



A Quirky Destination: Portmeirion

These days, hotel stays are considered a little passé and a trend has emerged for staying in establishments termed “restaurant with rooms”. Such is the status of food and gourmet dining in popular culture right now that hoteliers have come to realise that a luxurious bed and décor can only get you so far; but offer a menu peppered with the yield of the onsite kitchen garden and meat that, pre-plate, grazed in the field next door and eager guests be queuing out of the door faster than you can say “field to fork”.

Recent years have seen some excellent restaurant-with-room options emerge, including places such as The Moody Goose at the Old Priory hotel in Bath and the Artist Residence in South Leigh, Oxfordshire, which was once a country pub but now with its bohemian twist and arty vibe, is offering fabulous food and quirky rooms. In keeping with this better than ever array of picture perfect restaurants with rooms, for a truly magical escape to feed your inner child and revive your soul, an escape to the village of Portmeirion will not disappoint.

To say that Portmeirion is an enchanting Italianate village in North Wales doesn't relay the magic of this unique place. It is a self-contained gem of unique rarity. In addition to its architectural heritage, its stunning setting and sub-tropical gardens, Portmeirion has two stylish hotels, a cluster of self-catering cottages, shops, a spa, cafes and restaurants and an authentic Italian style gelateria. In short, once you enter the gates of Portmeirion,



you enter a magical kingdom and you can be as detached from the outside world and indeed reality as you choose.

As a busy writer and mother of four young children, I found an escape to this quirky, architectural wonderland to be just the tonic. Indeed, if Portmeirion were to be likened to a culinary dish, it would be chicken soup for the soul. It's a difficult place to categorise because it is not a restaurant with rooms, but then nor is it simply self-catering cottages or hotels. It is, in some respects, an architectural paradise that provides a range of different accommodation options and excellent cuisine but then this adequately describes Portmeirion, too. Perhaps it is best described as somewhere that offers an experience and a place that is unlike any other.

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During my stay I was able to understand why Portmeirion was a favourite haunt of The Beatles, the place where Noël Coward wrote *Blithe Spirit* and the home of the Sixties hit cult television series, *The Prisoner*. It is a place that inspires great thinking and if you're after a refreshing break, and some blue-sky thinking, this is definitely the place to visit.

It became glaringly obvious during my visit why this Welsh tourist village, designed and built by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis between 1925 and 1975, has achieved such relevance in popular culture. It is a place that offers something for everyone, young and old.

For adults it offers the perfect respite retreat or a romantic get-away, but for families it offers many opportunities including those to explore the village, grounds and woods. It is certain that Portmeirion is an exciting environment for children of all ages, making it a great location for a fantastic family getaway. My six-year-old and nine-year-old were wowed by the colourful shades of the buildings and architectural quirks as much as they were captivated by the idea that fairies were bound to exist in the woodlands, while my toddler simply loved pottering around and the adored the land train.

Portmeirion also offers a good mix of dining options that are suitable for differing needs. Ranging from the beautiful and award-winning art deco Hotel Portmeirion restaurant to the more relaxed options of numerous cafes or lunch in the brasserie in Castell Deudraeth.

Castell Deudraeth offers a warm and friendly environment with excellent service and simple but well-executed dishes. Compared with the fine-dining ambiance of its big sister Hotel Portmeirion, Castell Deudraeth offers a more relaxed, but still culinary sumptuous, menu with all-day dining in a conservatory area, bilingual menus (so you can practice your Welsh language skills) and a good selection of Welsh spirits and beers. One of the things I loved about dining at Deudraeth, apart from the very nice gin and tonic that came garnished with fresh violets and juniper berries, was being able to retire to the wood-panelled lounge after dinner for coffee by the roaring fire.

No matter the time of year, Portmeirion is well worth the trip; it's mismatched architecture sets the colour of the



Mediterranean against the picturesque landscape of North Wales – and the mountains of Meirionnydd offers a dramatic contrast during the winter months and an unusual almost dreamlike vision in the summer.

All of the accommodation is of an excellent standard and everything is offered with a quirky edge. The dining options for vegetarians and meat eaters alike are excellent and for picky eaters and young children, the understanding and obliging nature of the staff is outstanding.

In conclusion, if you are looking to visit somewhere different this year then Portmeirion is a place to make memories and a place that you thought only existed in dreams.

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