



Snowdonia is a Mecca for hikers



Lee Westcott swapped Bethnal Green for Ludlow

Welsh Weekends

The rolling Marches, craggy coastline and soaring mountains promise action-packed breaks

For those who've been awarded their Duke of Edinburgh Gold and feel most at home in walking boots, Wales and its bordering counties, Shropshire and Herefordshire, are heaven.

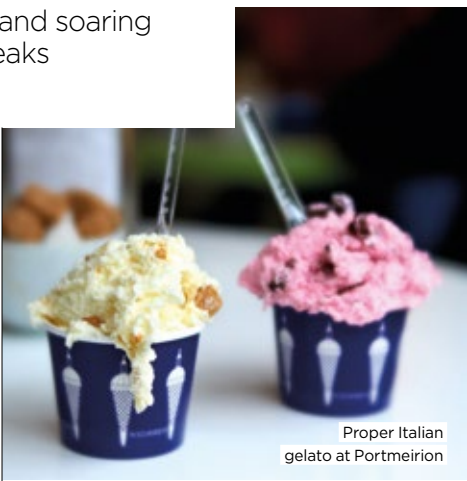
If two mountain ranges and the Shropshire Hills don't tempt you, a long list of excellent pubs and some reliably exciting wet weather activities (underground, as well as indoors) will. The country has many beautiful natural sights that don't have to be reached via a long hike up to the top of a cloud-obscured peak (don't miss summers at Bosherton Lily Ponds near Pembroke), making this small but mighty country a family-proof attraction, from pram to scooter.

All that fresh air is sure to work up a healthy appetite. Make time to stop for Caceni Gri (griddle cakes) and Bara Brith (rich tea cake), slathered with butter and consumed with a steaming mug of tea.

Whether you're driving alongside the rolling coastline in Pembrokeshire, or from cultural Cardiff to the wild Brecon Beacons, or perhaps heading north to explore Anglesey, remember that the finest inns, shops and secret beaches are the ones you almost rolled right past.



Caceni Gri cakes



Proper Italian gelato at Portmeirion

SEE If a pair of binoculars is always on your packing list, a day trip to Skomer Island is right up your street. That said, they're not necessary here as the Wick is so stuffed with puffins you can't miss them. From April to September only – you join the boat at Martin's Haven. welshwildlife.org

Take a tour of a single estate distillery with a twist. At Chase, just four miles out of Hereford, they make vodka and gin from potatoes. chasedistillery.co.uk Portmeirion is a slice of Italy in Snowdonia. Designed and built by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis between 1925 and 1975, it's now a holiday village but worth a visit to enjoy its stand-out toy town architecture (and an Italian gelato). portmeirion.wales



Chase Distillery makes vodka from potatoes

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; © JOHN CAREY

BUY If you've had a day out on the Brecon Beacons, don't miss a pit stop at Beacons Farm Shop at the Welsh Venison Centre. Bred on the family farm since 1985, the shop is literally surrounded by the animals that stock it. It's a revered supplier of critically-acclaimed restaurants both locally and further afield. beaconsfarmshop.co.uk

Thirteenth-century Conwy Castle is one of the most magnificent medieval fortifications in Britain. Tie in your visit with a day of shopping: sheltering behind its walls is a range of independent shops selling local crafts such as Welsh cloth, flannel and tapestries. The Potter's Gallery, also in Conwy, showcases the creative work of 20 regional craftspeople. cadw.gov.wales



Skomer Island is puffin paradise



Barafundle Bay



Conwy Castle

DO Pack a picnic and visit beautiful Barafundle Bay. Yes, it's one of those annoyingly inaccessible spots, but well worth the effort it takes to reach it.

For some gnarly conditions, surfers should hit Freshwater West, after first honing their technique at the artificial wave pool in Snowdonia. adventureparksnowdonia.com

MAMILs (middle aged men in lycra) flock to the Mawddach Estuary Trail, which runs in the foothills of Cadair Idris, ending in Barmouth. A ten-mile taster of the route along the disused railway track and over Penmaenpool bridge affords maximum views for minimum effort. mawddachtrail.co.uk

Fresh fish is always better when you can meet the fisherman who caught it, buying straight from their hands. The Milford Haven Waterway, on the south coast, is a good place to start; you can even go all out and hire a charter boat to bag your own bass. mhpa.co.uk

Scaling Snowdon may well be on the cards. If you're undecided, it helps to know you can take the mountain train up (and down again), if you want. snowdonrailway.co.uk

WHEN TO GO



MAY TO JUNE

At Hay Festival you'll hear from the latest thought leaders spanning literary, political and philosophical fields. But it's a lot more fun than it sounds – comedy, music, food, pop-ups... and lots of bookshops. hayfestival.com



JULY

A world first, the Gower Peninsula is home to a running and music festival, where glamping and a glorious coastal location are the added ingredients that transform it into the ultimate Welsh weekend. lovetrailsfestival.co.uk



SEPTEMBER

Abergavenny puts its red dragon-shaped stamp on the culinary scene. Alongside the usual mix of masterclasses and demos, guests can go on day trips to forage for wild estuary foods. abergavennyfoodfestival.com