

Your Gourmet Guide to Wales

With Wales hosting the World Cheese Awards in November and one of its Welsh restaurants being voted the best in the UK, this is the country's time to shine on the epicurean stage. Intrigued, Karyn Noble enjoys a gastronomic tour. Here are some of her highlights...

In Wales you will find an abundance of incredible seafood to match the views. 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 Wales 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 tour.

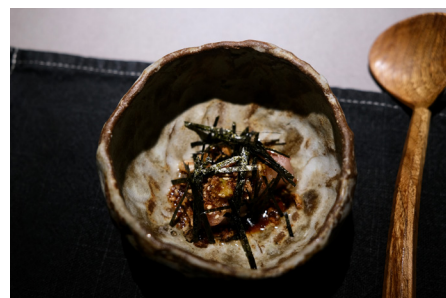
Ynyshir

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. → ynyshir.co.uk



Where to Stay: There are three fully-furnished luxury tipis at Ynyshir, as well as eight hotel bedrooms.

Don't Miss: 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.



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. → asador44.co.uk

Where to 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 complimentary 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 Davids Cardiff has a peaceful perspective.

Don't Miss: A warm Welsh cake fresh from the traditional cast-iron griddle at Fabulous Welshcakes is a perfect snack before (and after!) exploring Cardiff Castle.



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. His 50+ year career as a chef is obvious and 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 → thewalnuttreeinn.com

Where to Stay: The Walnut Tree has two extraordinary self-catering cottages (part of the Caradog Cottage collection) 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.

Don't Miss: One of the highest-profile food events in Britain, The Abergavenny Food Festival, occurs each September, and is held across six different venues, including Abergavenny Castle. →

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

→ stdavidskitchen.co.uk

Where to 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)

Don't Miss: Blas Restaurant, dark and moody, holds 3AA Rosettes and 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 perhaps some Welsh laverbread (seaweed) with your poached eggs and mushrooms at breakfast. → stbridesspahotel.com



Where to Stay: St Brides Spa Hotel has unbeatable views from its 34-degree heated infinity pool, or for some poetic history, Browns Hotel in Laugharne, Carmarthenshire, frequented by Dylan Thomas, has 14 boutique rooms (some with double roll-top baths), and a self-contained Dylan's Den (for seven guests).

Don't Miss: Tenby is a picturesque paradise of pastel houses, 13th-century stone walls and classic seaside resort tranquillity and grandeur.



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. → palehall.co.uk

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

Don't Miss: Portmeirion – 50 minutes' drive east 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.



Take a bite at one of Wales' foodie events

The Big Cheese

It's hard to resist a festival called The Big Cheese, which makes its comeback in 2023, or for those who can't wait there's a smaller festival taking place this September, called the Little Cheese. Expect huge food halls to explore, street food areas, cookery demos, music events and all the medieval activities and hijinks that a setting in the town of Caerphilly demands. (Little Cheese, 3-4 September 2022, The Big Cheese, 2-3 September 2023)

The Conwy Honey Fair

The Conwy Honey Fair is said to be one of Britain's oldest food festivals, dating back over 700 years. The Royal Charter of Edward 1st dictates that it must happen on the same date every year – 13th September – unless that date falls on a Sunday, in which case, it moves to the Monday after. At the fair, you can expect to see honey, honey-related products, beekeeping stalls, preserves, sweet treats and other produce and crafts.

Narberth Food Festival

With food stalls, cookery demonstrations, music, street theatre and activities, this is the perfect Pembrokeshire day out. (24-25 September)

→ For more information, see Visit Wales: visitwales.com/food