



Get away for...

THE WEEKEND!

North Wales is stunning although current restrictions mean this is one weekend to plan in for next year

WORDS: Helen Werin PHOTOGRAPHY: Robin Weaver

From our bewitching sunset spot at Morfa Nefyn, the undulating headland of Porth Dinllaen, silhouetted against the fading light with the twinkling waters of Cardigan Bay in between, is very appealing. Even more so because I've read that it was the site of an Iron Age fort and that there are grey seals and dolphins to look for beyond the lifeboat station.

Oh, and I've heard that the Ty Coch Inn – the outline of which I can just about make out in the shadows – offers wonderful lunches. A local has also told me that, on a clear day, you can see across to Ireland and the Wicklow Mountains.

We've reached this cliff-top vantage point via a network of paths through tall bracken. A mile further east along the coastal path, the prospect from the top of a tiny finger of headland separating two gorgeous beaches

is equally stunning. To one side is the perfect crescent of Traeth Morfa Nefyn facing northeast, to the other, the long swathe of Traeth Nefyn's sands face northwest, with the distant three peaks of The Rivals (Yr Eifl) as the backdrop.

The words of David Lloyd George are ringing in my ears: "A little piece of heaven fallen to earth". I know that the WWI prime minister was using this eloquent description for another part of north Wales, the unspoilt Ceiriog Valley near Chirk, which we've visited on the way here. Yet, they perfectly sum up the lovely Llŷn Peninsula on the north of which I now stand. Lloyd George is at the forefront of my mind because we're pitched at Llanystumdwy Camping and Caravanning Club Site, which is just up the road from the house in which he grew up (now a museum). ➤



Why?... To enjoy seaside, good walks and fabulous vistas

MAIN View east from Morfa Nefyn in evening light

ABOVE FAR LEFT A horse-drawn narrowboat on the Llangollen Canal

BELOW LEFT Beddgelert

BELOW RIGHT A dad guides his son along a tricky part of the path above the river in the Aberglaslyn gorge

ME AND MY 'VAN



Helen Werin...

is MMM's Travel Editor and spent years yearning to get away from Wales; now she loves visiting the country



2002 Roller Team Auto-Roller 41 on a Fiat 2.3-litre diesel engine. Roly has lots of lockers and storage space and six travelling seats for our family

So, it's a bit disappointing to discover that Porth Dinllaen headland is mostly a golf course. Robin, my husband, wonders aloud what Iron Age man would have thought if he could see people knocking little white balls about on the perfectly manicured grass. Would he think it a new hunting technique, perhaps?

The promontory fort has some vestiges of steep-sided ditches over 6ft high, visible as a straight bank running across the links. A gravel path leads us around the headland and down to a very smart RNLI lifeboat station, where a multi-million pound rescue craft is on display.

Swimmers are launching themselves off the rocks by the lifeboat station into water as clear and blue-green as the Caribbean. It's a particularly inviting scene to a pair of rather hot and sticky walkers.

The half-moon beach here is small and far quieter than the suntrap sands by the Ty Coch Inn, which are so packed with families on this sweltering day that we have to step in the water to get around them. Adults are paddleboarding in the shallows with dogs and babies aboard.

We escape to the top of the headland again with glorious views all round (though we can't see Ireland through the heat haze!), then drop down to the cliff edge where a few

people are gathered, watching something. To our delight, we spot a couple of seals sunning themselves on the rocks.

Further round, the rocks are being used for far more daring pursuits by humans. A group of co-workers from a Staffordshire city are 'bonding' in a coasteering exercise, treading cautiously and (some) rather unsteadily over what looks to me like a ridiculously small ridge of craggy rocks offshore. One of them tells me later that he had been "horribly nervous" before setting out but, after just a few minutes of coasteering, was "hooked".

I'm 'hooked' on walking coastal paths, particularly as I now live 100 miles from the nearest seaside. From Aberdaron, near the southern tip of the Llŷn, our own explorations take us on a spectacular walk via the little cove of Porth Meudwy towards Pen y Cil. Climbing this heather-topped hill we get the best perspective of Bardsey Island, aka Ynys Enlli, meaning 'island of the swirling currents', which indeed it is as seven powerful currents meet here.

Aberdaron is a characterful place of fishermen's cottages, an ancient stone bridge and the Church of St Hywyn, which sits right at the edge of the beach.

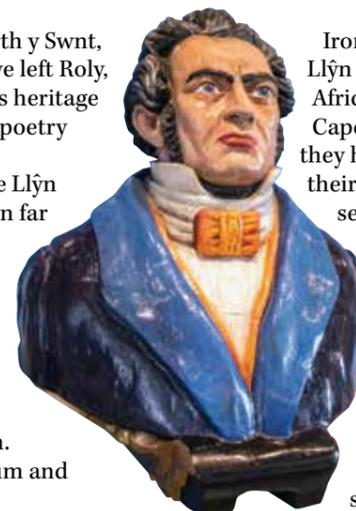
Whilst photographer, Robin, is taking pictures, I go into the National Trust's

Interpretation Centre, Porth y Swnt, by the car park where we've left Roly, our motorhome. The Llŷn's heritage is explained here through poetry and art installations.

However, I find the little Llŷn Maritime Museum at Nefyn far more engaging and interesting. To be honest, I'd only ducked into what is the former St Mary's church for a cuppa (there's a café and gift shop), but was instantly transfixed by this museum. What an absorbing museum and it's free.

I did already know that the Llŷn was a place of pilgrimage along the route to Bardsey Island (where, it is said, 20,000 saints are buried), but I didn't know the stories of smuggling or shipwrecks along this treacherous coast.

There are some great tales, one of the most notable being that of the wreck of the *Stuart* (1901), bound for New Zealand with porcelain, pianos, whisky and cotton bales on board. It's said that bottles of whisky from the wreck were concealed in rabbit holes and bloomers and that one of the pianos was carried up the cliffs!



Ironically, the hardy sailors of the Llŷn may have travelled to north Africa and Canada and around Cape Horn to Chile and Peru, but they had never strayed far out of their own parishes. I read of one

seafarer who had sailed to Sydney and Lima, although he'd never been to nearby Abersoch or Llanbedrog. Llanbedrog is just one of the impressive beaches all around the Llŷn. My favourites are those around Nefyn, where the mountains really do sweep down to the sea. Traeth Nefyn, with its bright, candy-striped beach huts and huddle of whitewashed stone cottages near the harbour, is one of the reasons I'm here, in fact. I wanted to see if it lived up to my childhood memories as a smashing beach (it does).

A different part of the Llŷn's coastline beckons us at Llanystumdwy. We cross the busy A497 to reach the footpath down to the River Dwyfor, which we trail until it reaches the sea. The outlook is over Tremadog Bay to the distant mountains of Snowdonia.

The Victorian seaside resort of Criccieth is in our sights as we stroll above the >

INFORMATION

Both Porth y Swnt visitor centre and Llŷn Maritime Museum are closed until further notice

ESSENTIALS

HOW LONG
Three nights

WHEN
We went in summer this time, but have been in winter when it's beautifully bracing and peaceful

HOW MUCH
Fuel Average 28mpg (425 miles; Staffordshire-north Wales return) **£89.25**
Site fees **£78.15**
Parking Aberdaron, Llangollen and Beddgelert **£8**
Entrance fees As a National Trust member I got free entry to Porth y Swnt interpretation
TOTAL £175.40



TOP TIP

Llanystumdwy Camping and Caravanning Club Site is in a national dark zone, so a torch is essential

DID YOU KNOW?

Three pilgrimages to Bardsey was equivalent to one pilgrimage to Rome

LEFT Porth Dinllaen

BELOW Engine driver on the Llangollen Railway waiting for the signal to go

RIGHT Bardsey Island from Pen y Cil



Must do... Climb up Pen y Cil for a great view of Bardsey Island



Must see... The splendid atmospheric ruins of Castell Dinas Brân

beach and behind the dunes and cross swampy stretches on boardwalks. Edward I's sturdy Criccieth Castle becomes our focus and, as we get nearer, Harlech Castle – another of Edward's 'iron ring' of defences to keep the Welsh out – appears as a vague shadow on the horizon.

We stop for ice cream at Cadwaladers (eating Cadwaladers ice cream is a seaside ritual when in Wales) before continuing over the pebbles at the eastern end of Criccieth's popular beach and up onto cliffs overlooking the expanse of Black Rock Sands.

It comes as a big surprise to see what is a truly fine beach covered in cars and motorhomes. Looking back to Criccieth from our peaceful spot we can see men fishing whilst, off Black Rock Sands, thrill-seekers are scooting around in the water on jet skis. Happily, the sounds do not reach us.

We've been extremely lucky with the weather. Every time we've been to Beddgelert – to which we briefly detoured on our way over to the Llŷn – it's been raining heavily. It was almost a shock, therefore, to see Beddgelert in blazing sunshine, the river sparkling beside us as we walked down through the beautiful Aberglaslyn gorge from the village.

All my plentiful memories of soggy

waterproofs and moaning kids and wandering in and out of Beddgelert's small cafés and gift shops in a futile bid to stay dry were washed away on this trip. Every man – and their dogs – were paddling in the Glaslyn or perched on rocks in the middle.

It's from a far more elevated viewpoint that we experience our final thrill in north Wales. Passing through Llangollen on our way home, hearing the toot of one of the steam trains of the heritage railway, Castell Dinas Brân (castle of the crows) calls to us. I can't resist; I love these atmospheric ruins of a once-splendid thirteenth century castle which are visible for miles.

We park Roly near the Dee, then cross the canal above the wharf where tourists are waiting to board one of the horse-drawn barges to take them to Thomas Telford's Horseshoe Falls. A quiet lane leads us to the bottom of the 'twmp' on which the landmark sits, before zigzagging up more steeply to the windswept top.

The exhilarating panorama takes in the Berwyn and Eglwyseg mountains and the Llantysilio Mountain high above the Horseshoe Pass. To the east, I see another of Telford's creations, the renowned Pontcysyllte Aqueduct – the 'stream in the sky' – which carries the canal over the Dee Valley. Heavenly? You bet! **MMMM**

THE CAMPSITE

Llanystumdwy Camping and Caravanning Club Site

Tyddyn Sianel, Criccieth
LL52 0LS

☎ 01766 522855

📍 campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk

📅 1 April – 27 September

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £22.45

ALTERNATIVE SITES

Ty'n y Coed Touring Park

Lon Groes, Morfa Nefyn,
Pwllheli LL53 6BP

☎ 01758 720564/07776
182614

📍 tyn-y-coed-touringpark.co.uk

📅 March – October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £24

PREMIER Bodnant Caravan Park, Nebo Road,

Llanrwst LL26 0SD

☎ 01492 640248

📍 bodnant-caravan-park.co.uk

📅 March – October

£ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £24