

# itinerary 6 - Houses and Gardens of North Wales

company name: **Plas Tan y Bwlch**

name of tour: **Houses and Gardens of North Wales**

dates of tour: **available upon request**

no. of days and nights: **7 days, 6 nights**

published rate: **from £690 p.p.**

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In this course we will explore the principle houses, gardens, and designed landscapes of North Wales and the relationship between natural and man-made beauty. Houses, castles, gardens and landscapes, in both public and private hands, are the raw materials of this course. Lecturers and guest speakers from the University of Wales, the National Trust, the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust and the Ffestiniog Railway Society will address topics, including the picturesque movement in landscape and garden history.

Field trips each day will take us to houses, castles and gardens of international importance, set in and around one of the most dramatic and exciting landscapes of the British Isles, the Snowdonia National Park. Plas Newydd and Bodnant are both houses and gardens owned by the National Trust; but we shall also be visiting Gwydir Castle and the Nanhoron Estate, both privately owned, and the latter seldom opening its doors to the public. The famous seaside gardens at Portmeirion, designed by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, will figure in our itinerary, but so too the private ancestral gardens of the Williams-Ellis family at Plas Brondanw. We shall see Caernarfon and Beaumaris castles, great Norman strongholds, and the magnificent native Welsh Border Castle of Powis, built of red sandstone in the Severn Valley in the Welsh Marches. Extra-curricular activity will include a visit to the seaside, an evening of traditional Welsh music, a visit to an art gallery, a pub lunch, and a ride on the famous narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway. The focal point of our course will be the mansion of Plas Tan y Bwlch, a Victorian house of the Welsh and English gentry, set in a magnificent designed picturesque landscape and park.

## day 1

Arrival at Plas and registration followed by a sherry reception and Welcome/Croeso by Llew Evans, Director of Plas Tan y Bwlch. After dinner there will be an introduction to the week and a lecture on The Historic Gardens, Houses and Landscapes in North Wales by David Jeffreys, Director of Plas Glyn-y-Weddw Gallery and course leader.

## day 2 - a day out on the Llŷn peninsula

Morning: We shall be visiting Nanhoron, a fine 'retarditif' eighteenth-century manor house on one of the largest estates of the Llŷn. The estate has been in the same family, the Lloyd-Edwards, for many centuries. David Harden, Esq., the present owner, is a gentleman farmer and President of the Country Landowners Association (Wales). His wife, Mrs. Bettina C. Lascelles Harden, is Chairman of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust. Nanhoron possesses fine furniture, silver and pictures, and two walled gardens, presently undergoing imaginative restoration under the expert eye of Mrs Harden who has kindly agreed to open house, garden, and park for us and talk to us about the history of the house and landscape.

We shall then proceed to a point on the peninsula where we may, weather permitting, glimpse the island of Bardsey, reputedly the burial place of 20,000 Celtic Saints, and stop briefly to survey the gardens at Plas yn Rhiw. If the weather is clear we shall glimpse the Wicklow Mountains and the coast of Ireland across the Irish Sea. We shall take lunch at Plas Glyn y Weddw, a haunted Victorian mansion, once the dower house of the Love-Jones-Parry family who served at the court of Queen Elizabeth I. After lunch there will be an opportunity to stroll in the gardens and walk on the nearby beach, with its views across Cardigan Bay to the mountains of Snowdonia and Harlech Castle.

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## day 3 - an easy day at the seaside and in local gardens

Portmeirion, a village, garden and harbour in the Italianate style, is the creation of the famous Welsh architect, Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, a close friend of the American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Sir Clough wished to design a seaside resort free from advertisements and unplanned buildings on a beautiful peninsula, part of the family estate. Apart from the hotel in which Sir Noel Coward completed one of his most famous plays, conspicuous buildings are the half-Romanesque and half-Baroque Campanile, and the Bath House Colonnade, (18th Century and rescued from Bristol in 1957). The village is surrounded by splendid gardens, notably the "Gwylt" (Wilderness), with species Camellias and Rhododendron in the Spring.

After lunch at Plas Tan y Bwlch we shall then proceed to Plas Brondanw, the ancestral home of Sir Clough, to explore his intimate gardens set in the landscape of the Snowdonia National Park and aligned on the dramatic peak of Cnicht.

Before dinner, accompanied by David Jeffreys, we shall explore the gardens of Plas Tan y Bwlch and the picturesque ravine and lake of Llyn Mair. For the adventurous the walk will be extended to the atmospheric lake of Llyn Hafod y Llyn.

## day 4 - excursion to powis castle in the welsh marches (borders)

At Powis we shall tour both castle and gardens. The gardens are of the highest historic and cultural importance and are fine at all times of the year. Powis Castle, of mellow red sandstone and perched on a rock above its late 17th century garden terraces, contains one of the finest country house collections in Wales. It was built circa 1200 AD by the native Welsh Princes and for 400 years was owned and altered by successive generations of the Herbert and Clive families. It is frequently used by H.R.H. Charles, Prince of Wales as a base when he visits and entertains in Wales. En route there will be an opportunity to see some of the finest Welsh landscapes and visit a woollen mill.

## day 5 - whole day on the isle of anglesey, and a tour through the dramatic passes and valleys of snowdonia

Morning: Anglesey, in Welsh, Ynys Môn or "Mam Cymru" (Mother of Wales) is rich in historic and prehistoric sites. It was also a stronghold of the native Welsh princes of Gwynedd until the conquest in 1282. Beaumaris Castle, architect, savoyard, James of St. George, was ready to repel the Welsh by 1298 and formed a part of the English King Edward I's defensive system, including the castles at Caernarfon, Harlech and Conwy. All are of great architectural importance and magnificently sited. The small town of Beaumaris is pleasantly situated and an important yachting centre.

Afternoon: Plas Newydd is an impressive 18th century house by James Wyatt in unspoilt surroundings on the Menai Strait, with picturesque views of Snowdonia. The house contains Rex Whistler's largest and last wall mural in trompe l'oeil and an exhibition about his work. In the military museum are campaign relics of the first Marquess of Anglesey and the Battle of Waterloo. There is a very fine garden and parkland and an interesting walk along the Menai Strait. The Seventh Marquess and Marchioness still live in the house and take an active interest in the development of the gardens. The Seventh Marquess has lately completed the authoritative history of the British cavalry.

Either a free evening or a film show, as you choose. The Welsh film "Hedd Wyn" (with English sub-titles) is about a local Welsh hero and poet who fought and died in the First World War - there won't be a dry eye in the house and the film is a compelling evocation of war, contrasted with the hardship and idyllic tranquility of the farming life of Wales in the early 20th century.

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## day 6 - the lledr and conwy valleys

We make our way into the Conwy Valley, passing the native Welsh fortress of Dolwyddelan, reputed birthplace of Llewelyn the Great, Prince of Wales.

Afterwards there will be an opportunity to explore the pretty village of Betws-y-Coed and have a pub lunch.

In the afternoon we drive to Bodnant Garden. Covering nearly 100 acres, Bodnant is one of the finest gardens in the British Isles, with magnificent rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias in the Spring; there are formal terraces, and an outstanding collection of ornamental trees. The Dell, a ravine garden, evokes sensations of paradise and the Garden of Eden. The gardens are situated above the River Conwy, with spectacular views over the Snowdon range. Our homeward journey will give us further glimpses of the heart of Snowdonia.

## day 7 - landscape, townscape, two castles and an elizabethan merchant's house

In the morning we drive to Gwydir Castle beneath Carreg y Gwalch (Rock of the Falcon), the ancestral home of the powerful Wynn Family, descendants of the kings of Gwynedd, and one of the most significant families of North Wales during the Tudor and Stuart periods. The Castle has a most interesting historical connection with the United States of America and is being sympathetically restored by Mr and Mrs Peter Welford, present owners, who will introduce us to their house and garden.

In the afternoon we proceed to the walled town of Conwy, with its noble Edwardian castle, theatrically set and one of the most picturesque of Welsh fortresses. The little town, within the walls, is a lively resort and yachting centre, and home of the Royal Cambrian Academy. In the middle of the town is one of the finest Elizabethan town houses in Wales, recently restored by CADW, the Welsh body responsible for the restoration of historic monuments. Sadly, this is our last full day together, so we shall again make our way home through one of the great passes over Snowdon.

In the evening there will be a farewell dinner, with traditional Welsh music.

Partnership North Wales and North Wales Tourism

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is correct at the time of print 2007.