

GOURMET *guide to* WALES

Not only is 2022 the 10-year celebration of the Wales Coast Path, but the country will host the World Cheese Awards in November. Prompted by one Welsh restaurant being voted the best in the UK, Karyn Noble is just back from a gastronomic tour with highlights for your next road trip



WORDS | KARYN NOBLE

It's a head-scratching matter that fewer international visitors head to Wales than to other British nations, but 2022 is certainly the country's time to shine on the epicurean stage. The Wales Coast Path (launched in 2012) may be the first in the world dedicated to an entire country's coastline, and it's here you'll find an abundance of incredible seafood to match the views. There's also a dynamic dairy industry, further amplified when Wales hosts the World Cheese Awards in November 2022. And this year, for the first time, a Welsh restaurant won the National Restaurant Awards, so it's definitely time to pack your bags and your appetites to see why its food scene is so super-charged right now.

Whether you have a penchant for unique restaurants with rooms, a little poetic history with your puddings, clifftop dining and imbibing from Britain's only coastal national park, or quietly impressive lakeside retreats, Wales will surprise and enthrall you in equal measures. For too long it has hidden in the shadows of its more popular neighbours. But now we're outing its most impressive dining destinations, along with tips for where to stay, and don't-miss highlights while enjoying your food-travel experience with *Dream Escape*.

Ynyshir

The first Welsh restaurant deemed the UK's best at the National Restaurant Awards (2022), the two-Michelin-starred Ynyshir in the Dyfi Valley is much more than a dining destination. It's a '90s-electronic-music-soundtracked extravaganza in a house that was once Queen Victoria's. Expect a 5.5-hour feast of 30 indulgent courses from chef Gareth Ward, including local crab and lobster and Japanese Wagyu beef cooked on open fire.

Where you can stay: There are three fully-furnished luxury tipis at Ynyshir, as well as eight hotel bedrooms (six in the main house and two with garden access).

Dinner packages are great value.

Dream Escape Highlight: In-the-know locals love the homemade Welsh minted lamb pies at Tynycornel Hotel on Tal-y-Llyn, an exquisitely peaceful lakeside spot, 30 minutes' drive north. It also has rooms, if Ynshir is fully booked.

The Walnut Tree Inn

Near the English border, two miles east of Abergavenny, is Michelin-starred The Walnut Tree, with chef Shaun Hill overseeing operations since 2008. With more than 50 years' experience as a chef, as a chef, his creations are seemingly simple yet with a sophisticated understanding of flavour, enjoyed in an artwork-filled dining room that has an extremely loyal following for its local produce and relaxed ambience.

Where you can stay: The Walnut Tree has two extraordinary self-catering cottages that are a pretty garden stroll from its restaurant, where you can soak in a clawfoot bath and watch the cows in a meadow next door.

Dream Escape Highlight: The Abergavenny Food Festival, one of the highest-profile food events in Britain, occurs each September, and is held across six different venues, including Abergavenny Castle.

Henry Robertson Dining Room, Palé Hall

Awarded Wales' first Green Michelin star in 2021, the Henry Robertson Dining Room combines sustainability with sublime surroundings in the five-star Palé Hall country house located on the edge of Snowdonia. Choose from five- or eight-course menus celebrating Welsh seasonality with Japanese and Middle-Eastern influences from head chef Gareth Stevenson.

Where you can stay: Palé Hall or Portmeirion (below) have luxurious accommodation, where no attention to detail or extravagance is overlooked.

Dream Escape Highlight: Portmeirion – 50 minutes' drive west of Palé Hall in Gwynedd, North Wales – is beyond magical: a 130-acre, pastel-coloured Italianate fairy land, with a 2 AA rosette fine-dining restaurant.

St Davids Gin & Kitchen

In Britain's smallest city of St Davids you'll find this ode to sustainability and ethical eating, a lively restaurant in a vibrant-blue building run by a family of farmers who champion local Pembrokeshire produce. Along with →



‘...creations are... enjoyed in an artwork-filled dining room that has an extremely loyal following for its local produce and relaxed ambience.’





Pictured first page:
Venison served at
Blas Restaurant
Previous page:
Chris Fynes
Crab at Ynyshir;
TheWalnut Tree
Inn interior
This page: Blas
Restaurant
interior; Dessert
with a view at
Cliff Restaurant,
St Brides Spa Hotel

Solva lobster and local oysters, you must try their gin, with botanicals foraged from the peninsula.

Where you can stay: Twr Y Felin (a 9-minute walk from St Davids Gin & Kitchen) is Wales' first contemporary art hotel, and has a highly acclaimed restaurant, Blas (below)

Dream Escape Highlight: Blas Restaurant, dark and moody, holds 3AA Rosettes and has a flair for capturing both flavour and 'art on a plate.'

Cliff Restaurant, St Brides Spa Hotel

Enjoy dramatic panoramic views across Saundersfoot Bay with pan-fried local cod with shellfish bisque and mussels, or



‘Enjoy dramatic panoramic views across Saundersfoot Bay with pan-fried local cod with shellfish bisque and mussels, or perhaps some Welsh laverbread with your poached eggs and mushrooms at breakfast.’

perhaps some Welsh laverbread (seaweed) with your poached eggs and mushrooms at breakfast.

Where you can stay: Brown's Hotel in Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, frequented by its most famous resident, poet Dylan Thomas, has 14 boutique rooms (some with double roll-top baths), and a self-contained Dylan's Den (for seven guests).

Dream Escape Highlight: For some poetic history take a short stroll from Brown's to Dylan Thomas Boathouse, and take some time to visit Tenby, a picturesque paradise of pastel houses, 13th-century stone walls and classic seaside resort tranquillity and grandeur.

Asador 44

Food critic Tom Parker-Bowles declared it could be his favourite restaurant of 2020, and Asador 44 lives up to the hype; you could easily find yourself believing you're dining in Northern Spain rather than Wales' capital Cardiff, with the restaurant's huge Parilla grill and cuts of

ex-dairy Asturias beef displayed in glass-fronted fridges. It also has one of the UK's finest Spanish red wine lists, and there are further excellent Spanish drinking experiences to be had at its sister Bar 44 around the corner, especially if you are a sherry connoisseur.

Where you can stay: Open since June 2022, Parador 44 (upstairs from Asador 44) is Cardiff's first food-focused luxury hotel, with nine boutique rooms and the González Byass guest lounge and pantry that's abundant with Spanish treats (not to mention complementary PX-Sherry-soaked Welsh cakes), which can be enjoyed on the terrace. Or for five-star luxury right on Cardiff Bay, and floor-to-ceiling water views, voco St David's Cardiff has a peaceful perspective.

Dream Escape Highlight: A warm Welsh cake fresh from the traditional cast-iron griddle at Fabulous Welshcakes is a perfect snack before (and after!) exploring Cardiff Castle. 🍪

Find out more



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Michael Davies, Travel Design Manager

“The classic image of the Welsh culinary repertoire is roast lamb (from mountains or salt marshes) served with Pembrokeshire potatoes and leeks covered in sauce made from local Caerphilly cheese. But the chefs who have made Wales their home have discovered a wider range of delicacies: wild salmon from the rivers of the southwest, ham from Carmarthen, mussels from Conwy, and native plums from the northeast. Recently I was asked to find a Snowdon Pudding, a variation on the traditional British steamed dessert with a zingy lemon flavour. But as no one seems to have made this commercially to date, I bought Welsh Cakes instead; full of juicy raisins, these are wonderful served warm with stewed apple and Cadwaladers delicious ice cream!”

◆
michael@dreamescape.co.uk