shops** (h 9am-5.30pm) around the village, selling books, souvenirs and some basic supplies. Also available is Portmeirion pottery, the famous pottery designed by Susan, Sir Clough's daughter, which bears the Portmeirion label, even though these days it's made in Stoke-on-Trent (England).

The village formed the ideally surreal stage set for the 1960s cult TV series, *The Prisoner*, which was filmed here from 1966 to '67; it still draws fans of the show in droves with *Prisoner* conventions held annually in March. The **Prisoner Information Centre** (h 9am-5.30pm Apr-Oct) has a raft of memorabilia for hard-core fans, who no doubt receive a frisson of excitement from knowing that the centre is housed in what was No 6's cottage – buy the souvenir DVD for an explanation. More recently the village was the setting for the hugely popular TV series, *Cold Feet*. The giant Plaster of Paris Buddha, located just off the piazza, also featured in the 1958 film, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman (for more on film sets in Wales, see the boxed text the North Wales Film & Television Trail, p303).

## SLEEPING

You can live the dream and overnight within the village. The management company has three options for accommodation:

**Portmeirion Hotel** (% 770000; www.portmeirion-village.com; s/d/ste £155/188/209) The original hotel, dating from 1926, has an impressive guest book – HG Wells, Bertrand Russell and Noel Coward all stayed here. The latter was suitably inspired to pen the novel *Blithe Spirit* after a sojourn in the Watch House. The 14 rooms are all individually styled to different themes and ooze a sense of whimsy and history, even if the décor reflects the vaguely psychedelic nature of the surrounds. Ask about low-season promotional deals. A fine-dining-style evening meal is served in the formal dining room for a hefty supplement.

**Castell Deudraeth** (% 770000; www.portmeirion-village.com; r £175-245; p ) Opened in 2001 as a more contemporary alternative to the traditional Portmeirion Hotel, Castell Deudraeth lies just outside the village but is connected by a free shuttle bus service. It was extensively refurbished following a fire but retains the fairytale castle design. The 11 rooms are a blend of contemporary chic and gadget heaven with apartment-style design dominated by a flat-screen entertainment system. There's a less formal grill restaurant with a menu of modern British (and Welsh) staples, plus a busy bar area for cocktails. Of the two hotels, this is better suited to families, with children welcome in the restaurant.

**Self-catering cottages** (% 770000; www.portmeirion-village.com; per week £695-1124) There is a range of 26 self-catering cottages and apartments in the village, all of them individually styled with names like Mermaid, White Horses and Angel, dotted around in eccentric nooks and crannies. They are hired out according to a complex series of rates for weekly, weekend or midweek stays. Facilities and size vary considerably between the properties; check the website for the latest promotional rates and deals.

## EATING

**Town Hall** (h 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) A simple, café-style restaurant for self-service lunches and coffees, although the food can be a bit hit and miss.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Portmeirion village is located about 2 miles east of Porthmadog and 1 mile off the road – an

### IN THE AREA: TREMADOG

While Porthmadog has several places to stay and eat, a couple of the best options in the area are actually located about half a mile further along the A487 in the attractive little village of Tremadog. It feels like an extension to Porthmadog but is actually a separate village with a small post office and Spar supermarket grouped around the handsome town square.

One of the best local sleeping options is **Snowdon Lodge** (% 515354; www.snowdonlodge.co.uk; Lawrence House, Church St; dm/d/f £15/35/58; p h ), a four-star-rated independent hostel. Run by travellers for travellers, the building is actually the house where TE Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) was born on August 16, 1888. In 1896 the Lawrence family moved to Oxford, but the house is still recognised for its importance by the TE Lawrence Society. It's a friendly spot and a great base for organising activities in the area (the owners can advise on local options and operators), while communal areas encourage guests to socialise and swap Snowdonia tips. The rooms are mainly dorms but some private and family rooms are also available; a continental breakfast is included in the price. All bedding is provided, there's an in-house café and a bar, and bike hire is available (£15).

For something to eat, one of the best options is the **Golden Fleece** (% 512421; Market Sq; mains around £8; food h noon-2pm & 7-9pm) in Tremadog's main square. It's an inviting and friendly little pub with real ales, some decent pub grub, an open fire for cold nights and a sunny courtyard for balmy days. This is a great spot to sample a pint of the local microbrewery ale from the Purple Moose Brewery (see the boxed text A Pint of Porthmadog's Finest, p251). There are live acoustic music sessions on Tuesdays and occasional live bands.

## LOCAL VOICES

I've spent 30 years working in Gwyllt Gardens in Portmeirion village and have seen how the colours and designs have changed over the years – the best time for colour is April and May. We are a team of 12 gardeners, now working over 70 acres of woodland with the gardens stretching to 120 acres in total.

The gardens have a unique fairytale-like quality about them. We're on the Gulf Stream here, so we can grow more exotic plants. This is not just a botanic garden. It's constantly developing, so the plan now is to create more one-off events and foster more winter colours. Susan Williams-Ellis, Clough's daughter, adds new designs to the gardens inspired by new themes.

The diversity of species is huge: more than 200 species of rhododendrons, 60 varieties of camellias and 40 varieties of magnolias. There's a lot of fauna too: badgers, foxes, rabbits and ospreys are all common sights.

Of course, these days Portmeirion is as famous as a TV location as it is for the displays of flora. I was here when the TV crew was filming the 1960s TV series, *The Prisoner*, and I just remember spending all my time sweeping up after them as they were a bunch of chain smokers. I was also here when they were filming the TV series *Cold Feet* too. It's great to see Portmeirion getting recognition but, for me, the village will always be about exploring the gardens through the seasons.

*Arwel Hughes, head gardener, Gwyllt Gardens, Portmeirion village*

Portmeirion village produces two leaflets for walks in the Gwyllt Gardens: the Tree Trail and Woodland Garden Walk. Collect them from the Tollgate.

easy stroll from Porthmadog's tourist office (p249). Williams bus 99B has two daily services at 9.55am and 1.05pm to cover the 10-minute journey to the site from Porthmadog.

## CAERNARFON

☎ 01286 / pop 4000

Caernarfon, situated 9 miles from Bangor between the gleaming swell of the Menai Strait and the deep-purple mountains of Snowdonia, is home to Wales' most magnificent castle, a looming, fantastical World Heritage Site built by Edward I as a medieval show of strength. Following the efforts of the former Welsh prime minister, David Lloyd George (see the boxed text, p36), the castle was designated as the venue for the 1911 and 1969 investitures of the Prince of Wales, the latter focusing the attention of the world to Caernarfon when Prince Charles, the current heir to the British throne, had his investiture broadcast live on TV.

Given the town's crucial historical importance, the pervading downbeat feel of the town comes as something of a disappointment. There is a tangible sense of history in the streets around the castle, and within the walled town, cobbled and lined by fine Georgian buildings, but many shopfronts are boarded up and Caernarfon has a rather down-at-heel feel. Only the new arts centre, Galeri Caernarfon (p257) brings a breath of fresh air to the town's cultural life.

Caernarfon has traditionally been the heartland of the Welsh Nationalist movement and remains a defiantly Welsh-speaking enclave that preserves its traditional language and culture with pride. Indeed, about 70% of locals speak Welsh as their first language.

## Orientation & Information

The historical heart of Caernarfon is enclosed within stout 14th-century walls, just to the north of the castle, beside the River Seiont (where it empties into the Menai Strait). The centre of modern Caernarfon is just east of the castle, at Castle Sq (Y Maes). The main shopping area is pedestrianised Pool St, running east from Castle Sq. Buses stop at stands along Penllyn, two blocks north of Pool St. The terminus of the Welsh Highland Railway is two blocks south-east of the **Slate Quay car park** (per day £3).

The **tourist office** (☎ 67223; Castle Ditch; 11 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar), opposite the castle's main entrance, the King's Gate, incorporates the Pendeitsh Gallery, which showcases crafts from the **Parc Glynllifon craft centre** (☎ 83022; adult/child £3/1), located 6 miles southwest of Caernarfon on the A499.

All the major banks have branches around Castle Sq, where the **post office** (11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) is also located. The **library** (Bangor St; 11 9.30am-7pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, to 1pm Wed & Sat) has free internet access, while the **Dylan Thomas Café**

(☎ 678777; 4 Bangor St; 11 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Tue & Thu, to 6.30pm Wed, to 7pm Fri, to 5pm Sat) offers internet access (£0.50 per 10 mins) and wi-fi access for laptop carriers (£5 per day) along with a simple café, which has a vague aroma of old socks.

**Pete's Launderette** (☎ 678395; 10 Skinner St) is north-east of Castle Sq. The **police station** (☎ 673333; Maesinda Lane) is half a mile east of the town centre, while the nearest accident-and-emergency service is at Bangor's **Gwynedd Hospital** (☎ 01248-384384), approximately 9 miles east.

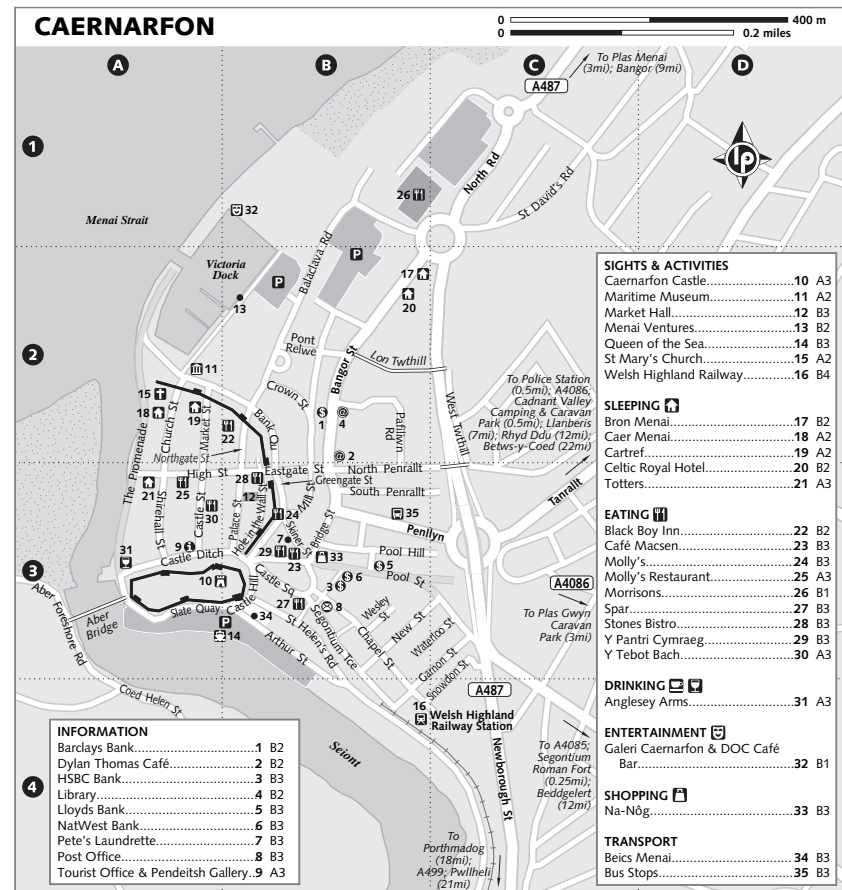
## Sights

### CAERNARFON CASTLE

One of the world's greatest medieval castles, majestic **Caernarfon Castle** (☎ 677617; adult/child/family £4.90/4.50/15; 11 9.30am-5pm Apr-May & Oct, 9.30am-

6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) was built between 1283 and 1330 as a military stronghold, a seat of government and a royal palace. Like the other royal strongholds, it was designed and mainly supervised by Master James of St George, but the brief and scale were extraordinary. Inspired by the dream of Macsen Wledig recounted in the *Mabinogion*, Caernarfon echoes the 5th-century walls of Constantinople, with colour-banded masonry and polygonal towers, instead of the traditional round towers and turrets.

Despite its fairytale aspect it is thoroughly fortified with a series of murder holes and a sophisticated arrangement of multiple arrow slits. It repelled Owain Glyndwr's army in 1404 with a garrison of only 28 men, and resisted



three sieges during the Civil War before surrender to Cromwell's army in 1646. Finest of all is the **Eagle Tower**, on whose turrets you can spot the weathered eagle from which it gets its name, and where stone helmeted figures were intended to swell the garrison's numbers.

A year after construction of the building was begun, Edward I's second son was born here, becoming heir to the throne four months later when his elder brother died. To consolidate Edward's power he was made Prince of Wales in 1301, and his much-eroded statue is over the **King's Gate**. He came to a very nasty end via a red-hot poker, but this did not destroy the title. However, the first investiture that took place here, rather than in London, wasn't until 1911 – of the rather less ill-fated Edward VIII. Although initiated by the Welsh prime minister, David Lloyd George, it incensed the largely Nationalist local population.

There is an exhibition plus cinematic glimpse of the 1969 investiture of today's Prince of Wales in the **North East Tower** (that time Nationalists tried to blow up his train). In the **Queen's Tower** (named after Edward I's wife Eleanor) is the vivid **Museum of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers** (free admission with castle ticket); poets Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon both served in the brigade.

## SEGONTIUM

Just east of the centre, the excavated foundations of the **Segontium Roman Fort** (% 675625; 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) represent the westernmost Roman legionary fort of the Roman Empire. Overlooking the Menai Strait, the fort dates back to AD 77, when Caesar Julius Agricola completed the Roman conquest of Wales by capturing the Isle of Anglesey. It was designed to accommodate a force of up to 1000 infantrymen, and coins recovered from the site indicate that it was an active garrison until AD 394 – a reflection of the crucial strategic position.

The one-site museum explains the background to complement the stark remains. The site is located about half a mile along Llanbelig Rd (A4085), which crosses through the middle of it.

## WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY

The narrow-gauge **Welsh Highland Railway** (% 677018; www.festrail.co.uk; all-day Rover ticket adult/child £16.50/13.20; 2-5 daily services, selected days Apr-Oct), the sister service to the Rheilffordd Ffestiniog Railway, is an amalgamation of several late-19th-century railways used for carrying slate.

The line opened for passenger traffic in 1923 but closed just 14 years later. It was saved by volunteers and reopened as a tourist attraction in 1997, currently running to **Rhyd Ddu**, from where several trails lead up Snowdon, making the train a major link for walkers. Extensions to the network to Blaenau Ffestiniog and Porthmadog are planned for completion by 2009 for links to Snowdonia National Park.

## Activities

The excellent **Plas Menai, The National Watersports Centre** (% 01248-670964; www.plasmenai.co.uk), 3 miles out along the A487 towards Bangor, offers a year-round range of water-based courses for all interests and ability levels – from sailing to power-boating, plus multi-activity courses suitable for families and youth groups. Advance reservations are mandatory. The centre also offers on-site accommodation with en suite B&B (rooms £30) and a bunkhouse (dorms £20).

The tourist office has a brochure-map of Gwynedd recreational cycle routes, established by Gwynedd Council along disused railway lines. Three of these are based around Caernarfon: the 12-mile **Lôn Eifion** running south to Bryncir (starting near the Welsh Highland Railway station); the 4.5-mile **Lôn Las Menai** along the Menai Strait to the village of Y Felinheli; and the 4-mile **Lôn Gwyfrai** to the village of Waunfawr. See p258 for details of bike hire.

The pleasure boat **Queen of the Sea** (% 672772; 1 May-Oct; adult/child £5/3.50) offers five daily, 40-minute tours up and down the Menai Strait from Slate Quay, beside the castle. For something with more of an adrenaline kick, **Menai Ventures** (% 674540; www.ribride.co.uk; RIB rides adult/child £17/13; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-3pm Sun May-Sep) offers one-hour RIB (rigid inflatable boat) rides and arranges water sports activities for groups – enquire for details. All activities depend on current tidal conditions.

## Sleeping

**Cadnant Valley Camping & Caravan Park** (% 673196; www.cwmcadnantvalley.co.uk; sites per adult/tent £2/4; 1 Mar–end Oct) Located half a mile east of the castle along the A4086 Llanberis road, this leafy park has a good range of facilities, including a children's play area and disabled-access toilets.

**Plas Gwyn Caravan Park** (% 672619; www.plasgwyn.co.uk; Llanrug; from £11.50, sites per tent plus £2 per adult) This quiet family-run site, set in the grounds of an imposing Georgian house, has good facilities and a peaceful setting. From Caernarfon, take

the A4086, signposted Llanberis, for 3 miles – the park is situated on the right before entering Llanrug.

**Totters** (% 672963; www.totters.co.uk; Plas Porth Yr Aur; 2 High St; dm/r £14/16; C) Modern, clean and very welcoming, this excellent independent hostel is the best-value place to stay in town by a country mile. In addition to traveller-friendly facilities, the 14th-century arched basement hosts a long table that gives a sense of history to guests' dinner parties. In addition to dorms, there's a two-bed family-friendly attic apartment with TV and bathroom (£20 per person).

**Cartref** (% 677392; www.cartref-caernarfon.co.uk; 23 Market St; s/d £35/60; 11) New owners have brought a fresh look to this attractive 18th-century townhouse. In addition to restoring original features, such as slate fireplaces, wi-fi internet adds extra appeal for the business traveller. Ask about group and off-season deals.

**Caer Menai** (% 672612; www.caermenai.co.uk; 15 Church St; d/f £60/80; 11 C) A former county school building, dating from 1894, this pale-yellow Georgian building has been a guesthouse since 1974. The seven en-suite rooms are comfortable, if a little old-fashioned, and some are suitable for families.

**Bron Menai** (% 675589; www.bronmenai.co.uk; North Rd; s/d £55/70; 11) A cut above the average B&B, this smart, family place has six en-suite rooms with tasteful features and a few nice homely touches. The owners have run the guesthouse for over 20 years and are full of tips for visiting the local area.

**Celtic Royal Hotel** (% 674477; www.celtic-royal.co.uk; Bangor St; s/d from £77/93) This grand old Georgian building resembles a stately home with its impressive entrance hall. It certainly targets the high rollers with a leisure club, buzzy Havana bar-cum-bistro, plus specialist facilities for conferences. Given the formal atmosphere, however, this is definitely one for the older, more genteel visitor, rather than families or young couples.

## Eating

**Y Tebot Bach** (% 678444; 13 Castle St; cakes £1, sandwiches £5; 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sat) The nicest of the many tearooms around the castle, this tiny place for a light bite has a cosy, living-room feel, homemade cakes and sandwiches.

**Café Maccen** (% 676464; 11 Castle Sq; mains around £7; 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) A simple but airy café with marble tables, it offers the stock-in-trade all-day breakfasts and sandwiches, as

well as some reliable mains. While the food may be simple, the place is cleaner and friendlier than other cafés in the block.

**Molly's** (% 673238; Hole in the Wall St; mains from £9; 11 noon-2.30pm & 5.30-9pm Wed-Sun) An arty café bar for snack-style meals. It specialises in creative recipes using local fish.

**Stones Bistro** (% 671152; 4 Hole in the Wall St; mains £10.50-14; 11 6pm-late Tue-Sat) Housed in what was a 17th-century temperance house, this French-style bistro is open only for dinner with speciality roast lamb and some decent options for vegetarians.

**Black Boy Inn** (% 673604; Northgate St; mains around £12; 11 bar meals 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun) This 15th-century inn, rammed with original features and divided into a series of snug, small rooms, has good bar meals – try the farmhouse basket (£6.50) for a hearty lunch. The hotel also offers B&B accommodation (rooms with shared/private bathroom £35/60).

**Molly's Restaurant** (Castle St; 11 6.30-10pm Wed-Sat) This is a more formal spot for dinner than the flagship café Molly's.

**Y Pantri Cymraeg** (% 678884; Castle Sq; 11 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) A tiny deli with supplies of Welsh wines and chocolate, plus other local specialities.

There's a **Spar supermarket** (Castle Sq; 11 7am-11pm); a farmers market sprawls across Castle Sq every Saturday and, in summer, on Monday too.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Galeri Caernarfon** (% 685222; www.galericaernarfon.com; Victoria Dock; box office 11 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, plus during events; 11 10am-5pm) Caernarfon's cultural scene has been dramatically boosted by the 2005 opening of this excellent multi-purpose arts centre, which hosts exhibitions, theatre, film and events. Check the programme for details. The in-house **DOC café bar** (11 10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun) has day-round snacks and pre-event suppers.

**Anglesey Arms** (% 672158; The Promenade; bar meals 11 noon-8.30pm) For a pint, the Anglesey Arms down by the water is your best bet, especially with outside seating in summer offering a great harbour view for a sundowner. The owners also run a floating restaurant in summer in the harbour (mains around £6).

## Shopping

**Na-Nôg** (% 676946; www.na-nog.com; Castle Sq; 11 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) This little music, DVD and book

shop is devoted to Welsh-language material for culture vultures keen to explore material in Welsh.

### Getting There & Away

With the exception of the Welsh Highland Railway (p256), Caernarfon has no train service, though bus services are plentiful:

**Arriva Cymru** Bus 5/X5 runs from Bangor (30 minutes, every 20 minutes Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday) and from Llandudno (1½ hours, every 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday).

**Express Motors** Bus 1 runs to Porthmadog (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday) and onto Blaenau Ffestiniog (1¼ hours).

**Snowdon Sherpa** Bus S4 to Beddgelert.

### Getting Around

Bikes are available for hire from **Beics Menai** (☎ 676804; 1 Slate Quay; adult/child £16/9; 11 9.30am-5pm); the owner can also advise on local cycle routes.

## BEDDGELERT

☎ 01766 / pop 500

The charming little community of Beddgelert is a conservation village at the heart of the Snowdonia National Park. The rough grey-stone buildings, overlooking the trickling river with its ivy-covered bridge, come alive in spring when flowers festoon the village – hence Beddgelert is a regular prize-winner in the ‘Britain in Bloom’ competition. Scenes from Mark Robson’s 1958 film, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*, starring Ingrid Bergman, were shot here.

Beddgelert, meaning ‘Gelert’s Grave’, is allegedly named after the folk tale of the 13th-century Welsh prince, Llewelyn, whose faithful dog was killed by its owner because he thought it had savaged his baby son. In truth, Gelert had actually killed the wolf that was attacking the baby. The grave is now just a short walk from the village along a riverside trail and, according to the tombstone: ‘The prince filled with remorse is said never to have smiled again. He buried Gelert here. The spot he called Beddgelert.’

Today the grave is a major attraction but, some locals suggest that the dog’s grave was the invention of a canny 19th-century hotelier to boost visitor numbers. More likely the name refers to Celert, a 5th-century missionary preacher from Ireland, who is thought to have founded a church here.

## Orientation & Information

The hub of the village is the ancient bridge, where the rivers Colwyn and Glaslyn meet and the roads split for Caernarfon and Capel Curig. Most of the sleeping and eating options are strung out along the main street. The **tourist office** (☎ 890615; Canolfan Hebog; 11 9.30am-5.30pm daily Easter-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Fri-Sun Nov-Mar) is at the southern end of the village, close to the short-stay **car park** (per hr 40p).

There’s a **post office** (11 7.15am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 7.15am-1pm Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 8am-noon Sun) with a bureau de change, but no banks or grocery store.

## Sights

At the heart of the village, **Tŷ Isaf** (☎ 510129; admission free; 11 1-4pm Wed-Sun) is managed by the National Trust. The oldest house in Beddgelert, Tŷ Isaf has a tiny exhibition showcasing traditional village life in the 19th century.

A mile east of the village, the Gwynn Valley features the hill **Dinas Emrys** where the legendary King Vortigern – son-in-law of the last Roman ruler, Magnus Maximus – tried to build a castle. According to folklore, the young wizard Merlin liberated two dragons in a cavern under the hill, a white one representing the Saxons and a red one representing the Welsh, and prophesied that they’d fight until the red dragon was triumphant. The act was the spiritual birth of the Welsh nation and the two dragons have apparently been at each other’s throats ever since (for more on Merlin, see p78).

Across the road from Dinas Emrys is the **Sygn Copper Mine** (☎ 890595; www.sygnoppermine.co.uk; adult/child £8/6; 11 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct), which was mined from Roman times, but especially in the 19th century. It was abandoned in 1903, later overtopped into a museum and now boasts an audio-visual underground tour that evokes the life of Victorian miners.

## Sleeping

**Beddgelert Forest Campsite** (☎ 890288; sites per tent/caravan £13-16; 11 mid-Dec-end Oct; C ) Well-equipped and well-situated, this forest site 1 mile west of Beddgelert on the A4085 Caernarfon road has a log cabin and adventure playground for children.

**Snowdon Ranger YHA** (☎ 01286-650391; Rhyd Ddu; adult/child £12/9) On the A4085, 5 miles north of Beddgelert, at the trailhead for the Snowdon Ranger Path up Snowdon, this former inn,

full of character, is perfect for walkers and has its own adjoining beach. The Snowdon Sherpa bus S4 from Caernarfon passes by the door with connections to Bangor.

**Bryn Gwynant YHA** (☎ 890251; Nantgwynant; adult/child £12/9) Four miles east of Beddgelert, this walkers’ staple overlooks Llyn Gwynant and Snowdon, and is set in an early Victorian mansion. The Watkin Path trailhead for Snowdon begins less than 1 mile from the hostel and leads into incredible mountain scenery.

Near the bridge, there’s a group of B&Bs similar in style and price.

**Plas Gwyn** (☎ 890215; Beddgelert; www.plas-gwyn.com; s/d £25/50) Try Plas Gwyn, a 19th-century red-granite house with high-ceilinged rooms and some original features. A hearty cooked breakfast is served in the dining room with views across the river.

**Plas Colwyn** (☎ 890458; Beddgelert; www.plascolwyn.co.uk; s/d £27/54; P 11 ) The slightly smarter Plas Colwyn, a 17th-century house with river and mountain views, offers traditional rooms (some of them with original fireplaces) and a homely atmosphere.

**Tanronnen Inn** (☎ 890347; Beddgelert; s/d £55/100) Following a recent refit, this traditional coaching inn has smart, albeit slightly formal rooms at the top end of the scale. Set in an attractive location, it’s right at the heart of the village. Bar meals are also available from noon to 2pm and 7pm to 8.30pm.

## Eating

**Beddgelert Bistro & Antique Shop** (☎ 890543; Beddgelert; mains around £12; 11 noon-5pm & 7-9pm) Beside the bridge, this tearoom-style place is divided between several small rooms with exposed flagstone walls. It has snack meals and – rather incongruously – a range of fondues.

**Café Glandwr & Glandwr Ices** (☎ 890339; Beddgelert; 11 9am-9pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar; C ) The busiest place in the village! This excellent ice-cream parlour serves a huge array of home-made flavours and is now joined by an annex family restaurant with a café-style menu. You don’t have to love pizza to eat here – but it helps.

**Lyn’s Café** (☎ 890374; Beddgelert; meals £6-8; 11 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat & Sun; C ) A good family-friendly all-rounder, Lyn’s is split between a restaurant serving big breakfasts and Sunday roasts, and a tearoom round the back with seats by the river for simple snacks.

## Getting There & Around

Beddgelert is served by the Snowdon Sherpa bus S4 from Caernarfon and the S97 from Porthmadog to Betws-y-Coed.

**Beics Beddgelert** (☎ 890434; www.beddgelertbikes.co.uk; adult/child per day £18/17), located 2 miles north on the A4085 and close to the entrance to the Beddgelert Forest Campsite, rents out mountain bikes, tandems and child seats.

## AROUND BEDDGELERT

### Blaenau Ffestiniog

☎ 01766

Slate was the basis of Snowdonia’s wealth in the 19th century. Most of the slate used to keep English houses dry came from Wales, and most of that came either from the quarries of Bethesda or the mines of Blaenau Ffestiniog. However, only about 10% of mined slate is usable, so for every ton that goes to the factory, nine tons are left as rubble.

Despite being in the very centre of Snowdonia National Park, the grey mountains of mine waste that surround Blaenau Ffestiniog prevented it from being officially included in the park – a slap in the face for this impoverished town, in the days before Wales’ industrial sites were recognised as part of its heritage.

Today, although slate mining continues on a small scale, Blaenau (*blay-nye*) struggles to survive as a tourist town, selling the history of the slate industry and of the Ffestiniog Railway (which has its northern terminus here). The town has a deeply mournful feel about it and an amazing sparsity of any worthwhile sleeping and eating options. If you’re not interested in slate or rail heritage, then frankly there’s little here to distract you.

## SIGHTS

Blaenau’s main attraction, the **Llechwedd Slate Caverns** (☎ 830306; www.llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk; either ride adult/child £8.95/6.75, both rides £13.50/9.50; 11 from 10am daily, last tour 5.15pm Mar-Sep, 4.15pm Oct-Feb) offer a chance to descend into a real slate mine and get a sense of what the working life was like. There are two tours; the best is the 25-minute Deep Mine tour, including a descent on the UK’s steepest passenger railway and a walk through 10 multimedia sequences, which guide you through the Victorian mining experience. If you can’t manage a lot of steps, go for the Miner’s Tramway Tour, a ride through the huge 1846 network of tunnels, caverns and Victorian tableaux. The site is



just under a mile north of town on the A470 Betws-y-Coed road.

Riding the **Rheilffordd Ffestiniog Railway** (% 516024; www.festrail.co.uk; all-day Rover ticket to/from Porthmadog adult/concession £16.50/13.20), one of Wales' finest narrow-gauge railways, remains the main reason for visiting Blaenau. The Ffestiniog Railway Company is the oldest independent railway company in the world, and was established by Act of Parliament in 1832. The 13.5-mile line, built in the 1830s to haul slate to the port at Porthmadog (p250), is now an important link between the Conwy Valley and Cambrian Coast main lines. Frequency ranges from two to a high-summer maximum of six trains daily from April to October (45 minutes).

## BETWS-Y-COED

% 01690 / pop 900

If you're looking for a base with an Alpine feel from which to explore Snowdonia National Park, the bustling little village of Betws-y-Coed (*bet-us-ee-coyd*) stands out as a natural option. It boasts a dramatic setting above an inky river, is engulfed in the verdant leafiness of the Gwydyr Forest and benefits from a position near the junction of three river valleys: the Lledr meets the Conwy and, about 1 mile south of the centre, they join the Llugwy. Betws-y-Coed takes its name (which means 'sanctuary in the wood') from the 14th-century St Michael's Church at the heart of town.

The town has blossomed as Wales' most popular inland resort since Victorian days when a group of countryside painters founded an artistic community to record the diversity of the landscape. The arrival of the railway in 1868 cemented its popularity and today Betws-y-Coed is as busy with families and coach parties as with walkers.

Activities are its stock-in-trade, however, with outdoor-activity shops strung out along the A5, the London-Holyhead highway that forms the main thoroughfare. The rivers Conwy and Llugwy are rich with salmon in autumn while water sports and skiing are best organised through the nearby Plas y Brenin National Mountain Centre (p263).

## Orientation & Information

Betws-y-Coed is essentially centred around the A5 (known locally as the Holyhead Rd) with buses stopping at the end of Station Rd by the **short-stay car park** (per 3hr £1).

The excellent **National Park Information Centre** (% 710426; www.betws-y-coed.co.uk; Royal Oak Stables; 11 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is the hub for tourist information in the area with a comprehensive array of books and maps. The adjoining, free exhibition on Snowdonia National Park includes a virtual-reality helicopter ride over Snowdon. For specialist references for walkers, climbers and cyclists, call into **Ultimate Outdoors** (% 710555; www.ultimateoutdoors.co.uk; Holyhead Rd; 11 9.30am-6.30pm May-Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Thu, to 6.30pm Fri & Sat Oct-Apr), an adventure shop with a huge range of equipment.

The **post office** (Holyhead Rd; 11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) is located within a **Londis convenience store** (11 8am-9pm), while the only bank in town is the close-by **HSBC** (Holyhead Rd).

You can access the internet at the **Cotswold Rock Bottom Shop** (Holyhead Rd; per 30min £1).

## Sights

The main draw here is the surrounding landscape, with **Swallow Falls** (viewing platform £1), located 2 miles northwest of town, the main natural tourist trap. But there's also a raft of quieter day walks close by (see below).

In the tiny town centre, the 14th-century **St Michael's Church** is across the train tracks – the National Park Information Centre has a key, as does the **Conwy Valley Railway Museum** (% 710568; adult/child £1.50/0.80; 11 10am-5pm), which also arranges miniature steam train rides for families – the 1-mile round trip costs £1.50. Less compelling is the rather fusty **Betws-y-Coed Motor Museum** (% 710760; adult/child £1.50/1; 11 10am-6pm Apr-Oct) with vintage models of Aston Martin, Bentley, MG and various racing cars for enthusiasts.

## Activities

### WALKING & CYCLING

The 28-sq-mile **Gwydyr Forest**, planted since the 1920s with oak, beech and larch, encircles Betws-y-Coed to the west and south. At its heart, the **Gwydyr Forest Park**, laced with walking trails and boasting a designated cycle track, is an ideal spot for a day's walking close to town, though it gets very muddy in wet weather.

The **Forestry Commission** (www.forestry.gov.uk) publishes a brochure with 13 graded walks across a variety of distances; it's available from the National Park Information Centre for £2.

### PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

Located 6 miles east of Betws-y-Coed at Penmachno, **Ty Coch Farm** (% 760248; rides per hr/half-day

£17/30) arranges rides through the Gwydyr Forest for novice and regular riders alike. It also offers a pub ride for £36, lasting around four hours and stopping off for a pint at a couple of local pubs along the way.

## Sleeping

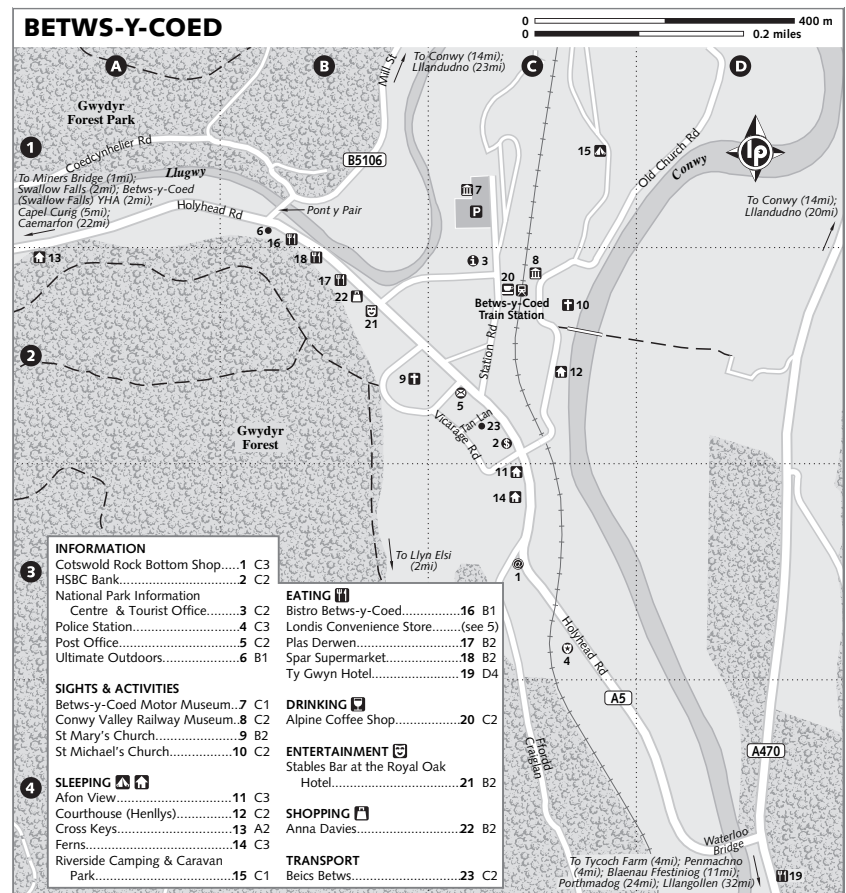
**Riverside Camping & Caravan Park** (% 710310; Old Church Rd; sites per adult/child £6/3; 11 Mar-Oct) This well-appointed site has tent and caravan pitches and hot showers. The owners operate a strict noise curfew after 10pm and bookings are highly recommended at peak times.

**Betws-y-Coed (Swallow Falls) YHA** (% 710796; adult/child £14/10) Two miles west of town and opposite the trail leading down to Swallow Falls (opposite), this year-round hostel is part

of a bustling traveller hub with camping, a restaurant and self-catering facilities. While facilities are excellent, it's aimed at serious walkers rather than families with children. The Snowdon Sherpa bus S2 runs out here every 30 minutes from Betws-y-Coed train station.

**Ferns** (% 710587; www.ferns-guesthouse.co.uk; Holyhead Rd; s; £38 d £50-60) New owners have taken over this four-star-rated B&B at the heart of the village and introduced 'fry up'-free healthy breakfasts using local produce. The rooms are comfortable with some nice, homely touches.

**Afon View** (% 710726; www.afon-view.co.uk; Holyhead Rd; s/d/f £31/60/80; p n ) Traditional but homely, with a few frilly touches for Laura Ashley fans, this Victorian property has seven en-suite rooms and is set back from the main road in a





### A DAY WALK AROUND BETWS-Y-COED

Starting from the car park behind the National Park Information Centre in Betws-y-Coed, this 4-mile circular walk is an easy stroll suitable for families. The walk draws on the unique location of the town at the convergence of the Conwy and Llugwy rivers.

From the tourist office the footpath passes the Motor Museum to the point where the Llugwy and Conwy rivers meet. Take a right and follow the Conwy, passing some large stepping stones, the oldest crossing point of the Conwy.

Back on the main road, follow the left-hand fork, which leads to the 14th-century church of St Michael, now used only for funerals. Cross the Conwy by the white suspension bridge built in 1930 and follow the path through the fields to the main road. Then head south along the A470 until you come to Waterloo Bridge. Built in 1815 and known locally as 'iron bridge', it spans 32m and is inscribed thus: 'This arch was constructed in the same year as the battle of Waterloo was fought'. Take a right over the bridge and follow the main road through the village. At the stone-built Pont y Pair, the 'Bridge of the Cauldron', cross the river, taking the left path alongside the river Llugwy – keep to the river side.

After about 1 mile you will come to the Miners' Bridge, so called as this was the route miners took on their way to work in the lead mines nearby. This is a modern replacement of the oldest crossing of the Llugwy.

Either cross the bridge to follow the path to the main road, where you turn left to get back to the village, or retrace your steps alongside the river.

For more information, see [www.eryri-npa.gov.uk](http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk).

quiet location. The friendly owner can advise on local activities.

**Cross Keys** (% 710334; [www.crosskeyssnowdonia.co.uk](http://www.crosskeyssnowdonia.co.uk); Holyhead Rd; s/d £40/70; 11 ) About half a mile from town on the A5 heading west to Capel Curig, this simple but satisfying pub has decent ensuite rooms, some accessible via a separate entrance to the main bar area in a cottage-style extension. Downstairs the owners serve up standard bar-food fare from noon to 12.30pm and 6pm to 8.30pm.

**Courthouse (Henllys)** (% 710534; [www.guesthouse-snowdonia.co.uk](http://www.guesthouse-snowdonia.co.uk); Old Church Rd; s/d £36/80; 11 ) Nine individually styled rooms feature in this traditional guesthouse; the most popular is the old judge's quarters with exposed oak beams. Formerly the town's courthouse, today it retains its connection to the legal profession with its treasure-trove interior of memorabilia and artefacts. The guest lounge offers a particularly, ahem, arresting experience with its fine collection of police helmets.

### Eating & Drinking

**Plas Derwen** (% 710388; Holyhead Rd; light meals £4; 11 10am-5pm) A very modern and airy café serving lunches and light meals, plus a full afternoon tea (£6.50). A few tables overlook the main street for an al fresco morning coffee and the owners have introduced a couple of modern, tasteful rooms upstairs for B&B (rooms £25).

**Alpine Coffee Shop** (% 710747; Train Station Complex; snacks £5; 11 8.30am-5.30pm) Grab a bite at this excellent, friendly little café, which serves toasted sandwiches and snacks. Unusually, it also boasts a huge tea menu with 25 varieties, including the 'world's rarest tea' at £8.50 per pot. Unfortunately, after all that tea, there's no toilet – use the public loo in the nearby car park.

**Bistro Betws-y-Coed** (% 710328; [www.bistrobetws-y-coed](http://www.bistrobetws-y-coed); mains £15; Holyhead Rd; 11 noon-3pm & 6.30-9pm) The sister property to Bistro Conwy (p291), this smart new eatery is one of the best places for an evening meal, with a menu of traditional Welsh dishes and daily specials. Reservations are often mandatory at weekends and during peak season.

**Ty Gwyn Hotel** (% 710383; [www.tygwynhotel.co.uk](http://www.tygwynhotel.co.uk); bar meals £8, mains £15; meals 11 noon-2pm & 6.30-9pm) Under new management, this 17th-century coaching inn (it dates from 1636) oozes character from every one of its numerous exposed beams, although a little love is required to preserve the ambience. The menu focuses on hearty, meaty mains but lighter bar-style meals are also available. The owners also offer B&B accommodation (rooms £22 to £50) – ask about off-season promotions.

For self-caterers, there's a **Spar supermarket** (Holyhead Rd; 11 8am-10pm) and a **Londis convenience store** (Holyhead Rd; 11 8am-10pm) to stock up on basic supplies.

### Entertainment

**Stables Bar** (% 710219; [www.royalokahotel.net](http://www.royalokahotel.net); Royal Oak Hotel, Holyhead Rd) There's live jazz on Thursday nights and a male voice choir in residence every other Friday as well as cheap bar meals (from £7), dinner and B&B accommodation packages (from £57.50 per person).

### Shopping

**Anna Davies** (% 710292; [www.annadavies.co.uk](http://www.annadavies.co.uk); Holyhead Rd; 11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) A local institution, the Anna Davies department store sells crafts and household goods, and celebrated its 50 years of service in 2006.

### Getting There & Away

The most scenic journey to Betws-y-Coed is by train, with six daily services (three on Sundays) from Llandudno Junction (£4, 30 minutes) and onto Blaenau Ffestiniog (£3.30, 30 minutes) on the **Conwy Valley Line** ([www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk](http://www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk)).

Snowdon Sherpa runs bus S2 from Llandudno and S6 from Llanberis to Capel Curig via Betws-y-Coed, stopping outside the train station.

Arriva's bus 84 runs three daily services to Llandudno Junction (35 minutes); bus X19 runs four daily services (two on Sundays) to Llangollen (one hour).

### Getting Around

**Beics Betws** (% 710766; [www.bikewales.co.uk](http://www.bikewales.co.uk); Tan Lan) can advise on local cycling trails and hires a range of mountain bikes from £14/18 per half-/full day. Ask about full-suspension and free-ride bike prices.

### AROUND BETWS-Y-COED

#### Capel Curig

% 01690 / pop 190

Tiny Capel Curig, 5 miles west of Betws-y-Coed with a population of less than 200 people, is one of Snowdonia's oldest hill stations, and has long been a centre for walkers, climbers and other outdoor junkies. A scattered village at the heart of soaring, heady scenery and ringed by looming mountains, Capel Curig has two primary claims to fame.

**Ugly House** (% 720287; 11 9.30am-5.30pm Easter-Oct; admission £1) is a historic property with an educational centre for children and a wildlife garden. More crucially, the property is home to the **Snowdonia Society** ([www.snowdonia-society.org.uk](http://www.snowdonia-society.org.uk)), a charity working to protect and enhance Snowdonia National Park (see the boxed text Local

Voices, p264). The origins of the house make for great local folklore. One yarn suggests it was built in 1475 by two local bandits as their hide-out; another states that, because Welsh law in the Middle Ages said that any man who built on common land and had smoke coming out of the chimney by daybreak could stake a claim for the freehold as far as he could throw an axe around the property, the outlaws claimed the place as their own after some axe-throwing practice. The Snowdonia Society rescued the property from dereliction and turned it into their headquarters in 1988 following painstaking renovations by a team of dedicated volunteers.

The **Plas y Brenin National Mountain Centre** (% 720214; [www.pyb.co.uk](http://www.pyb.co.uk)), at the western edge of the village, is a multiactivity centre with excellent facilities and a huge array of residential, year-round courses, ranging from basic rock climbing to summer and winter mountaineering, and professional development and teaching qualifications. Advance bookings are required. The management can arrange local B&B accommodation and offer simple in-house dorm rooms (£20). There's a communal bar area to meet other students and regular talks cover related topics on Monday, Tuesday and Saturday evenings at 8pm. Taster days runs throughout the year with an introduction to three activities for £30.

For cheap sleeping options, there is a youth hostel in the local area open year-round, but call ahead to check availability. **Capel Curig YHA** (% 0870 7705746; Plas Curig; adult/child £16/12.50) is very much a walkers' hang-out (with great views across to the Snowdon Horseshoe), but has limited access with its entrance up a very steep track. Snowdon Sherpa bus S2 runs close by – ask the driver to shout when approaching the junction with the A4086. Call ahead to check opening times off season.

The liveliest spot to head for after dark is **Bryn Tyrch** (% 720223; [www.bryntyrch-hotel.co.uk](http://www.bryntyrch-hotel.co.uk)), the most popular pub in the village. It has log fires in winter, bar meals, including lots of vegetarian and vegan options (mains around £9), and B&B in cosy rooms (singles/doubles £45/65).

### LLANBERIS

% 01286 / pop 2000

Llanberis is a magnet for walkers and climbers, with lots of rugged, fleece-wearing trekkers relishing hearty meals and pub post mortems of the day's activities. While not the most

## LOCAL VOICES

Nowhere in the UK can offer such diverse scenery as the Snowdonia National Park: majestic mountain tops (15 over 3000ft), 23 miles of stunning coastline, shimmering lakes, tranquil valleys dotted with ancient woodland, moorland and an abundance of wildlife can all be found within the park's 823 sq miles. The lure of the scenery is irresistible and each year the equivalent of 11 million day visits are made to the oldest and largest national park in Wales.

The park has the twin aims of conserving the landscape, while encouraging the public's enjoyment. With growing visitor numbers, reconciling these aims can be difficult.

The Snowdonia Society, a charitable organisation, has been passionately working to protect and enhance the park for some 40 years through a range of innovative and imaginative projects. Their Sustainable Energy and Tourism Project (SEAT) is all about working with visitors and tourism businesses to reduce the industry's impact on the park's fragile environment.

Visiting such a delicate environment will always have some negative impact – but we can all play a part to lessen this. Why not leave the car behind? Take the time to travel and enjoy the views on foot or bike, or make use of the Snowdon Sherpa buses and local trains. Or join volunteers to use traditional techniques and materials to restore footpaths and prevent erosion. Help the environment and local economy and reward yourself with the scrumptious fruit of this living landscape with a locally produced meal. At the end of your day take a shower instead of a bath – you'll save lots of water which looks much better in the rivers and lakes!

The society is working with local tourism businesses to encourage them to reduce, reuse and recycle the amount of resources they use and to use local products. When booking accommodation look out for environmental hallmarks such as the Green Dragon Accreditation or the Society's Green Snowdonia Tourism Award – you can then rest assured that you're playing your part in protecting this spectacular region.

*Dan James, Operations Director, The Snowdonia Society (www.snowdonia-society.org.uk)*

attractive town, it's a popular and busy base from which to explore Snowdonia, especially in July and August when room space is at a premium.

The town was originally built to house workers in the Dinorwig slate quarry, whose massive waste tips are hard to miss as you approach from the east – despite the fact the quarry shut down in 1969. While tourism is the cornerstone of Llanberis life these days, the town still wears its industrial heritage on its sleeve with pride. Indeed, Dinorwig, which once boasted the largest artificial cavern in the world, has now become part of Europe's biggest pumped-storage power station. Some of the old quarry workshops have been reincarnated as a museum of the slate industry, and the narrow-gauge railway that once hauled slate to the coast now tootles along Llyn Padarn.

## Orientation & Information

Llanberis straddles the A4086 with nearly all the points of interest spread out along the High St, which runs parallel to it. Across the A4086 are the village's two lakes, Llyn Padarn and Llyn Peris. The Snowdon Mountain Rail-

way has its base at the southern end of town while **car parking** (per hr 40p) is available at sites close to Electric Mountain (opposite). Buses stop along the High St at request stops.

The High St is the hub of the action with a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 870765; 41 High St; 11 9am-5pm Fri-Wed Apr-Oct, Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat Nov-Mar), a **post office** (11 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat) across the street and a series of banks.

To tap into the travellers' and walkers' network, **Pete's Eats** (☎ 870117; www.petes-eats.co.uk; 40 High St; 11 9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 9am-8pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) has a huge noticeboard, a book exchange, a map and guidebook room, and – when it's actually working – some computers for internet access (50p initial charge, then 5p per minute); see also above.

**Joe Brown** (☎ 870327; www.joebrownonline.co.uk; 11 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-5pm Sun), a climbing shop selling all things outdoors, has a notice board that includes gear for sale and accommodation, plus three-day forecasts and lots of information or advice for walkers.

**Swigoda Sebon** (54 High St; service wash £5.50; 11 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) has a service wash to clean post-walking kit.

## Sights

### SNOWDON MOUNTAIN RAILWAY

Opened in 1896, the **Snowdon Mountain Railway** (☎ 0870 4580033; www.snowdonrailway.co.uk; 11 9am-5pm Mar-Oct) is the UK's highest and only public rack-and-pinion railway. It will take you up to the summit of Snowdon (1085m) with the minimum of effort – the 5-mile journey takes an hour. Seven vintage steam and four modern diesel locomotives haul carriages up and down; departures are weather-dependent and summer queues can be long.

However, the railway is currently undergoing major construction work, and trains will only run to **Clogwyn station** (adult/child £11/7), at a height of 762m, throughout 2007 and into 2008. A new summit station, complete with a café and new attractions, is due to open in time for the summer season 2008.

### ELECTRIC MOUNTAIN

The Dinorwig pumped-storage power station is the largest scheme of its kind in Europe. Located deep below Elidir mountain, its construction required one million tonnes of concrete, 200,000 tonnes of cement and 4500 tonnes of steel. The power station uses surplus energy to pump water from Llyn Peris up to Marchlyn Reservoir. When half the population switches on their kettles for tea during a TV ad break, the water is released to fall through underground turbines. Dinorwig's reversible pump/turbines are capable of reaching maximum generation in less than 16 seconds.

**Electric Mountain** (☎ 870636; www.electricmountain.co.uk; 11 10.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sun Feb, Mar, Nov & Dec, daily Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Jun-Aug), the power station's visitor centre, has free interactive exhibits on the history of hydropower. An interesting **guided tour** (adult/child £7/3.50; every 30min Jun-Aug, by reservation otherwise) into the underground power station also starts from here; advance bookings are essential.

The centre is also home to Connections Café (p266) and **Techniquet** (www.techniquet.org; adult/child £3.20/2.20; 11 10.30am-4.30pm May-Nov), a child-friendly science museum with hands-on exhibits and an interactive science theatre show.

The centre is located where High St joins the A4086, about a third of a mile south of the tourist office.

### WELSH SLATE MUSEUM

The **Welsh Slate Museum** (☎ 870630; www.museum.wales.ac.uk/en/slate; admission free; 11 10am-5pm Apr-Oct,

10am-4pm Sun-Fri Nov-Apr), inside the Victorian workshops beside Llyn Pardarn, brings the local slate industry alive. It features a huge working water wheel, reconstructed workers' cottages (furnished as they would have been between 1860 and 1969 when the quarries closed), demonstrations on splitting slate into tiles and a 3D-presentation on working in a quarry.

The turn-off is located along the A4086 between the Electric Mountain exhibition centre and the Snowdon Mountain Railway station.

### RHEILFFORDD LLYN PADARN LLANBERIS LAKE RAILWAY

This little tourist **train** (☎ 870549; www.lake-railway.co.uk; adult/child £6/4; 11 4-10 services daily mid-Mar-Oct plus occasional special services; √) departs on a 5-mile return jaunt beside Llyn Padarn, part of the route (though not the same track) used from 1843 to 1961 to haul slate to port on the Menai Strait. It's a tame but scenic one-hour return trip through Padarn Country Park to the terminus at Penllyn, with scenic mountain views en route; there's a wheelchair-adapted carriage.

The terminus station is located across the A4086 towards Llyn Peris and opposite the Snowdon Railway station, with a second station by the Welsh Slate Museum.

## Activities

**Beacon Climbing Centre** (☎ 650045; Ceunant; www.beaconclimbing.com; 11 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-10pm Sat & Sun) is a large indoor climbing centre with over 100 climbs to learn and the chance to hone your skills; it's 5 miles west of Llanberis, off the A4086. There are also 90-minute taster sessions for one to three people for £45 per person.

**Boulder Adventures** (☎ 870556; www.boulderadventures.co.uk; Bryn Du Mountain Centre; half-/full-day courses £26/42) offers a range of activities, including kayaking, canoeing, climbing, abseiling and mountain walking, plus activities for small groups and families, in a spacious Victorian property. Communal hostel-style facilities are good with on-site B&B (dorm beds £14).

**Llanberis Lake Cruises** (☎ 671156; adult/child £5/3.50; 11 11am-5pm May-Oct) runs scenic 45-minute boat trips on Llyn Padarn aboard the *Snowdon Star*; the boat sails from the Padarn Country Park jetty near the Welsh Slate Museum car park.

## Sleeping

**Llanberis YHA** (☎ 0870 7705928; Llwyn Celyn; adult/child £14/10; 11 daily Easter-Oct, Fri & Sat Nov-Mar) Originally a

quarry manager's house, this hostel is a haven for walkers, hikers and outdoor pursuits with self-catering facilities and a drying room. It's half a mile southwest of town.

**Pen-y-Pass YHA** (☎ 0870 7705990; Nantgwynant; adult/child £14/10; 𠄎 daily Easter-Oct, Fri & Sat Nov-Mar) Superbly situated 5.5 miles up the A4086 atop Llanberis Pass, this hostel was once the haunt of Victorian climbers – George Mallory of Everest fame once stayed here on his early climbing trips to Wales. Given the prestigious history, it's now a natural base for climbers on the Snowdon pilgrimage, or for those exploring the surrounding mountains. Transport connections are provided by the Snowdon Sherpa service, with various services passing close by.

**Snowdon House** (☎ 870284; www.snowdonhouse.co.uk; 3 Gwastadnant; camping/dm £5/10, cottages per week up to £590) Three miles towards Pen-y-Pass at Nant Peris, this traveller hang-out makes up for its lack of welcome with its range of budget alternatives. The smarter cottage option accommodates up to nine people with central heating and a fitted kitchen.

**Jesse James' Bunkhouse** (☎ 870521; Penisa'r Waun; dm £10-30; 𠄎 ) Located about 3 miles out of Llanberis on the A4244 Bangor road, this budget hostel has been a popular walkers' base since 1966. The eponymous Jesse, a retired mountain guide, is full of useful advice and believes in a keep-it-simple ethos: bring a sleeping bag and food, everything else is provided.

**Alpine Lodge** (☎ 870294; www.alpinelodgehotel.co.uk; 1 High St; r per person £28-37.50; 𠄎 ) With lodge-style accommodation in an attractive setting, the Alpine has rooms with balconies and great views across the mountains. The décor is simple and modern, although the so-called 'luxury lodges' offer a few more home comforts.

#### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Pen-y-Gwyrd** (☎ 870211; www.pyg.co.uk; Nant Gwynant; s/d £35/45; bar meals 𠄎 noon-2pm & 7.30-9.30pm) For a unique place to sleep, this amazing old hotel gives a great sense of living history without sacrificing on comforts. The 1953 Everest team used the inn as a training base, and memorabilia from their stay – including their signatures on the ceiling of the dining room – lends the place the atmosphere of a private museum. You can even re-create the scene as guests gather round a large communal dining table for evening meals.

The rooms are very traditional with hefty wooden furniture, while the bathrooms feature free-standing baths with huge Victorian taps. The hotel is 5 miles southeast of Llanberis over the Llanberis Pass at the junction of the A498 and A4086. A little gem.

**Bron-y-Graig** (☎ 872073; www.bronygraig.co.uk; Capel Coch; r per person from £32) About 150m off High St (turn at the Spar supermarket), this picturesque Victorian guesthouse, with its own little garden, has three well-equipped rooms. The breakfast menu includes options for vegetarians and vegans.

**Dolafon** (☎ 870993; www.dolafon.com; High St; s £28, d £56-75; 𠄎 ) Set back from the road, this imposing 19th-century house offers a series of very traditional rooms, most of them with en suites. The hearty breakfast includes vegetarian options and, if you need a lie in after a long walk, continental breakfasts can be delivered to the room.

**Plas Coch** (☎ 872122; www.plas-coch.co.uk; High St; s/d £31/62; 𠄎 i WC ) With a warm welcome and a homely feel, this excellent upper-scale guesthouse is the most family-friendly in town. The owners have also adapted one ground-floor room for disabled and wheelchair access, plus installed wi-fi access. Prices include a huge and hearty breakfast, which draws on local and organic produce.

**Quality Hotel Snowdonia** (☎ 870253; www.hotels-snowdonia.com; s/d £70/110) Formerly known as the Royal Victoria Hotel, this property has undergone changes in management and decoration recently. It remains the top-end property in town and is set in a suitably stately, grand building, although the rooms do still feel rather old-fashioned. In-house facilities cater increasingly for the group and conference markets.

#### Eating & Drinking

**Connections Café** (☎ 873024; www.electricmountain.co.uk; 𠄎 10.30am-4.30pm Wed-Sun Feb, Mar, Nov & Dec, 10.30am-4.30pm daily Apr, May, Sep & Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Jun-Aug) A welcoming, child-friendly café for coffees, snacks and simple daily specials set within the Electric Mountain visitor centre (p265).

**Saffran** (☎ 871777; High St; 𠄎 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4.30pm Sun) An organic deli selling takeaway organic foodstuffs, including soups and sandwiches. The shop is also home to a giant noticeboard which helps visitors tap into the local network of organic producers.

**Pete's Eats** (☎ 870117; www.petes-eats.co.uk; 40 High St; meals £4-6; 𠄎 9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 9am-8pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar) This place is a local institution, a crowded (expect queues), bright café where hikers and climbers swap tips over monster portions in a hostel-like environment. Mostly it's big breakfasts (around £4) and meals with chips, but the extensive menu does offer the odd imaginative daily special, such as spinach and chick curry (£6). Huge portions, terrible service. The owners also offer basic bunkhouse accommodation (dorm beds £12).

**Peak Restaurant** (☎ 872777; High St; mains around £12; 𠄎 11.30am-4pm Thu & Fri, 7-9.30pm Wed-Fri, 6-9.30pm Sat, 4.30-8pm Sun) Looking smarter and fresher after expansion and refurbishment, this popular spot continues to serve the best dinners in town with hearty mains at dinner and snack-style lunches.

**YBistro** (☎ 871278; www.ybistro.co.uk; 45 High St; mains around £16; 𠄎 7-10.30pm) This inviting dinner-only restaurant has a good range of favourite Welsh dishes with a rustic-French twist, such as roasted Anglesey pheasant with bread sauce. It's one of the few places in town with a nod to fine dining; bookings are strongly advised.

Along High St there's a **Spar Supermarket** (𠄎 8am-8pm) for self caterers.

**Heights Hotel** (☎ 871179; 74 High St; www.heights-hotel.co.uk; bar meals 𠄎 noon-9pm) In the evenings, climbers and walkers head for the bar at the Heights Hotel, a pub with bar meals, music and – wait for it – its own climbing wall. The owners also offer basic B&B accommodation (singles/doubles £35/55).

#### Getting There & Away

KMP's bus 88 runs from Llanberis to Bangor (one hour, hourly, no Sunday service) via Caernarfon (25 minutes, eight services Sunday); bus 9 follows a similar route but runs from Bangor onto Llandudno (two hours, hourly, no Sunday service).

The Snowdon Sherpa bus S1 connects Llanberis with Pen-y-Pass, where you can connect with all the other Sherpa services.

## THE LLYN

Jutting out from the mountains of Snowdonia, the Llŷn Peninsula is a long, narrow, green-patchwork finger of land jutting into the sea, some 25 miles long and averaging 8 miles in width. The Llŷn and the Isle of Anglesey were the last places on the Roman and Norman itineraries, and both areas maintain a strong sense of a separate identity, although the Llŷn remains far more untouched compared to Anglesey today. Over the centuries the heaviest footfalls have been those of pilgrims on their way to holy Bardsey Island.

Criccieth is a sedate family resort, Abersoch a big water sports draw and Pwllheli, the biggest town, the main railway hub of the peninsula. The latter is also home to the only official tourist office on the peninsula. The land is peaceful and largely undeveloped, with 70 miles of wildlife-rich coastline (much of it in the hands of the National Trust, and almost 80% of it designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). It offers quiet walking and cycling, some excellent beaches and a handful of small fishing villages. Welsh is the language of everyday life. Indeed, as places go, this is about as Welsh as it gets.

#### CRICCIETH

☎ 01766 / pop 1800

This genteel slow-moving seaside town sits above a sweep of sand-and-stone beach and is about 5 miles west of Porthmadog. The town is topped off by a small high-up castle, is a good spot for brisk seafront walks and it also makes a low-key base for exploring the surrounding countryside.

#### Orientation & Information

The town's focal point is Y Maes, a wide square on the High St, the A497 Porthmadog-Pwllheli road. The seaside road running parallel to High St is Castle St. There's parking space on the opposite side of High St behind the Lion Hotel (p268) and the train station is about two blocks west down the A497.

There is no longer a tourist office, although **Roots** (☎ 523564; 46 High St; 𠄎 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), a Christian bookshop, now acts as the de-facto tourist office. It has OS maps and offers internet access (50p to connect, then 5p per min). You can also fill your water bottle for free here.

Along High St, you can find a HSBC bank with ATM, a small **Spar supermarket** (H 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun) and a **post office** (H 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Sat).

## Sights

**Criccieth Castle** (C 522227; adult/child £2.90/2.40; H 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, to 5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-4pm Fri-Sun Nov-Mar) is still considered Welsh – it was taken by force and enlarged by Edward I in 1283, but established between 1230 and 1240 by Llewelyn ap Iorwerth (Llewelyn the Great). Little remains of the castle, but it's in a fantastic position, with views stretching along the southern coast and across Tremadog Bay to Harlech. The castle's fate was sealed when, in 1404, the Welsh leader, Owain Glyndŵr, captured and burnt the castle. Today there is a small but informative exhibition centre at the ticket office.

## Festivals & Events

The week-long **Criccieth Festival** (C 522778) is an eclectic sampler of art, lectures, walks, drama, jazz and classical music in venues around the town in the second half of June each year.

## Sleeping

**Lion Hotel** (C 522460; www.lionhotelcriccieth.co.uk; Y Maes; s/d from £35/60) One block northwest of Y Maes, this large, 46-room hotel has views of the castle and sea, and is also a good mid-range option. Family friendly, it has bar meals (served from noon to 8.30pm daily), a beer garden for summer days and a penchant for hosting murder mystery weekends.

**Moelwyn** (C 522500; www.themoelwyn.co.uk; 27-29 Mona Tce; s/d £40/60) Two blocks southeast of Y Maes, this serene smart restaurant with rooms is a friendly spot. There are only six en-suite rooms, although sea views are a bonus. The owners serve a hearty dinner (from 6.30pm to 9.30pm) in a restaurant with Tiffany-coloured walls and cream tablecloths.

**Bron Eifion** (C 522385; www.broneifion.co.uk; s/d from £60/80) A country-house hotel with fabulously formal gardens, grand old Bron Eifion has been taken over by new management and refurbished with flat-screen TVs and less chintz to give it a fresher, cleaner look. Check out the chunky wooden furniture now gracing all the rooms – it was all imported from Brazil. The hotel is half a mile from Criccieth, off the A497 towards Pwllheli.

## Eating & Drinking

**Café Cust** (Y Maes; H 10am-6pm) For a snack on the go, this is a simple café for coffees and sandwiches.

**Poachers Restaurant** (C 522512; 66 High St; mains around £10; H noon-2pm Wed-Sun, 6-9pm daily) A popular local eatery, Poachers has a menu with an international flavour and a suitably pleasant setting. Try the good-value three-course dinner (£13.95).

**Prince of Wales** (C 522556; Y Maes; H ) The liveliest pub in town, with local ales and decent bar meals (served from noon to 9.30pm).

## Getting There & Away

Express Motors bus 1 runs from Blaenau Ffestiniog (40 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday) via Porthmadog (10 minutes). Arriva's bus 3 passes by en route from Porthmadog (13 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours Sunday), and from Pwllheli (25 minutes).

National Express coach 545 from Pwllheli stops by Y Maes daily at 7.45am en route to London (11 hours) via Birmingham (eight hours).

## AROUND CRICCIETH

The village of **Llanystumdwy** is the boyhood home and final resting place of David Lloyd George, one of Wales' finest ever political statesmen, and the British prime minister from 1916 to 1922 (see the boxed text, p36). There's a small **Lloyd George Museum** (C 522071; H 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Apr & May, Mon-Sat Jun, daily Jul-Sep, 11am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct), which gives an idea of the man and to some extent illustrates the tension between his nationality and position, through photos, posters and personal effects. Highgate, the house he grew up in, is 50m away, and his grave is about 150m away on the other side of the car park – the memorial is designed by Clough Williams-Ellis, the creator of Portmeirion (p252). There's a new interactive children's area for families inside the museum.

The turn-off to the village is to be found 1.5 miles west of Criccieth on the A497. The Porthmadog-Pwllheli bus (bus 3) stops here (half-hourly Monday to Saturday, every two hours on Sunday).

## PWLLHELHI

C 01758 / pop 4000

The largest town and transport hub of the peninsula, Pwllheli (pooth-*heh*-lee; mean-

ing 'salt-water pool') is 13 miles from Porthmadog and 8 miles from Criccieth. Despite its hub status, it's not a particularly attractive or well served town to overnight. It has narrow, cobbled streets and loads of pubs, but lacks the infrastructure for holidaymakers of other places on the peninsula. It's best to stop at the tourist office to stock up on information – then move on.

Pwllheli is a passionately Welsh town (it was here in 1925 that Plaid Cymru, the Welsh National Party, was founded, though the building is long gone) and Welsh is still widely spoken. As such, you'll get further here with Welsh street names than English ones – for example Stryd Fawr instead of High St, and Ffordd-y-Cob rather than Embankment Rd.

## Orientation & Information

The train station, bus stands and harbour are all within a block of one another just south of Y Maes, the main square. Pwllheli is the terminus of the Cambrian Coast railway from Machynlleth and the train station is two blocks south of High St, with the bus station tucked one block further west. A large **Co-op supermarket** (H 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) dominates the station area, with parking available in its extensive car park overlooking the railway line.

The **tourist office** (C 613000; Station Sq; H 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat Nov-Mar, 9am-5pm Apr-Oct), just east of the train station, has everything you'll need to know about the peninsula, including information on walks and a brochure detailing the walks around Llŷn Coastal Path. Free internet access is available at the **library** (C 612089; Stryd Penlan; H 10am-1pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon & Wed, 2-5pm Fri). There's a **post office** (H 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) opposite the Co-op and banks located along High St.

## Activities

Operators based in or around Pwllheli offer the following activities:

**Bardsey Ferry Service** (C 07814-128620; www.enllicharter.me.uk; adult/child £30/18) Has daily departures to Bardsey Island (depending on the weather) with departures from Pwllheli harbour at 8.45am.

**Judy B** (C 01691-650223) Arranges deep-sea fishing trips.

**Pathfinder Activities** (C 01766-810909; www.pathfindersnowdonia.co.uk; The Coach House, Pencaenewydd) Runs outdoors navigation courses, plus abseiling and canoeing.

## Sleeping

If you do find yourself stuck in town for the night, there are a few good options to choose from.

**Rhosydd** (C 612956; Golf Rd; s/d £20/30) This basic B&B, located three blocks southwest of Y Maes, is a friendly spot with very traditional fittings and furnishings.

**Crown Hotel** (C 612664; High St; s/d £40/60; i ) A smarter midrange option, this pub-hotel offers free wi-fi internet for laptop carriers. Make sure to ask for a room on one of the upper floors, however, to avoid the thump of the jukebox from the public bar and watch out for the noisy plumbing. There's a decent in-house restaurant with bar meals (from noon to 2.30pm and 6pm to 9.30pm).

## Eating

**Coffee Bean Emporium Graffi** (C 613143; High St; H 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat; C ) A useful spot for a caffeine fix and a pastry, with a huge range of fair-trade speciality coffees.

**Barn** (C 613800; Goal St; meals £6.95; H 10.30am-9pm) Simple but satisfying, this family restaurant has a big menu of traditional favourites, plus daily specials and a busy Sunday carvery with all the trimmings.

**Taro Deg** (C 701271; Lon Dywod; lunch/dinner mains £5/8; H 9am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-9pm Fri & Sat) Stylish yet nice and relaxed, this café-cum-bistro offers newspapers to browse and a thoughtful menu, featuring organic local produce. Coffees and pastries are served all day while it takes on a more intimate feel for dinner.

**Ship Inn** (C 740270; Llanbedrog; bar meals H noon-9pm) A popular, family-friendly pub about 3 miles out of Pwllheli off the A499, the Ship Inn is well worth the drive. Great, hearty bar meals with lots of daily specials make this place the stand-out for bar food in the area.

**Esi Café Bar** (C 701321; Station Sq; mains around £15; H 10am-2.30pm & 6pm-late Mon-Sat) This new stylish addition to the dining scene has a contemporary restaurant downstairs and a bar area upstairs, the latter open late for post-prandial snifters into the early hours.

**Pili Palas** (C 612248; 2-4 Goal St; mains around £15; H 10am-3.30pm & 6.30-9pm Tue-Sat) A welcome addition to the restaurant scene, this great little eatery has friendly service and upmarket but affordable fare. By day the menu has light bites, such as hot ciabatta, while the evening menu boasts traditional hearty mains. Bookings recommended.

**AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Plas Bodegroes** (% 612363; www.bodegroes.co.uk; s/d from £50/100; 1 Mar-Nov) This slick, highly professional restaurant with rooms is a rare treat in the area, boasting a Michelin star for its elegant, pistachio-coloured dining room. Set in a stately Georgian Manor House with flower-strewn and immaculately coiffeured gardens, it's a romantic spot for couples and welcoming to families seeking a special weekend break. The rooms are richly and stylishly decorated, with lots of wooden antique furniture, while the fine-dining restaurant specialises in using the best fresh local produce. The latter is also open to nonresidents, serving a four-course dinner (£40) and a Sunday lunch (£17).

The hotel is 2 miles from Pwllheli, heading west along the A497. Take the turn-off for the B4415 and then follow the long twisting drive to the property. Ask about promotional rates for midweek breaks (two nights, dinner, B&B) available from Tuesday to Friday.

**Entertainment**

**Neuadd Dwyfor** (% 704088; Stryd Penlan) Sharing a building with the library, it shows the latest films.

**Getting There & Away**

Trains come from Machynlleth via Porthmadog (single £10.40, 25 minutes, every two or three hours Monday to Saturday, one Sunday).

The main bus services to Pwllheli include Arriva's bus 3 from Porthmadog (40 minutes, half-hourly, six Sunday services) and Clynog A Trefor's bus 12 from Caernarfon (45 minutes, hourly, three Sunday services).

**AROUND PWLLHELI****Oriel Plas Glyn-y-ddw**

This **art gallery** (% 740763; Llandbedrog; www.oriel.org.uk; admission free; 11am-5pm Wed-Mon, daily Jul & Aug) is housed in a great Victorian Gothic mansion and set in green wooded grounds. The interior has exposed beams and stained glass, and shows changing exhibitions of Welsh artists that are always worth a look. There's also a nice little café and gift shop set in a conservatory area overlooking the grounds.

The gallery is 4 miles west of Pwllheli off the A497. You can also take bus 18 between Pwllheli and Abersoch (25 minutes, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday, four services Sunday) – ask to be let off at Llandbedrog. Nearby is the NT-owned Llandbedrog beach for a bracing blast of fresh air.

**ABERSOCH & AROUND**

% 01758 / pop 1000

Abersoch comes alive in summer with a 30,000-person influx from the sailing and surfing crowd. Packed in high season, it's a virtual ghost town in winter. Edged by gentle blue-green hills,

the town's main attraction is its beaches and waves and today it's the Llŷn's premier water sports centre. Surfers head for the Atlantic swell at **Porth Neigwl (Hell's Mouth)** and Porth Ceiriad, while sailors, windsurfers and boaters prefer the gentle waters of Abersoch Bay.

**Orientation & Information**

Most of the action is spread out along the main drag, Lon Pen Cei. Buses stop along this street, while **car parking** (per day £3.50) is available at the top end of town close to the strip of B&Bs.

There's a small and independently run **tourist office** (% 712929; www.abersochtouristinfo.co.uk; Lon Pen Cei; 10.30am-4.30pm daily in summer), which is friendly and helpful; it also offers internet access (£2.50 per 30 minutes). On the main street there's a **Londis convenience store** (11.30am-10pm), a **post office** (11.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-12.30pm Wed & Sat) and various banks.

**Activities**

**West Coast Surf Shop** (% 713067; www.westcoastsurf.co.uk; Main St; 11am-5pm) offers half-day surf lessons (£27.50, including equipment) year-round; the course is approved by the British Surfing Association (BSA).

**Offaxis** (% 713407; www.offaxis.co.uk; Lon Engan St; 11am-5pm Apr-Oct) is another outdoors-cum-surf shop, which specialises in wakeboarding classes (£30 per 15-minute session) and surfing lessons (£30 per half-day), with both prices including equipment. Surfboard and wakeboard rental starts at £10 per day.

**Abersoch Sailing School** (% 712963; www.abersochsailingschool.co.uk; Main Beach; 11am-end Oct) has sailing, power-boating and windsurfing classes with small-group tuition.

**Events**

The popular **jazz festival** (www.abersochjazzfestival.com) is held at various venues around town during the second weekend of June. **Wakestock** (www.wakestock.co.uk), Europe's largest wakeboard festival, features competitions and two nights of DJs and live music, and is held each year from mid- to the end of July.

**Sleeping**

**Sgubor Unnos, aka The Bunkhouse** (% 713527; www.tanrallt.com; dm adult/child £15/7) Located 1 mile from Abersoch, this no-frills place offers budget bunkhouse accommodation with two four-bed and one six-bed dorms, plus a communal kitchen and laundry. The owners also run **land hovercraft rides** (per 30min £50; 11 Apr-Sep).

**Tudor Court Hotel** (% 713354; www.tudorcourt.com; d £65.50; 11 Mar-Oct) A two-star midrange hotel, close to the car park at the top end of town, the Tudor Court has comfortable rooms with few frills.

**Riverside** (www.riversideabersoch.co.uk; s/d £68/110; 11 Mar-Oct) This place has undergone major renovations to give it a fresher, smarter look, although it's rather pricey for what you get. Family rooms are available.

At the time of writing there were plans to open a new five-star property just outside Abersoch, to be run by the owners of Plas Bodegroes (opposite). Check with the tourist office for more information.

**Eating & Drinking**

**Abersoch Café** (% 713433; High St; 11am-5pm) This is a cheap and cheerful coffee shop for snacks and drinks. Next door, **Abersoch Deli** (% 713456; 11am-5pm) is a great little spot for eat-in or take-away sandwiches.

**Fresh Bar & Grill** (% 710033; www.fresh-abersoch.co.uk; High St; 11am-6pm) The ultimate surfer's hang-out, this place has beanbags, a TV area and a regular clientele of surfer dudes. The food is of high quality, though the service is rather slow. Think wraps and fries at lunch (around £4) and more hearty dinners in the evening. Surf gear is optional.

**Angelina** (% 712353; High St; mains £8-14 11am-6pm) A traditional, well-established Italian place that specialises in fish mains and pasta, this is Abersoch's smartest option for dinner.

**Vaynol Arms** (% 712776) For a pint, head for the Vaynol Arms, which has real ales, simple bar snacks and wi-fi access.

**Shopping**

**Hideaway Bookstore** (% 711 0002; 4 High St; 11am-5.30pm) A book and craft shop with a nice range of children's books to offer some blessed relief from the relentless onslaught of surf shops.

**Getting There & Away**

Arriva's bus 18 runs to Abersoch from Pwllheli (25 minutes, roughly hourly Monday to Saturday, four services Sunday).

**ABERDARON & AROUND**

% 01758 / pop 1000

Aberdaron is an ends-of-the-earth kind of place on the northwestern tip of the Llŷn Peninsula with whitewashed, windswept houses contemplating Aberdaron Bay. This is where Welsh poet RS Thomas was the local minister from 1967 to 1978, and the desolate chapel, **St Hywyn's Church** (11am-5pm Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar), set above the pebble beach, seems an appropriate setting for his bleak, furious poetry (see the boxed text *Poet, Priest & Patriot*, p43). The church was restored in 2006 and today has lots of information about local history.

At the heart of the village, there's a tiny **village shop** (11am-8pm Mon-Sat, from 9am Sun) and a Spar supermarket with a **post office** (11am-9pm). **Car parking** (per 2hr £2) is available on open ground just before the bridge.

**Sights**

The little **Gwylan Islands** in the bay are North Wales' most important puffin-breeding site. At wind-blasted Braich-y-Pwll, the Llŷn's westernmost mainland point, the National Trust has a small information post in an old coast-guard hut, open most weekends from Easter to September, and there are amazing views to Bardsey Island (p272) than from here. Inland are strip fields that preserve many of the patterns of ancient land-use.

Just north of Aberdaron at Porthor are the **Whistling Sands**, a crescent-shaped beach whose sand squeals unnervingly when you walk on it. From here it's a 2-mile coastal walk west via the twin headlands of Dinas Bach and Dinas Fawr to the cove of Porth Orion.

On the heights near the hamlet of Rhiw, 5 miles east of Aberdaron, is **Plas-yn-Rhiw** (% 780219; adult/child house & garden £3.40/1.70, garden only £2.20/1.10; 11am-5pm Thu-Mon Apr-mid-May, Wed-Mon mid-May-Sep, Sat & Sun only Oct). A 17th-century Welsh manor house restored by three sisters in the 1930s and '40s, Plas-yn-Rhiw features



ornamental gardens that are a startling contrast to the surrounding moorland. The property is today managed by the National Trust.

### Activities

To follow in the footsteps of the pilgrims, **Edge of Wales Walk** (% 760652; www.edgeofwaleswalk.co.uk), a cooperative of local residents, will help to arrange a 47-mile, self-guided walking tour around the peninsula and Bardsey Island, based around a new extension to the Llŷn coastal path that opened in 2005.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Ty Newydd Hotel** (% 760207; s/d Oct-Mar £35/55, Apr-Sep £40/65) Right on the beach, this hotel is a friendly place with spacious rooms featuring exposed brickwork; the ones with sea views over the broad sweep of beach and sea are best.

**Ship Hotel** (% 760204; www.theshiphotelabardon.co.uk; d/f £68/75) A pub-hotel with a decent in-house restaurant (mains around £8), this place has comfortable rooms, some with sea views.

**Y Gegin Fawr** (The Big Kitchen; 11 9am-6pm) A little thick-walled café with tiny windows, next to Ty Newydd at the centre of the village. It was built around 1300 so the saints could claim a meal before heading over to Bardsey Island as part of their pilgrimage. Today it serves up basic coffees – and it's service very much without a smile. Ask the owners for the latest ferry information.

### Getting There & Away

Arriva bus 17 runs to Aberdaron from Pwllheli (40 minutes, every hour or two Monday to Saturday).

### BARDSEY ISLAND (YNYS ENLLI)

This mysterious island, 2 miles long and 2 miles off the tip of the Llŷn, is a magical place, its otherworldliness emphasised by its ancient name: the Isle of 20,000 Saints. In the 6th or 7th century the obscure St Cadfan founded a monastery here, giving shelter to Celts fleeing the Saxon invaders. Medieval pilgrims followed in their wake and, at a time when journeys from Britain to Italy were long, perilous and beyond the means of most people, the Pope decreed that three pilgrimages to Bardsey would have the same value as one to Rome. A Celtic cross amidst the Abbey ruins commemorates the 20,000 pilgrims who came here to die – the 20,000 saints that give the island its ancient name.

To add to its mythical status, it is one of many candidates for the Isle of Avalon, where King Arthur is alleged to have been taken after the Battle of Camlann. Other legends say the wizard Merlin is asleep in a glass castle on the island.

The island's Welsh name means 'Isle of the Currents', a reference to the treacherous tidal surges in Bardsey Sound, which doubtless convinced medieval visitors that their lives were indeed in God's hands.

Most modern pilgrims to Bardsey are seabird-watchers (the island is home to an important colony of Manx shearwaters), although there are also some 6th-century **carved stones** and the remains of a 13th-century **abbey tower**.

The **Bardsey Island Trust** (% 0845 8112233; www.enlli.org; boat trips adult/child £25/15), which looks after the island, organises boat trips from Porth Meudwy, the closest harbour to the island. There are up to three daily departures at 10am, 11am and noon, according to tidal conditions. The boat trip takes 30 minutes, and the fare includes 3½ hours on the island. Book tickets through the **Bardsey Ferry Service** (% 128620).

### NEFYN

% 01758 / pop 800

The north coast of the Llŷn feels supremely remote with a handful of small villages and a few quiet sweeping beaches. The village of Nefyn is a sleepy spot with a tiny post office and a Spar supermarket.

St Beuno was to North Wales what St David was to the south of the country, and there's a tiny church dedicated to him – one of the peninsula's many stopovers for medieval pilgrims – at the hamlet of Pistyll, 2 miles east of Nefyn (another St Beuno church is further up the coast at Clynng Fawr). A few miles on from Pistyll are the 100m sea cliffs of **Carreg y Llam**, a major North Wales sea-bird site, with huge colonies of razorbills, guillemots and kittiwakes.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Caeau Capel Hotel** (% 720240; www.caeaucapelhotel.com; Rhodfa'r Môr; s/d £40/75) Former Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, often used to stay here when it was a family house. Today it's a characterful but slightly faded, old-fashioned place located towards the beach and signposted from the village's main street. Ask about off-season promotional rates.

**Nanhoron Arms** (% 720203; Ffordd Dewi Sant; s/d/f £42/72/85) Large and modern with a rather chain-

### LOCAL VOICES

The village of Nant Gwrtheyrn as you see it today was formed when companies began excavating granite from the surrounding mountains during the 19th century. In 1861, Port Nant quarry was opened by the Kneeshaw and Lupton company from Liverpool. The granite, which was used for road building, was carried straight from the quarry by ships sailing to Liverpool, Manchester, Birkenhead and some the world over.

In 1878 Nant Gwrtheyrn village was built to house the quarry workers, but the quarries closed after the Second World War and slowly the villagers left, leaving empty buildings behind which soon became derelict.

The first Welsh Language Act was passed in 1967. This meant that Welsh now had to be given a status equal to that of English when it came to providing public services. This resulted in more and more adults learning Welsh as a second language because of the need for bilingual workers in the public sector.

In July 1978, the Nant Gwrtheyrn Trust, set up by the local doctor, Dr Carl Clowes, succeeded in buying the derelict village from Amey Roadstone Company, the then owners, for the sum of £25,000, with the aim of turning it into a residential centre for learning the Welsh language. Because the village had been empty for so long (with a lack of electricity, running water and sewerage), there was a tremendous amount of work to be done to re-build the village.

The years that followed saw individuals and societies the length and breadth of Wales raising hundreds of thousands of pounds to enable the restoration work. Since the first course was held in 1982, thousands have flocked to Nant Gwrtheyrn Welsh Language & Heritage Centre to learn one of Europe's oldest living languages.

*Eleri Williams, Marketing Manager, Welsh Language & Heritage Centre*

hotel feel, the Nanhoron Arms has a good raft of services, including a decent in-house restaurant. The latter is particularly popular for its Sunday carvery (three courses £11.50).

### MORFA NEFYN

% 01758

Tiny Morfa Nefyn is based around the NT-run **car park** (£3, free to NT members), where there's a small information kiosk giving weather advice. This is the trailhead for walks and access to the nearby golf course. It's a more attractive base than Nefyn, with a wild feel and a couple of good options for sleeping and eating.

For food, try **Cliffs Inn** (% 720356; bar meals 11 noon-9pm), a decent lunch spot with great panoramic views from the conservatory eating area and generous Sunday roasts. The owners also offer self-catering accommodation (weekly rates from £295 per week according to the number of people) in three studios close to the hotel.

It's hard to believe that the little crescent of sand at **Porth Dinllaen** – now owned in its entirety by the National Trust – was once a busy cargo, shipbuilding and herring port, the only safe haven on the peninsula's north coast. Indeed, it was eyed up by slate magnate William Madocks as a possible home for ferries to Ireland, but in

1839 the House of Commons gave that job to Holyhead. Today, the beach is known for gloriously bracing beach strolls. The most agreeable way to get here is on foot along the beach and via part of the golf course – it's a 1-mile walk west from Morfa Nefyn's car park.

Reward yourself upon arrival with a drink at **Ty Coch Inn** (% 720498; % lunch noon-2.30pm), a tremendously photogenic pub with a dramatic beach-side location. The pub has been used as a film set (see p303) and today is popular with walkers and families for its daily specials, such as Bay Crab (£8).

### AROUND MORFA NEFYN

% 01758

Heading away from Porth Dinllaen, a good place to overnight is **Llys Olwen** (% 720493; www.llysolwen.co.uk; s/d £26/52), an impressive former Victorian sea captain's residence. The rooms are large and have big windows that overlook fields and gardens, but none have en suites – they just have washbasins. What makes the place stand out is that the friendly owner prepares all her own bread and yoghurt and serves great home-cooked meals every evening. Dinner is also open to non-residents, with three freshly cooked courses from £19.

For a lunchtime bar meal, try **Y Bryncynan** (% 720879; bar meals 11 noon-9pm), a great place with a traditional but not overdone feel, real ales and huge portions of tasty bar meals, including vegetarian and children's options.

From Morfa Nefyn, the B4417 leads onto the village of **Llithfaen** (it's signposted Welsh Language & Heritage Centre), the access point to the former 'ghost village' of Nant Gwrtheyrn.

**Nant Gwrtheyrn** was brought back from the dead when it was bought and restored as the home of the **Welsh Language & Heritage Centre** (% 750334; www.nantgwrtheyrn.org; heritage centre 11 11am-4pm daily Jun-Aug, Mon-Fri Sep-May). The centre is reached from the village of Llithfaen by following a path down a steep valley. According to tradition it is here that the semi-mythical Celtic King Vortigern is buried. You

can also drive down – but take it very slowly and be extremely careful.

The heritage centre has a small but very compelling exhibition on the history of the Welsh language, while the centre offers a range of residential courses (prices from £245 for three days full-board) to study Welsh language and literature, including B&B accommodation at homely little grey-stone cottages on the site. During August, it offers half-day taster courses (adult/child/family £4/2/10) to get a basic grasp of a few key phrases. Even if you don't take a course, it's a magical place – eerily quiet but tranquil and ideal for a walk along the cliffs with an end-of-the-world feel.

**Caffi Meinir** (% 750442; 11 10.30am-4.30pm) has light meals and coffees served daily during summer and during courses at other times.