

Quality Wales.



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Special adventure issue

2016 is Wales' Year of Adventure. In this special issue of Quality Wales, we explore how tourism businesses of every type and size can gear up to help their visitors step outside their everyday lives – and try something truly different.

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“**Year of Adventure 2016 is a celebration of all the amazing things that are happening in Wales.**

Adventure isn't about ticking a box to say you have done this or that. It's about taking people on a journey.

”

Andy Middleton, TYF Group



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Cover image—Festival No 6, Portmeirion



“
Wales is where the
adventure starts in 2016.
”

Bear Grylls, survival expert

A sense of adventure. Wales' Year of Adventure in 2016 promises spine-tingling activities and world-class attractions. But it's not all adrenalin with a capital A.

Adventurer, former British Special Forces soldier and the youngest ever Chief Scout, Bear Grylls is the definitive action man. So when he declares "Wales is where the adventure starts in 2016", you'd better believe it.

"Spending time doing something different and challenging yourself can really show people what they are made of," says Bear. "I've had amazing experiences in Wales with my Survival Academy; the beautiful, rugged and wild terrain of Wales lends itself so well to so many activities and adventures."

That's why he's delighted to be an ambassador for Wales' Year of Adventure in 2016, joining rugby legend turned outdoor adventurer Richard Parks and extreme sports enthusiasts Lowri Morgan, Tori James and Maria Leijerstam. This unprecedented campaign to promote Wales as the world's capital of adventure tourism marks the start of three themed years with Year of Legends in 2017 and Year of the Sea in 2018. They're designed to motivate the people of Wales, galvanise the tourism industry and inspire target markets to think differently – and visit Wales now.

The time is right for Year of Adventure. Wales is now home to iconic destinations such as Zip World, Bounce Below, Cardiff

International White Water and Surf Snowdonia, which has vowed to come back bigger and better than ever in 2016. Its mountain biking is world-class. The 870 miles of the Wales Coast Path is the longest continuous path along a nation's coastline.

Adventure tourism already accounts for one tenth of all tourism in Wales, according to Paul Donovan of the Wales Adventure Tourism Association (WATO). It's worth £481 million a year to the economy – and it's still growing. Thanks to a new accreditation approach developed by WATO and Visit Wales, visitors can select adventure companies based on their ability to deliver safe and effective industry practice. Hundreds of inspirational providers have signed up on the Visit Wales website.

"Year of Adventure is about people stepping outside their comfort zones and entering the adventure zone," says Paul. This doesn't have to mean testing the limits of physical endurance. Watch the sun rise on your favourite mountain, ride a horse on a beach, sleep under the stars: it's all happening under the hashtags #WalesAdventure and #FindYourEpic.

During a packed calendar of events in 2016 children will be invited to take over

and sleep in castles, museums and abbeys, treasure-hunters will take a geo-cache challenge along the Wales Coast Path and families will go stargazing. There will be a Great Weekend of Adventure on 2/3 April, a Big Summer Scrapbook Challenge in July, Roald Dahl's City of the Unexpected in Cardiff on 17/18 September (see page 32 for more details) and a Big Welsh Food Adventure in October.

Because the Year of Adventure isn't just for adrenalin junkies. It's for everyone. It's about creating a seamless experience where physical activity, culture, heritage and nature together create a distinctively Welsh sense of place.

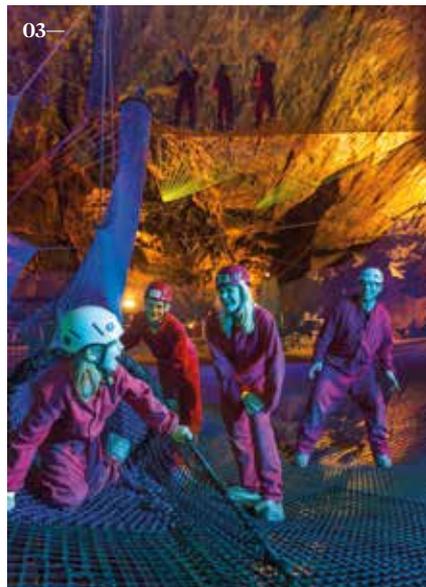
"We have to look at what adventure means – it's different for everybody," says Phil Scott of Anglesey adventure boat tour company RibRide. "We don't use the words 'adrenalin' or 'thrill', it's not about that. We take people on exciting days that include history, geology and wildlife. It's a rounded cultural experience."

All this means that Welsh tourism businesses of every type are getting behind the Year of Adventure, from pubs and restaurants to attractions and accommodation providers. They're all finding their own particular spin.

Even ice cream can be surprisingly adventurous. Don't ask Tony Green, graduate of the famous Carpigiani "gelato" university in Italy, for vanilla. Customers at his Red Boat ice cream parlour in Beaumaris are taken on a taste journey through flavours such as bara brith, lavender and summer fruits, gin and tonic (with real Gordon's gin) and strawberry, mascarpone and balsamic vinegar.

"You don't have to hang off a mountain or swim with sharks," says Tony. "It's also about trying something new and quirky, so we're working on ice cream flavours that capture the ideas of Year of Adventure.

"All of us in the Welsh tourism industry are the salespeople for this campaign – we need to make our customers aware of Year of Adventure and why we're excited about it. If you have the imagination and the determination, you can really make this work for you."



Find out more...

[@visitwalesbiz](https://twitter.com/visitwalesbiz)

Sign up for our tourism industry newsletter gov.wales/tourism

yearofadventure@wales.gsi.gov.uk

01—Wales Coast Path, Pembrokeshire

02—Surf Snowdonia

03—Bounce Below, Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog

04—Coasteering, Anglesey

05—Rock Climbing, Anglesey

06—Rhyl

07—Dark skies, Brecon Beacons

How to get involved.

Here are 10 top tips to make Year of Adventure work for your business.

Seize the day, be innovative

If you're thinking about adding an adventurous new experience or product to your offering, now is the time.

Spread the word

Contact customers on your mailing list to let them know 2016 is our Year of Adventure. Share the calendar of events. Run adventure-themed marketing campaigns and promotions.

Get the knowledge

Start collecting information on adventure providers and activities in your area. Educate and enthuse your staff.

Share the knowledge

Feature sample adventures and activities on your website. Create itineraries for guests and keep plenty of local information on hand.

Work together

Collaborate with other local businesses to give your guests the best possible joined-up experiences. Cross-promote, arrange special discounted rates and last-minute booking opportunities with activity providers.

Be accommodating

Provide storage and cleaning facilities for muddy boots and adventure gear. Print out a daily weather report for guests planning their outdoor activities.

Give your guests a sense of adventure

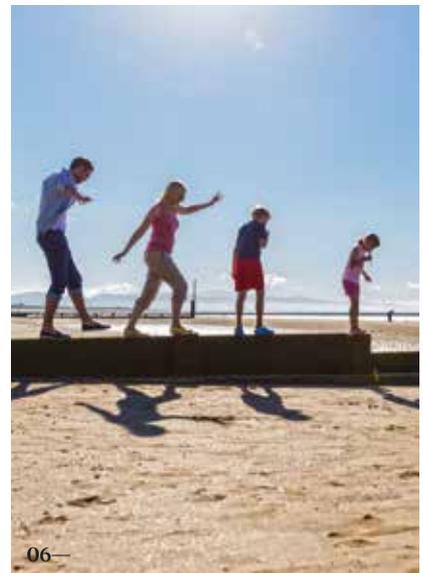
Pin up a giant map of the best walking routes in your area, supply wellies, introduce an adventure-breakfast.

Create magical micro-adventures for the kids

Install a big welcome adventure box filled with crabbing nets, Poohsticks or kites, stock a Roald Dahl-inspired bookshelf. Think about installing dens and rope swings.

Be social

Upload adventure content to your digital platforms and share it with Visit Wales. Use the hashtags #WalesAdventure and #FindYourEpic. Encourage your visitors to follow the Visit Wales consumer feeds on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Inside Track: TYF Group

For three decades the TYF Group have been delivering “life-changing adventures with a light touch on nature” from their base in St David’s. The Year of Adventure is both a celebration and an opportunity, says founding director Andy Middleton.

“It’s a celebration of all the amazing things that are happening in Wales, in the mountains, uplands, rivers, lakes and on the coast. It’s also a huge celebration for us of the 30 years we have been taking people out coasteering, sea kayaking and exploring around the coastline. It’s been an amazing journey.

“Year of Adventure is an opportunity to rethink our relationship with nature and the outdoors. Adventure isn’t about ticking a box to say you have done this or that. It’s about taking people on a journey that starts in the very first weeks of life through to their very last, recognising that time outdoors in nature improves the quality of life for everyone – no matter what their age or physical ability.

“People should be having their first adventures when they are nine weeks not nine years old. You should be going on your first five-mile walk around hills with your parents strapped into a papoose, not when you’re old enough to do it by yourself. You should be learning how to make fires and cook in the outdoors, how to forage and how to play in different ways.

“It’s great that Visit Wales is working with the activity sector across Wales to create some really special events. We’re all super-passionate about getting more people out adventuring in Wales. This is a fabulous opportunity to use the support of Visit Wales to get the message out to the widest possible audience.”

Find out more... tyf.com

01—TYF Group is 30 this year
02—Coasteering with TYF Group
03—TYF Group

01—



02—



03—



Time to think big. The Tourism Advisory Board has the ear of the Welsh Government and the backing of the industry. Its job is to make a real difference, says newly appointed Chair Margaret Llewellyn.



Margaret Llewellyn OBE describes herself, with some understatement, as a doer. This former Managing Director of Dragon Shipping Line somehow finds the time to be Chair of Cruise Wales and Non-Executive Director of Finance Wales, Ports of Jersey and Cardiff International Airport among other major organisations.

More than enough, you might have thought, to keep anyone occupied – even someone once voted Welsh Woman of the Year for Management Achievement. But as of 1 November 2015, Margaret has accepted a fresh challenge as Chair of the Welsh Government's Tourism Advisory Board, taking over the helm from Dan Clayton Jones for a three-year term after serving as a board member since 2011.

Largely made up of business people with a track record in the industry, the board is there to ensure government policies reflect the views of the people who really matter – the tourism operators. Those at the sharp end make themselves heard through the Destination Management Partnerships and Regional Fora that feed into the board.

In her new role Margaret is working closely with Ministers – as well as representing Wales on the main board of VisitBritain.

The Tourism Advisory Board is not a talking shop. It makes things happen. The aim is to deliver on the tourism strategy for Wales and by 2020 to grow an industry already worth £5 billion a year by 10%.

Businesses have to be ambitious and work together, according to Margaret Llewellyn. The Year of Adventure 2016, with other themed years to follow, is a prize example of how Wales can forge a reputation as a world-class destination.

"It's about innovation and making us stand out from the rest," she says. "People need the vision and aspiration to be better than everybody else. With mentoring, workshops and industry events we can help companies improve the little things that can change their entire product."

She singles out Cruise Wales' scheme to train German-speaking ambassadors for the Welsh cruise market as a "simple but wonderfully effective" idea. The proof of the pudding? Every single German cruise operator will come to Wales in 2016. "I want us to make a difference," says Margaret. "Otherwise there is no point."



Dr. Beynon's
Bug Farm

A bug's life. At Dr Beynon's Bug Farm, you don't just get to meet the insects – you can find out what they taste like. It's just one of a range of new attractions that are ready to thrill visitors during the Year of Adventure.

Dr Sarah Beynon loves bugs. Ever since childhood she's been fascinated by all things invertebrate with a particular passion for the humble dung beetle. Now she's one of Britain's foremost entomologists, or bug experts, often to be found on television gleefully poking about in unusual places for signs of tiny life.

She might be an insect cheerleader but she doesn't mind eating a few every now and again. In fact she thinks we should all join the two billion people worldwide who consume bugs on a regular basis.

The main reason is that it might just help to save the planet. Population growth means we need to find alternative sources of protein to meat from farm animals. The other reason is that they taste great.

No, really. Banish all thoughts of bush tucker trials involving something horrible that's still wriggling. At the Grub Kitchen restaurant in Pembrokeshire that Sarah launched in late 2015 with chef and founder Andy Holcroft all the possibilities of bug cuisine are being explored to delicious effect.

These are gourmet insects, cordon bleu creepy crawlies – transformed into dishes such as the signature bug burgers, or bug blinis with wild garlic humus and toasted cumin mealworms. With cricket crêpes and bamboo worm fudge ice cream to follow.

It could be the most adventurous meal you ever have. Their food certainly impressed celebrity chef Michel Roux Jnr, who pronounced cookies made largely from ground-up crickets to be "really nice with a meaty taste".

But this is much more than the UK's first restaurant with insects on the menu full-time (they offer more conventional food too, you may be relieved to know). It's just one part of a world-class visitor attraction, academic centre of excellence and 100-acre working farm known collectively as Dr Beynon's Bug Farm.

With financial backing from the Welsh Government's Tourism Investment Support Scheme, Pembrokeshire National Park's Sustainable Development Fund and social entrepreneur charity UnLtd, Sarah has transformed her old family farm at St David's with the aim of bringing alive a hidden world. It's a place where she and her students can deliver ground-breaking research on the importance of bugs and the future of sustainable agriculture.

She's also wowing visitors with some of the biggest and most colourful invertebrates known to man in a walk-through tropical bug zoo. There's also a bug museum, bug art gallery, indoor play barn, gift shop, bug farm trail and walled garden specially planted for invertebrates. Kids and adults

alike can get properly hands-on with bug handling, pond dipping, bug hunts and a programme of workshops, lectures and events. It's all about communicating Sarah's own boundless enthusiasm for these often misunderstood but crucial creatures.

"I get fired up by small things that people would normally step on," she says. "Everybody should learn to love insects. I'm particularly fascinated by dung beetles, which are not hard to find – X always marks the spot. Unfortunately that X is a cow pat. But they play a vital role in farmland ecology.

"Going on a bug safari or coming face to face with glow-in-the-dark scorpions or one of the biggest tarantulas in the world is a real adventure. We hope our visitors will go away with a new fascination and respect."

It's certainly a novel take on Wales' Year of Adventure. In fact the Bug Farm is one of several major attractions ready or planned for 2016, all funded by the Tourism Investment Support Scheme, that prove you don't need to be in the wild outdoors to be taken exhilaratingly outside your comfort zone.

You could be in a former disused factory in the Llanishen area of Cardiff, for instance. Thanks to the vision of Go Air founding

01—



director Jez James and a half-million pound investment, it's now the biggest trampoline park in Wales – at least until the company's planned site in Swansea opens for business.

When Jez witnessed the huge popularity of trampoline arenas in the United States, he knew the same blend of sport, leisure and fitness in a safe and family-friendly environment would go down a storm in the UK.

The result is an all-weather 23,000 square feet superpark featuring open jumping on 120 interconnected trampolines. Not to mention foam pits, a fidget ladder and slacklines, a bounce dodgeball court, urban sports coaching and an array of fitness classes which burn more than 1,000 calories an hour.

Bouncing is the perfect way to wean people of all ages off their screen-based lifestyles. Instead of twiddling their thumbs they can give themselves a cardiovascular workout that, according to NASA boffins, is more effective than running. And arguably a lot more fun.

Go Air Cardiff was launched in November 2015 and there are plans for rapid expansion – with 15 parks across the UK by the end of 2016 creating more than 1,000 jobs.

"We are looking to be one of the front-runners in Europe over the next three to five years," says Jez James. "We believe Go Air Cardiff is one of the best activity attractions that Wales has to offer and a perfect fit for the Year of Adventure."

Voted one of the UK's top 10 amusement parks in the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice Awards, Greenwood Forest Park at Y Felinheli already has a strong reputation with adventurous families. But they didn't get where they are by resting on their laurels. This spring sees the opening of a new £1 million signature ride – the Solar Splash.

The clue's in the name. Kids will climb a 12-metre tall tower with spectacular views, board an inflatable boat and career down one of three water chutes up to 90 metres long. The whole thing is powered by a 150kW photovoltaic array that will also provide 80% of the park's electrical needs – because fun needn't cost the earth.

Managing Director Stephen Bristow confidently predicts there will be "plenty of excited shrieking" on the way down. But it's not all about big rides such as Solar Splash or the park's famous Green Dragon, the world's only people-powered rollercoaster. Sometimes getting out into the woods is enough.

"Adventure should be about exploring exciting new experiences, a great day out," says Stephen. "Children don't want to be mollycoddled. They need more experience of wilderness, with dens to build, trees to climb, water to get wet in.

"Let them get out there and get their knees dirty and give them a bit of fun – and some exercise into the bargain. At the end of a day here they are worn-out but they don't realise they have been exercising because they are so excited."

02—



Find out more...

Dr Beynon's Bug Farm
thebugfarm.co.uk

Go Air
goairtrampolinepark.co.uk

GreenWood Forest Park
greenwoodforestpark.co.uk



- 01—Go Air Trampoline Park, Cardiff
- 02—Go Air Trampoline Park
- 03—Dr Sarah Beynon
- 04—Dr Beynon's Bug Farm, Pembrokeshire
- 05—Grub Kitchen at the bug farm
- 06—GreenWood Forest Park, Y Felinheli
- 07—Grub Kitchen's signature bug burger
- 08—The Solar Splash at Greenwood Forest Park

Baby boomers. If you want an adventure-loving family to stay the night, style alone doesn't cut the mustard – you need to cater for the kids. Sian Williams, self-confessed frazzled mum and founder of website Baby-Friendly Boltholes, explains how a small investment can make a big difference.

I think of Baby-Friendly Boltholes as my second child. Quite suddenly it became an all-consuming part of my life and, initially at least, I was quite unprepared for it – much like many people's experience of parenthood.

When my first child Erin (now 10) was born, it introduced me to a sense of weariness and trepidation I had never had about travelling before. I'd been lucky enough to travel for a living in my former career in public relations and had no intention of giving it up just because I had a tot in tow.

But then came the realisation that checking into a romantic boutique hotel with a screaming baby on my arm was unlikely to make me popular with my fellow guests. Besides which, how would I fit the cot, steriliser, baby bath, bottles, nappies, baby monitor, clutch of toys etc in the car, let alone in the regulation 12-kilo suitcase if I dared to dream of an overseas escape?

The more I thought about it, the more I realised that, with just a little TLC, the domestic travel tourism industry and pre-school families are made for each other.

Except for those with a fear of flying, what other market is likely to be more turned on to the idea of a holiday without flights?

Not only that, but these families will make it their main holiday, spend more, stay longer and potentially become loyal clients. Plus they'll actively want to do all this outside peak times, in those harder-to-shift low and shoulder season months.

It's a match made in heaven and, on a basic level, requires little more than some relatively minor investment in a cot, highchair, baby bath, changing mat, steriliser, baby monitor, repositionable stairgates and a chest of toys, books and dressing-up gear. You can even exploit extra revenue streams by offering services like CRB-checked babysitting, in-cottage treatments from a beauty therapist, a gourmet ready-meal honesty larder, breakfast baskets and the like.

Do it well and the benefits in terms of year-round business and strong rental rates will soon pay off your investment. Clydey Cottages are a prime example of a Welsh tourism provider making a great success

of all this. Of course that sort of major expenditure is not within everyone's reach. But some nursery gear, a playhouse, some trikes, a petting corner with guinea pigs or rabbits, even a paint your own pebble garden, all have the potential to set your accommodation apart and harness toddler "pester power" that can bring those guests back year after year.

Find out more...

Sian Williams is the founder of Baby-Friendly Boltholes, a collection of stylish and child-friendly holiday locations from across the globe and winner of The Times Travel Editor's Award for 2015.

babyfriendlyboltholes.co.uk



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Inside Track: Clydey Cottages

When Dewi and Jacqui Davies swapped their careers in the City of London for life running a cluster of self-catering cottages in Pembrokeshire, they had a very simple aim. They wanted to create a place they would love to go on holiday themselves.

Since they have three kids of their own, this meant making things as family-friendly as possible – but without stinting on the luxury. Over the years they've invested in an indoor leisure complex with heated swimming pool, a sauna, spa room, hot tubs and a playroom with baby corner. All set in 20 acres of beautiful grounds where children can roam, build dams, play pooh sticks – and feed the menagerie of animals.

According to Jacqui, it's not just about providing all the right bits of kit. It's about creating exciting new experiences.

"These days families are looking for more than a few toys and a travel cot in the corner," she says. "We love seeing children develop and grow in confidence. Collecting an egg that's still warm from the nest or getting up close and personal with a pig is a real adventure."

Find out more... clydeycottages.co.uk

- 01— Clydey Cottages, Pembrokeshire
 02— Feeding the animals, Clydey Cottages
 03— Clydey Cottages
 04— Playroom, Clydey Cottages
 05— Clydey Cottages



An adviser calls. Every business needs a fresh pair of eyes. Joining the Visit Wales star grading system can help you attract guests and keep them coming back – and it all starts with a visit from a Quality Adviser. Just don't mention Alex Polizzi.

As anyone who works in the tourism industry knows only too well, we live in the age of TripAdvisor. Everyone's an expert online. But it turns out that some people are still more expert than others.

People like Jackie Saunders, for instance. There isn't much that Jackie doesn't know about the Welsh tourism industry. After a career in hospitality, she now visits hundreds of accommodation providers every year as part of the Visit Wales star grading team. And she's been doing the job she loves for the last 16 years.

So when Jackie says a place is as good as it gets, it really counts for something. Because it's truly objective. Those Visit Wales stars still matter.

"Online review sites have had a huge impact but, at the end of the day, it's different people's opinions," says Jackie. "Savvy travellers know they have to read between the lines. That's why they still appreciate an official star grading. We grade everybody in exactly the same way. I have no bias whatsoever."

All the same you might struggle to suppress a few butterflies when Jackie turns up on your doorstep. But she's no scary Alex Polizzi from the TV. She's not a hotel inspector either. The term is Quality Adviser.

That's because her brief covers all sorts of serviced and self-catering accommodation, not just hotels. And she won't simply inspect and nit-pick. Like the rest of her colleagues, she wants your business to succeed. She'll provide insight and feedback to help you raise your standards – and she's in it for the long haul. Grading is a process, not a one-off, whether you have one star or five.

"People's expectations are always rising and standards have to be very high to keep pace," says Jackie. "What was groundbreaking a few years ago can look tired today. You can't afford to stand still in the tourism business but, when you are busy, you can stop seeing things that matter. We offer a fresh perspective."

Eldrydd Lamp could certainly be forgiven for seeing Plas Dinam Country House near Llanidloes through rose-tinted glasses. And not just because it's a splendid Victorian mansion commanding epic views over the mid Wales countryside. It was also her much-loved family home.

When her parents Lord and Lady Davies downsized, Eldrydd together with her husband Tyson and their young children returned from Australia to run the house as a truly distinctive self-catering business.

For groups celebrating weddings, birthday parties, family reunions or anniversaries, Plas Dinam provides the full "Downton experience". Because you don't just get a few rooms in one wing. You get the whole house. The winding drive, the 12 acres of grounds, the wood-panelled dining hall, the drawing room with grand piano, the billiard room, the kitchen with original Aga, the endless bedrooms: they're all yours.

The business was already up and running by the time Jackie was invited to pay a visit. Parties who may have been considering Scottish castles were discovering the delights of mid Wales, and boosting the local economy, instead. After all, properties that can hold 32 guests at a time don't exactly grow on trees.

But Eldrydd still wanted an official star grading from Visit Wales. And in her mind, only five stars would do. "There are some old houses that have character but are pretty rundown – people are cold and uncomfortable," she explains. "We felt that five stars would give people reassurance."

She knew they had work to do. An advisory visit from Jackie helped them identify their strengths – and exactly where they needed to improve to gain the coveted top award for quality. "It was absolutely crucial to be able to walk through the rooms with her



and pick out the things that needed to be done,” says Eldrydd.

The size and age of the building could have made it daunting. But Jackie was always willing to make allowances for the “intrinsic charm” of Plas Dinam. Taking a dip in a century-old claw-footed bath can be all part of the fun – just as long as the water is piping hot.

Confident that five stars were on the cards, Eldrydd embarked on a major renovation with the help of a grant from the Welsh Government’s Tourism Investment Support Scheme. Five new bathrooms were installed, a kitchen converted into another bedroom – making 15 in all – and a new biomass boiler made the house as comfortable as it was impressive. “We went to town,” she says.

The full grading came a year later in May 2014, balancing an overall score, consistency across key areas such as cleanliness, bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens and living spaces and a final “star qualifier” assessment. The result, much to Eldrydd’s relief and excitement, was a five-star grade.

“We put the logo on our website, talked about it on Facebook and Twitter,” she says. “We were able to take a listing on the Visit Wales website, enter the National Tourism Awards for Wales, where we won a bronze award, and generally become part of a tourism family. Being graded has opened new doors – it felt like a real milestone.”

Find out more...

Visit Wales star grading scheme
gov.wales/tourism
 0845 010 8020
quality.tourism@wales.gsi.gov.uk
 Plas Dinam
plasdinamcountryhouse.co.uk





Inside Track: Gwesty Seren

Social enterprise Seren provide care, support and work opportunities for people with learning disabilities. So when they launched a hotel offering “respite adventure care”, it was no surprise they packed it with specialist equipment such as lifts, ramps and hoists, wheelchairs, a sensory room and a hydrotherapy pool.

But they also wanted to make it a quality hotel, just like any other, with no compromise. So with funding from sources including the Big Lottery Fund, Cyfenter, Magnox and the Welsh Government’s Tourism Investment Support Scheme, they converted a former care home in Llan Ffestiniog to provide 10 luxury ensuite bedrooms and a restaurant serving delicious home-cooked food.

Then they called in Visit Wales. Because when their guests returned from an adventurous day on the zip wires, canoeing lakes and steam trains of Snowdonia, they wanted them to enjoy a genuine three-star experience. Senior Quality Adviser Heddwyn Jones helped them focus on crucial issues such as service, hospitality and friendliness as well as the quality of the facilities.

“It’s about giving each person a fantastic experience from the moment they come through the door,” says Gwesty Seren manager Sioned Parry. “Parents and carers need to trust that we will keep people safe and give them a lot of fun. Our three-star grading gives them an extra level of reassurance.”

Heddwyn was delighted to help a social enterprise that does so much good in its community: “They are a great example of the journey that people go on with the Visit Wales grading scheme. To see them progress and grow and become a flourishing business is very satisfying.”

Find out more... gwestyseren.co.uk

- 01—Plas Dinam Country House, Llanidloes
- 02—Plas Dinam: “the full Downton experience”
- 03—Adviser Jackie Saunders (left) with manager Eldrydd Lamp
- 04—Inspecting a bathroom
- 05—Inside Plas Dinam
- 06—Gwesty Seren, Llan Ffestiniog
- 07—Specialist equipment at Gwesty Seren
- 08—Gwesty Seren: three-star reassurance



Lights, camera, action! If a picture tells a thousand words, a moving image can work even harder. These days savvy tourism businesses are turning themselves into movie directors. And as Sarah Orchard explains, it isn't as difficult or expensive as it sounds.

The numbers are incredible. Video now accounts for almost 80% of all web traffic. Twitter users alone are watching 370 years' worth of video every single day, up by 250% in the last six months.

Just like Facebook, which started out as a purely social networking platform before being adopted by the corporate world, video has gone mainstream – even for smaller businesses. Rich media content provides a much more dynamic and interactive platform on which to attract customers and repeat visits.

Once YouTube was the only place to go for video. Not any more. Vimeo is a tried and trusted favourite. Twitter has Vine, a fun mobile app to create six-second looping videos. Periscope and Meerkat both allow you to stream live video through your mobile devices. All this means you can share your content across lots of social networking platforms as well as embedding it in your own website.

So how exactly can video help your tourism business? Well, everybody is different. It's important to understand your audience, know what makes them tick and create content that is specifically designed to inspire them. But here are a few ideas that might just work.

Meet the Team – give your business a human face. If the entire family works in the business, make sure everyone gets a special mention, even the dog or cat.

Virtual Tours – use your smartphone to record a tour of your attraction, B&B, campsite, hotel or pub. So much more effective than static photos for giving potential visitors a sense of what it is like to be there for themselves.

Behind the Scenes – use Vine to create fun short insider videos. Chef at work in the kitchens, building a new attraction, breakfast being prepared, events being set up – the list is endless. Or use it to capture the changing seasons and landscape.

Live Action Shots – live streaming apps or Vine can show with real immediacy your visitors taking part in activities like canoeing, climbing, surfing, cycling or horse riding.

How To Guides – if you run a campsite, why not show how to erect a tent or light a campfire? It might save a few arguments after a long journey getting to you.

Favourite Places – go out and shoot some short videos of your favourite local places or walks to add to your website. This can make it easier for your guests to find their feet than ploughing through baskets of leaflets.

Kind Words – written testimonials are great but a customer committing to video adds real authenticity and is much more fun.

But aren't videos expensive to make? Not any more. Yes, you can commission a professional video company but even this

costs much less than you might expect because they have to compete with a plethora of cheap DIY options.

The average smartphone or digital camera is capable of capturing really good quality video these days. You may prefer to invest in a proper video camera – GoPro is great for filming outdoor action shots.

Once you've made your video, you need to share it as widely as possible. It's incredibly easy. Put it on your website, add it to your Facebook business page, tweet it, set up your own YouTube channel and use Vimeo. Give your video an interesting and relevant title, along with a clear description so that it can be more easily found. The more viewings your video receives, the more likely it is to be shared to an ever-widening audience – it could just be the start of very exciting times for your business.

Find out more...

Sarah Orchard is managing director of Orchard Marketing Associates. A Chartered Marketer, she's one of Enterprise Nation's Top 50 Business Advisors. orchardmarketingassociates.co.uk

Sarah is an expert at the Business Wales Marketing Zone <http://businesswales.marketinginfohub.co.uk>

Do it yourself

Here is Sarah's pick of the software and online services to help you create professional-looking videos without breaking the bank.

Windows Movie Maker, Microsoft's video editing software
<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-gb/windows-live/movie-maker>

iMovie for Mac
apple.com/uk/ios/imovie

Adobe Voice for iPad
<https://standout.adobe.com/voice>

Magisto and Animoto, easy to use online services
magisto.com
animoto.com

Vine
vine.co

VivaVideo
vivavideo.tv

Periscope
periscope.tv

Meerkat
<https://meerkatapp.co>

01—Cleo Browne, Celtic Quest Coasteering
02—Celtic Quest Coasteering, Pembrokeshire
03—You can almost taste the spray
04—Helmet-mounted camera
05—Film shows how much fun it is



Inside Track: Celtic Quest Coasteering

"Video," says boss of Celtic Quest Coasteering Cleo Browne, "is just something that people get. You're more able to share the emotion of everything. We've been making films since we started six years ago."

She reckons coasteering is like kayaking without a boat, surfing without a board and bungee jumping without a bungee. Everything, in fact, your parents told you not to do at the beach.

So in her videos you can virtually taste the spray and feel the excitement of belly flopping, high diving and scramble climbing your way around the rocky Pembrokeshire coastline. But they offer a bit of reassurance too.

"Potentially you are going to be throwing yourself off a cliff and some people might find that a scary idea," she says. "Film is a way of showing how much fun it is."

Celtic Quest guides are equipped with waterproof cameras and helmet-mounted GoPro action cameras. The resulting footage isn't just posted on their website and platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Vine. It gets shared right across social media by participants themselves.

That's because, right out of the water, everyone is offered a branded USB stick of images and raw video footage of their adventures. "It does the marketing for us," says Cleo.

Find out more...
celticquestcoasteering.com



Inside Track: Rivercatcher

When Jen Horan saw Cilan farm in Denbighshire, she knew she'd found the perfect place for a luxury self-catering getaway. And not just because it was where her father had spent many happy hours fly-fishing.

The stone farmhouse and outbuildings dating back to 1400, the setting on the bank of the meandering River Dee, the Berwyn Mountains rising in the distance... it was impossibly idyllic.

"The peace and tranquility took me back to my childhood summers," recalls Jen. "The realisation hit that I wanted to create a small group of unique cottages for families and couples alike to escape to."

She launched Rivercatcher in 2014 and set about trying to persuade potential visitors to fall in love with the place – just as she had done. So she turned to video.

Not just any old video. A two-minute flyover tour filmed using an octocopter drone, which swoops over the immaculately restored buildings and provides a bird's eye view of the surrounding countryside.

"We're still a new business but so far we've been overwhelmed at the response from our guests," says Jen. "People say that, once they've seen the film, they know exactly where they'll be going. It seals the deal."

Find out more... rivercatcher.co.uk

06—The stunning setting of Rivercatcher, Denbighshire

07—Inside Rivercatcher

08—Rivercatcher



DYLAN'S

A taste of the sea. Good restaurants aren't simply destinations in their own right. With a strong commitment to local food, they can help define a sense of place to adventurous visitors hungry for a true cultural experience.

There are so many delicious dishes on the menu at the new Dylan's restaurant in Criccieth, it can be hard to choose. But if you're struggling over your starter, you might want to think about the Llŷn Peninsula crab cakes with pickled red cabbage and crème fraîche.

Not just because they're very tasty. But because you'll be helping to keep the local crab fisherman in business. Owner David Evans explains: "The seabed around here is littered with brown crab but one day the fisherman came in and announced he was giving it up. It just wasn't worth his while.

"We asked him what we could do to help and he said – buy all my crab. So, to the huge frustration of our head of kitchen, we decided we'd take all our crab in live, prepare and process it ourselves and put crab cakes on our menu all year round. They're now our most popular starter – we sell hundreds of them."

It neatly sums up the win-win strategy pursued by David and his partner Robin Hodgson ever since they launched their first Dylan's restaurant at Menai Bridge in 2012. A key local supplier is helped to thrive. The restaurant does great business. And the customer gets a fantastic plate of food.

As word gets about, even the town itself starts to feel the benefit. You might call it the Dylan's effect. It's already happened in Menai Bridge – the waterside restaurant and the popular Menai Seafood Festival it pioneered have helped create a surge of

visitors. Since their new restaurant opened in May 2015, it's happening in Criccieth too.

There are two iconic buildings in this traditional seaside resort on the south coast of the Llŷn. One is the 13th century castle commanding spectacular views across Tremadog Bay from its rocky headland. At the other end of the esplanade, slap bang on the beach, is the old Morannedd café.

This is where Dylan's have made their new home. They've taken this slightly faded Art Deco masterpiece by Portmeirion architect Clough Williams-Ellis, with its wonderful curved wings and full-height windows, and restored it to its former glory thanks to a half-million pound investment. In fact they've made it better than ever with the sort of stunningly executed interior the building never had even in its heyday.

The result is a true destination restaurant that's helping to change perceptions not just of Criccieth but of the whole north Wales food scene. It's also helped to make Dylan's the fastest-growing tourism and hospitality business in Wales.

"We have a fantastic opportunity here," says David. "We have the beaches and the mountains and we are relatively unspoilt. The restaurant scene is developing a bigger reach and, if we go at it hard and do it authentically and with commitment, we can make north Wales a destination that people flock to."

Dylan's is part of a wave of high-quality restaurants to launch in the region in 2015.

All are on the coast. All are firmly committed to local sourcing. And they've all received funding from the Welsh Government's Tourism Investment Support Scheme. It's helped them to plan their ventures without compromise – creating media buzz as well as jobs.

It helps when one of Britain's top chefs gets involved. Especially when he's a proud Welshman passionate about the quality of our produce. Denbigh-born Bryn Williams, Great British Menu winner and Saturday Kitchen regular, now splits his time between Odette's restaurant in London's Primrose Hill and his new bistro, bar and café in Colwyn Bay.

He might have taken up residence in the landmark £4 million Porth Eirias development, part of a huge regeneration scheme that's transformed the resort's famous waterfront and beach, but he doesn't stand on ceremony. There's an easy, informal mood and no rules: tuck into breakfast, graze over small plates at the bar, share a Sunday feast with the family or watch the sun go down through the great glass walls that look right out to sea.

The first-floor balcony at Venu doesn't have a bad view either. Once a dilapidated former carpet warehouse, this stylish new lounge, dance bar and restaurant looks out over Pwllheli harbour to the mountains of Snowdonia.

In what was already a memorable year for the town, which hosted the All Wales Boat Show at the newly opened £9 million Plas Heli sailing academy, Venu brought a bit of big-city glamour with its VIP areas and bespoke cocktails. It's an entertainment hotspot for all ages – and once you've worked up an appetite on the dance floor, the restaurant delivers some big Welsh flavours.

The menu touches all bases from tapas and light snacks including seared scallops and Aberdaron crab cocktail through to stone-baked pizzas and main courses such as local wild sea bass and dry-aged Welsh beef.

At Enoteca Y Felinheli, as the name suggests, the recipes might be Italian but you'll never forget you're in Wales. When owners Paolo Basetti Sani and Ferdinando Salvestrini launched their restaurant on Port Dinorwic marina, they wanted to pay tribute to two cultures. Inside you'll find Welsh slate as well as Tuscan marble, Welsh-speaking staff to go with the Italian chef and sommelier – and more than a few home-grown ingredients including mussels and steak.

With yet another north Wales destination restaurant opening later this year, the 150-cover Catch 22 Brasserie at Valley on Anglesey, this is a wave that shows no sign of breaking just yet.

Find out more...

Dylan's
dylansrestaurant.co.uk

Bryn Williams at Porth Eirias
portheirias.com

Venu
venuclub.com

Enoteca Y Felinheli
01248 208250

Tourism Investment Support Scheme
gov.wales/tourism



What is food tourism?

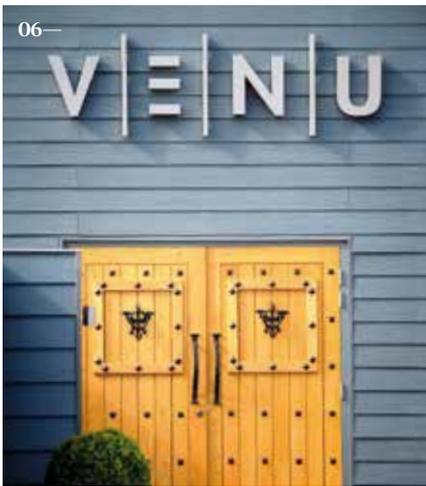
Wales has some of the world's best producers of food and drink – and some world-class chefs to cook it. Tourists are increasingly seeking local, authentic and novel experiences linked intrinsically to the places they visit.

Put the two things together and you get food tourism – farmers, producers, suppliers, restaurateurs, cafés, pubs and accommodation providers all working together to help visitors uncover our local culinary gems. It's about championing our food and telling the story of its journey to our plates, so that tourists feel a real connection with the area and are eager to come back for seconds.

There's plenty at stake. In 2013, 89 million day visits to Wales generated more than £3 billion of expenditure – 40% of it spent on food and drink. It's one reason Welsh Government has launched the Food Tourism Action Plan for Wales 2015-2020, aiming to raise the country's profile as a high-quality food tourism destination.

Look out too for a business support toolkit full of top tips about how to offer an authentically Welsh food and drink experience. It even contains ideas for better breakfasts. Baked eggs with leeks, laverbread and ham does sound rather moreish.

Find out more... gov.wales/tourism



- 01—Partners Robin Hodgson (left) and David Evans at Dylan's, Criccieth
- 02—Dylan's, Criccieth
- 03—Dylan's specialises in seafood
- 04—Dylan's is an Art Deco masterpiece
- 05—Dylan's, Criccieth
- 06—Venu, Pwllheli
- 07—First-floor balcony at Venu
- 08—Venu, Pwllheli
- 09—Venu, Pwllheli
- 10—Bryn Williams at Porth Eirias
- 11—Bryn Williams at Porth Eirias
- 12—Bryn Williams at Porth Eirias
- 13—Bryn Williams (right) in the kitchen

01—



02—



03—



04—



05—



Adventure under the stars. A new breed of Welsh “glampsites” shows that adventure and luxury can be happy bedfellows. We profile six of the best.

Just because you're out under the stars doesn't mean your towels can't be fluffy. That, in a nutshell, is the appeal of glamping, the fast-growing luxury alternative to pitching your own tent and roughing it.

Welsh tourism businesses have embraced this global trend for going back to nature without foregoing the glamorous little touches. Adventure-hungry visitors can now choose from a range of sumptuously equipped yurts, tipis, tree houses, Romany caravans, shepherd's huts, eco pods, safari tents and railway carriages.

If you have land or run an attraction, property or event, glamping could be the diversification you're looking for. Just think quirky – and very, very luxurious.

At The Secret Yurts near Welshpool, Tracey and Terry Phillips don't provide electricity or the internet. But they do offer magnificent views. Not to mention king-sized beds, cosy log-burners and the fluffiest of towels to go with their showers, proper kitchens and flushing toilets. Oh, and a hot tub.

“People want to do something different,” says Tracey with a certain amount of understatement. “But they still expect all the luxuries.”

thesecretyurts.co.uk

Wilderness

A little bit of American glamour beamed down in a meadow near Lampeter. This silver bullet of an Airstream trailer dates from 1964 but it's kitted out with all mod cons including double bed, retro-style kitchen, wood burner and wet room. wilderness.co.uk

Wonderfully Wild

Classic safari tent lodges with a Welsh twist, not least the epic views of Snowdonia. When Robin and Victoria Roberts diversified their Beaumaris farm, they thought big – and glamorous. Voted one of Elle magazine's most extraordinary rural getaways. wonderfullywild.co.uk

Living Room

A return to the simple (but chic) life – 30 feet off the floor. These futuristic curved pods are built into the treetops of a secret valley near Machynlleth. The hot spring water shower is an experience in itself. Squirrels at no extra charge. living-room.co

Treberfedd Farm

Feel just like a hobbit in these unique timber-framed houses, dug into a hillside and topped with a warm blanket of turf. Underfloor heating, a wood-burning stove and walls lined with sheep's wool make them about the cosiest homes in Ceredigion. treberfedd.co.uk

Nannerth Country Holidays

Say hello to Alys – perhaps the prettiest gypsy caravan in Wales. On this organic hilltop farm in mid Wales, you can sleep in Alys' comfortable double bed and shower in the shepherd's hut next door. Fortunately, the shepherd has long gone. nannerth.co.uk

01—The Secret Yurts, Welshpool
02—The Secret Yurts
03—The Secret Yurts
04—Hot tub at The Secret Yurts
05—The Secret Yurts



01—



02—

Tweets and hoots. Twitter has 316 million active users: no wonder managing your tweets can seem like a full-time job. Hootsuite could be the solution, according to digital marketing expert Laura Hampton. Best of all, it's free.

The tourism industry is exciting but challenging. Catching the eye of demanding consumers in a saturated market can be tough.

With online marketing, though, we play on a more level playing field. Attractions and accommodation providers who have a strong digital strategy and creative approach can definitely succeed.

Twitter is a great place to find new customers and to build relationships with existing customers. But with 316 million users constantly feeding in their messages, it's difficult to get a hold on what's relevant to you and how to use it.

Hootsuite is a great software tool to help you manage Twitter more effectively. Here are my five top tips about how the tourism industry can get the most out of it:

Set up some streams

This is the first thing to do with your new Hootsuite account. Streams are the columns of information that appear with your dashboard and show you different content depending on what you specify.

Start with a home stream, a mentions stream, a retweets stream, a new followers stream and an inbox. These will show you every time someone interacts with your Twitter handle. So you can see and respond to these interactions quickly without having to search through Twitter or move between screens at twitter.com.

Create a custom brand stream

Now create a new stream and, rather than picking one of the default options, choose "search". Put in your brand name plus any variants of it, and perhaps the names of key members of your team, and this stream will show you every time someone mentions your brand but doesn't use your Twitter handle.

Put speech marks around anything you want to be searched for exactly. By adding AND or OR between phrases, you tell the search to look for this term and/or another.

Set up custom product searches

Next, add a new stream and select "search", as you did for the custom brand search. The idea is to show you all the tweets that mention your product. So if you sell self-catering accommodation in Wales, you might set up a search that looks like this: "self catering" AND "wales".

Find PR opportunities

Hootsuite isn't just great for social listening – you can also use it as a PR tool. Journalists love Twitter and often tweet out their requests for contributors or people to comment on their articles. These are great opportunities to pitch yourself and your brand.

A custom search for two common hashtags used by journalists, #journorequest and #prrequest, will deliver a stream of requests straight to your dashboard.

You might refine the stream some more with: #journorequest OR #prrequest AND "wales" OR "accommodation" OR "attractions" OR "travel".

Use it for scheduling – carefully

Hootsuite allows you to schedule a tweet for a specific day and time – or you can use their "auto schedule" feature, which learns over time when your audience is active and thus when the best times to tweet are. This can be handy if your time and resources are limited.

Be cautious though – the benefit of Twitter is that you're able to have a conversation. If you only schedule, you can't contribute. Be sure to check in regularly and respond to people and get involved in what they're saying, using all of these tips.

Find out more...

Sign up free at
hootsuite.com

Laura Hampton is the marketing manager at digital marketing agency Impression.
impression.co.uk

Ask questions or share your experiences by tweeting Laura
[@lauralhampton](https://twitter.com/lauralhampton) or
[@impressiontalk](https://twitter.com/impressiontalk)

Laura is an expert at the Business Wales Marketing Zone
<http://businesswales.marketinginfohub.co.uk>



Tales of the unexpected. Adventure doesn't just take place in the surf, white water and windswept mountains of Wales. It can be a voyage of imagination too – with one of the world's best-loved storytellers as a guide.

Not much beats the thrill of hurtling down a zip wire, catching that perfect break or throwing yourself off a cliff into the sea. But if you want a real adventure, read a book.

Good writers take you to truly unexpected places. They introduce you to quirky characters that, even in somewhere as colourful as Wales, you're unlikely to meet down the local pub. Instead of exercising your body, they give your mind a good workout.

One of the most vivid, exciting and crazily creative of all was Roald Dahl. In 2016 the world celebrates the centenary of one of its favourite children's authors with a year-long party and a Steven Spielberg-directed blockbuster movie of *The BFG*.

And not a lot of people know this – but Roald Dahl was Welsh. He may have come from Norwegian stock but he was born in Llandaff, Cardiff, in 1916. One hundred years later, Wales isn't just claiming him as one of our own. We're leading the way.

In the words of Willy Wonka: "Many wonderful surprises await you!" Building on the success of the Dylan Thomas centenary in 2014, Wales was first to announce its programme of events for the Roald Dahl 100 celebrations – culminating in a spectacular live event that will be the biggest of its kind anywhere in the world.

On 17 and 18 September Cardiff will become the City of the Unexpected, one gigantic stage containing all that's weird, wonderful, subversive and surreal in Dahl's

world. So who knows where and how an Enormous Crocodile, a giant peach or the Fantastic Mr Fox might turn up?

Co-produced by National Theatre Wales and the Wales Millennium Centre, the event will be directed by Nigel Jamieson, who helped create the opening ceremony for the Sydney Olympics.

"Cardiff is Dahl's own city, the city of his childhood," says John McGrath of National Theatre Wales. "His family are incredibly passionate about reconnecting to Wales. His world is so particular, mischievous and wonderful and we want to transform the whole city through that perspective, to see it as Dahl would see it.

"City of the Unexpected will be the largest and most spectacular artistic event that Cardiff has ever seen and the biggest live event in the Roald Dahl 100 celebrations. Across the two days there will be big events attracting tens of thousands of people and others that you might stumble across almost by accident. You'll be able to see some of the best-loved Dahl characters and also a few little-known ones – inside, outside and on various buildings in the city centre."

Along with a national programme of outreach events, an exhibition of illustrations by Quentin Blake and the Dahl-inspired Land of Song school choir competition, it's a perfect fit for Wales' Year of Adventure in 2016.

Dahl was no stranger to adventure, whether getting up to mischief in his

Llandaff sweetshop or as a young pilot during World War Two. But the biggest thrills are the soaring flights of imagination in his books. Harnessing this excitement is something the whole country can get involved in – including the Welsh tourism industry.

"Every time you open a book, you open a new world of adventure," says Lleucu Siencyn, Chief Executive of Literature Wales. "Enjoyment of place is part of that. We want to bring Dahl back to Wales and attract more visitors to experience the world of his childhood. There's a real opportunity to make a big splash by working together."

Literature Wales will use the magic of Dahl's words, stories and characters to inspire creativity and take literature to new and unexpected places. Through its Invent Your Event scheme, it's offering funding to communities, youth groups, festivals, artists and businesses across the country to ensure the centenary is celebrated everywhere – and can be enjoyed by everyone.

"No one should miss out on this unique opportunity for invention, mischief and fun!" according to John Collins of the Roald Dahl Literary Estate.

So get your thinking caps on. If you want to cook some Revolting Recipes in your restaurant or think an appearance by the Fantastic Mr Fox would go down a storm at your local agricultural show, contact Literature Wales for support and advice.

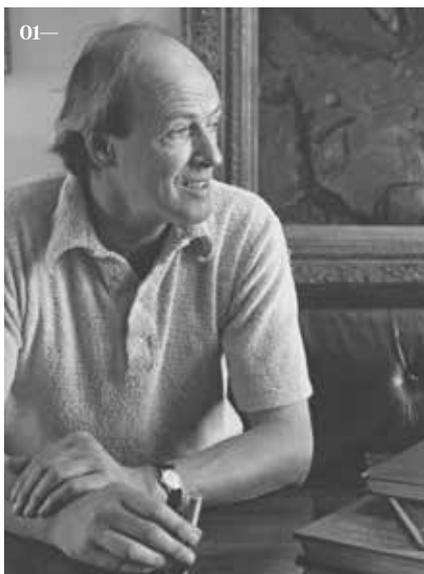
The Roald Dahl 100 celebrations are just the latest example of how literary tourism has become big business for the Welsh economy. The phenomenal success of the Hay Festival is being echoed at smaller events such as the Dinefwr Literature Festival and The Laugharne Weekend.

Events better known for their music, such as the Green Man Festival, Festival No 6 at Portmeirion and the Good Life Experience founded by Radio 6's Cerys Matthews, now feature literary performances too. Because books are the new rock and roll.

For 2016 and beyond, Wales won't just be the land of physical adventure. It will provide a voyage of the imagination too.

"To understand a writer you should know where they lived and the places they loved," says Lleucu Siencyn. "Often these sources of inspiration are in beautiful places such as National Parks, near our coastline or in quirky villages. Getting out into these landscapes, using all the senses, helps to bring the writer alive.

"People have multiple habits and interests. They don't just love literature, they love things like music and food as well. The Year of Adventure will be a way of bringing them together and presenting them to the world as an offer of what Wales has, a living indigenous culture that people will want to experience for themselves."



Find out more...

Literature Wales

literaturewales.org/roalddahl100/

Wales Millennium Centre

wmc.org.uk

National Theatre Wales

nationaltheatrewales.org

Word power

In Wales it feels like there's a literature festival every weekend. Here are six of the best – including the granddaddy of them all at Hay-on-Wye.

Hay Festival
hayfestival.com

Dinefwr Literature Festival
dinefwr-literaturefestival.co.uk

Penarth Book Festival
penarthbookfestival.org.uk

Gwyll Arall, Caernarfon
gwyllarall.com

The Laugharne Weekend
thelaugharneweekend.com

Gladfest, Hawarden
gladstoneslibrary.org/events



05—



06—



07—



08—

01—Author Roald Dahl
 02—James and the Giant Peach
 03—Dahl's The Twits
 04—Dinefwr Literature Festival

05—Hay Festival
 06—Dinefwr Literature Festival
 07—Festival No 6
 08—Dinefwr Literature Festival



01—Monmouthshire Cottages, Tintern Abbey
 02—Monmouthshire Cottages
 03—Steffan Roberts, Pen-y-Ceunant Isaf, Snowdonia
 04—Steffan's famous bara brith
 05—Fiona Wilton of Monmouthshire Cottages
 06—Pen-y-Ceunant Isaf, Snowdonia
 07—Monmouthshire Cottages
 08—Monmouthshire Cottages

Walk the extra mile. It's one thing to talk about giving a warm Welsh welcome: we meet two businesses who really walk the walk. In fact, going the extra mile just isn't far enough.

Fiona Wilton was sitting on a beach in Delaware USA when a message pinged in on her mobile asking which pubs in the Wye Valley might serve gluten-free food.

A few emails to local hostelrys later, she'd answered the question and confirmed yet another booking for Monmouthshire Cottages, the five-star self-catering business she runs with her husband Malcolm. It was just one of 12 bookings they took while on holiday. The very next day after falling off their late flight back to the UK, they were cleaning cottages for new arrivals.

"You have to respond quickly because, if you don't, someone else will," says Fiona. "We can't switch off when we're away."

The pair provide officially our Best Visitor Welcome according to the National Tourism Awards for Wales 2015. When you arrive at one of their three stylish cottages, expect towels and bath robes ready, cosmetics laid out, fresh flowers in all the rooms, starched napkins and polished glasses on the table, a tea tray with fresh cakes, milk in the fridge, home-made fruit vodka and a bottle of wine, a hand-written welcome letter and lots of other little touches all tailored to your specific booking.

But this, says Fiona, is the easy bit. "A welcome is not a handshake, it's a process.

It's not difficult to get someone out of their car and say 'croeso', the place is warm and lit, there are flowers and wine. But the process starts with the very first communication with them on our website or on social media, before they even talk to us personally. They need to feel welcome and that you can be trusted right from the beginning."

It's about having a conversation with your guests – even if you don't always like what you hear. Like most tourism businesses these days, Monmouthshire Cottages are constantly reviewed online and on feedback forms left in the properties.

They prefer to focus on the plaudits and great ideas rather than the nit-picking. "You can't just sit on your laurels, things move on," says Fiona. "Anyway, when else in life does anybody give you a gold star when you're a grown-up? It's an instant reward."

Steffan Roberts knows that feeling pretty well. His Pen-y-Ceunant Isaf Tea Room at Llanberis has twice been voted best restaurant in Wales by TripAdvisor travellers – despite not doing hot food.

It might be something to do with the bara brith like Mam used to make or the hot chocolate that many people think is the best they've ever tasted. But it's got even more to do with

Steffan's own unique personality – and a commitment to customer service that borders on the obsessive.

For the last 15 years he's been providing warmth, sustenance and encouragement from his unpretentious café on the lower slopes of mighty Snowdon. And he does it 365 days a year.

Dirty dogs, muddy boots, wet clothes – Steffan won't mind a bit, even if it's Christmas Day. His converted 18th century stone cottage with its roaring log fire and buzzing interior is a welcome sight for walkers coming off Britain's busiest mountain. In fact it's a beacon of Welsh hospitality.

"It doesn't matter who walks through the door, everybody talks to each other," says Steffan. "I'm a one-off person, I create my own atmosphere and train my staff to do the same. We are passionate about making the word 'croeso' mean something to everyone we meet."

Find out more...

Monmouthshire Cottages
monmouthshirecottages.co.uk

Pen-y-Ceunant Isaf
snowdoncafe.com

Portmeirion, Gwynedd, North Wales

