

Discovering Wales: Top Experiences and Hidden Gems – Episode 143

UK Travel Planner podcast features expert advice on exploring Wales

Tracy: Thinking about visiting Wales, but not sure where to start. In episode 143 of the UK Travel Planner podcast, I, chat with John Hadwin of Boutique Tours of Wales about the top experiences that make this country so special. From breathtaking outdoor adventures to rich history, culture, and incredible food and drink. John shares his expert recommendations, including some hidden gems and seasonal must dos. We also discuss Wrexham and why exploring Wales should be on every traveler's list. Tune in for insider tips and inspiration for your next Welsh adventure.

Welcome to episode 143 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast

intro: Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracey shares destination guides, travel tips and, itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands, and from the picturesque countryside, seaside towns.

Tracy: Hi, and welcome to episode 143 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. and this week I am joined by John Hedman. Again, Again, John. This is the third episode that

John Hadwin has been on my podcast to talk about all things Wales.

John: Oh, thank you very much, Tracy. It's a privilege. and, I'm, I'm so enamoured that you keep coming back. And, I know the reason why, because.

Tracy: Go on and tell me.

John: Nobody knows anything about whales.

Tracy: Well, clearly, clearly you are our Wales expert. Definitely. So episode 89, last year you were on and just before Christmas on episode 128, talking about cruise ship, excursions. Now, today we're going to talk about what you consider to be the five best experiences that you can have.

John Hadwin runs boutique tours of North Wales

Now, I know your kind of specialism is North Wales, but, but, but there's two things I really want to talk to you about. One is kind of, I know you go to Liverpool, which, before anybody tells me, I know it's not in Wales, but I know you do excursions to Liverpool, and I love Liverpool, but I have to start with talking about Wrexham. So introduce yourself, tell us who you are, what you do, and let's talk about Wrexham. John.

John: Okay, lovely, thank you. well, I'm John Hadwin, the owner, proprietor and the only person bar, my lovely wife running boutique tours. So when you come out with me, you get me. and I'm with you from your first inquiry right to the end of the tour physically. So, yeah, I've been operating tours since 2009 under the name of Boutique Tours and very,

Much specialise in Wales and private tours have come into a league of their own certainly, since COVID and it's very niche market and if I've got to sum up a visit to Wales, one of the best ways of doing it is actually. Not that I'm blowing my own trouble here but public transport is not great. So if you want to get around in a very limited time, you've really got to consider making the most of that time and making the most of your visit. Probably utilising somebody like myself to help you get the best out of your visit to Wales. So yeah, we've got a beautiful country, very historic, very scenic and what I call Britain's best kept secret. And everybody who comes out with me vouches for that very experienced when we go touring. So, couple of celebrities. I know you put me up there as one.

Tracy: Oh yeah, absolutely.

John: We've got a couple of Hollywood celebrities with Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenny who invested in a pretty unknown football club in the north eastern corner of Wales. Wrexham AFC. They were languishing in the non league, football leagues and they came along and put a proposal to the members. Now the club is owned by the people and they allowed them to buy in and it's been a fantastic success. And of course they brought their Hollywood experience with them and brought out the TV series, welcome to Wrexham which has been a massive hit worldwide. And I tell you, everybody who gets in the car with me now, when we leave from Liverpool or Chester or they're in Wales, they want to go to Wrexham and they want to go and see the football club. So what is it about the club? well, they've done a great job. There's a lot of personalities behind the scenes as well as the two guys. But you know, we're very proud here in Wales. I am a soccer man. So if you do come touring with me, you're going to get the benefit of the soccer, aspects. and I get told off for calling soccer.

Tracy: I was about to say that John.

John: Down the golf club, the guy is always my legacy. I can tell you've been out with the Americans.

Tracy: When you said that. I could hear Doug going, why is it call it. Why is it call it soccer? It's football. But then because you're a Liverpool supporter, he'll forgive you.

John: I tell you, I'm not.

Tracy: No, I thought you were. Don't see a Manchester United otherwise I.

John: Have to I was a schoolboy in Manchester City. All right, Manchester United. So it won't like, that I was too. That was too good for Liverpool.

Tracy: Oh. Oh.

Wrexham is the third oldest football club in the UK

John: So anyway, get on the Welsh subject. Wrexham, basically. Wrexham was founded in 1864, so they are the third oldest football club in the UK and, Wrexham the oldest in Wales. And, we have, with the Racecourse ground, one of the oldest international football stadiums in the world. So that, in its own right, has got, people's interest. Of course, we've hosted great FA cup, games there, the Knockout Cups. And, we get these great international games and European football matches. So, yeah, Wrexham is in a league of its own. And of course, if you want to throw a little addition into Wrexham,

look at the lager, the beer, which is brewed. And we have the oldest lager, in Britain, being produced in Wrexham that is now being franchised through the two guys, Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenny, into the U.S. so Rex is going places. And, you know, they are, our newest city of Wales. We only have seven cities in Wales, so pretty much one of the last things before Her Majesty the Queen passed away, she made Wrexham city. she gave it city status. So, Wrexham has, been a little, sleepy back quarter of a mining industrial area. of course, we have no mining there now. So, now the football is, helping create a great tourism industry and people.

Tracy: Absolutely. It's amazing.

John: If you come talking football in Wales, you'll find them very passionate. There isn't another team.

Tracy: So let's put that as our top experience. Well, there isn't, is there? That's a put that as our top experience because I can guarantee that the majority of people who listen to this podcast will be fans. should I confess, I've not actually watched it yet. I will. I will do. I actually was talking to an Australian friend of mine the other day, and she was talking about it, and I was like, am I the only person in the universe that has not watched this series? So, honestly, Wrexham is totally on the map. And I'm guessing you get a lot of requests for going to visit, and.

John: It'S so easy to reach. It's just off the highway that runs through Wales. you know, if you're coming in across the English border, you're talking like 20 miles across the border to reach Wrexham. And, the great thing is, if you've watched the welcome to Wrexham is the, pub. The Turf. everybody wants to visit the Turf. And if you go in there, you do become the celebrity. If you're an international visitor, people do make time for

you. And I mean I even get people behind the bar getting a picture, you know, photograph, pulling pints behind the bar there. Then we go around the other side of the ground. We go to the the souvenir store, and the shop. but if people want to come and see a game, the guys have now made international tickets a limited allocation for international visitors because there's such a following from the US you. There is a held back ticket stock for you so you can get priority. And if you want help and assistance on the day, then, you know, make sure you get me a ticket as well and I can come along with you and show you everything where it is and even buy a pint of WREX and beer or two.

Tracy: That sounds like a good deal to me.

John: The game goes. If you don't know football because it's a bit different to NFL.

Tracy: Yeah. Or Australian football, which I know nothing about.

John: I'll pop.

Tracy: I probably said that completely wrong as well because I'm not a sports fan at all.

What else would you suggest people experience when they go to Wales

So let's talk about other experiences that you can have. So you can have your kind of your football fix by going to Wrexham and your kind of Hollywood star fix. What else would you suggest that people experience when they go to Wales?

John: Well, if you're in that neck of the woods, it makes a great entrance and gateway to Wales. coming in, you have a beautiful historic house down the road called Erdigan, which is a bit of life, in a manor house from upstairs, downstairs lifestyle. So think of Downton Abbey. It's our equivalent in Wales. Further on down the road and quite close by you've got the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Frons of Le Caqueduct. People don't know about it probably because they can't say the name, but it sits on UNESCO World Heritage site of the Llangollen Canal. So in English they would say Llangollen. In Welsh we say Llangollen. And there's a 11 mile stretch of canal there with a stream in the sky and you can walk across it, you can boat across it, you can kayak across it. You're about 130ft above the river Dee, which is the border river.

Tracy: Wow.

John: And the scenery is absolutely

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John: stunning. And to be honest, if I start a tour of Wales, I use that as one of my first stops and people rave about it and said well, everything's got to be downhill from here. And I said, no, this is just a warm up. When you go touring with me, I'll take you off the beaten track and up in the hills around the Dee Valley. I'll take you up onto Offa's Dyke, which is, a national walking trail around the backbone of Wales. And, there's a little track up there I drive on and you can get the most amazing views down into the Dee Valley, which is one of our sort of three areas of outstanding natural beauty in North Wales. yeah, you've got Dinas Bran Castle, which is a fantastic little hike up into the hills there. And you're really in another world and it's so tranquil. And, it is worth you crossing the border to come and see this beauty that we have in Wales and, the history

that goes with it, because that is just the first of 640 listed castle sites in Wales.

I was going to ask you kind of what experience would showcase Welsh history and culture

Tracy: I was going to ask you kind of what experience you would say would showcase Welsh history and culture. But it's got to be the castles, hasn't it, really? I mean, there's so many. A lot of them are in ruins, though I will say yes.

John: I do get the odd person coming off the cruise ships, for example, saying, I'm really disappointed with the castles. They're not furnished. And I'm going, well, they are 800 years old. And we have actually got one in the border area just south of, Llangollen and the Fronic Aquada, which again makes a perfect touring day out of Wrexham. Turk. And it's the only castle that's still lived in today from mediaeval times. So that's, that's part of the National Trust comes, under their, their group. So if you're carrying the Royal Oak membership, that's one you could use your membership card for when you're here in, in Britain. So, yeah, you've got a fantastic day on day one there already, I was gonna say.

Tracy: I mean, that's already. We've got, we've got the outdoors, we've got history and culture. Now I'm getting, I'm getting hungry and I've got a thirst on.

What would you recommend that I try when it comes to Welsh food and drink

What would you recommend that I, I try when it comes to, Welsh food and drink?

John: Okay, you want, you've got to be spoiled for choice now. How big is the menu? well, we've got, national dishes. I always talk to people. I say the one you have to try before you leave the country and it is pretty much available everywhere. You even get it in England. But the English don't make it as good as it is in Wales. And the difference is it's got a bit of mustard in it, and the English kill it with their mustard. So our homemade Welsh mustards are, quite nice. They're, seeded mustards. It's a background taste. It doesn't kill the flavour of cheese, which predominantly is what the dish is. So think of cheese on toast. Okay. And, it's a luxury version of cheese on toast. I did have some guys from the US said, oh, it's, the Welsh version of a pizza.

Tracy: Oh, okay. That's an interesting take on it.

John: well, yeah, the dough's a bit different, but, no, Welsh rare. But you have to try it. And I've got three or four places that I go with the tours that I pick out that I rate amongst the best places for Welsh rarebit. So that's a privilege of coming out on tour with me. One of my little secrets, to go along with that, we've got, unique, other tastes. Do you know we had a Welsh caviar?

Tracy: No.

John: You do now.

Tracy: I do. I didn't know.

John: Called lava bread. Okay. And it's a specialty from the South Wales. Often it's

served at breakfast time, so you'll get it on your plate with your fried or poached egg. it's normally served with cockles and lava. bread is basically boiled seaweed, but it's our Welsh version of, a caviar. It's the nearest we can get to caviar, so we like to push things up. But I tell you, people are not disappointed when they try it. Now, you can get lava bread when you go to, like, the market stores where they sell fresh fish. So, for example, in the Cardiff open market, you can go to the fish market there they'll be selling cockles, small shellfish, and, you'll get a punnett of lard bread with it. and that is their specialty from the South.

Tracy: I have to say I'm just going to. I'm going to interrupt there, John, because it's a good job that people listening couldn't see my face because it doesn't appeal, I have to say. But I don't particularly like anything fishy or anything like that.

John: So.

Tracy: Does it taste fishy?

John: It does. Tastes of the sea. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tracy: So not for me. Definitely not.

John: It's not everybody's cup of tea, but I'm a great Believer. when I joined the travel industry 40 years ago, I was a very fussy eater. Now, my spectrum goes right across the board. And the motive is when you're travelling, just try it. Nothing to lose, you never know what you're missing. And, when you come out, when you come out with me on tour, that is top of our list.

Tracy: Okay, we'll get a photo of me trying it and we'll get a video.

John: Of me trying to. I'll get you on, on camcorder for that one. Now, other aspects we have, obviously we have a lot of sheep in Wales. So

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John: lamb as a meat is, a dish that we serve up in many different ways. But traditionally the Sunday roast in Wales is always roast leg of lamb. And if you catch me in the kitchen on a day off, that's usually what I'm cooking. So, yeah, we have your specialty then. Yeah, yeah.

Tracy: Is that your speciality, John?

John: My grandchildren, round last week and I was cooking then. I was. Because we had 14 for dinner.

Tracy: Wow.

John: So I was cooking two legs of lamb and, the little grandson comes in, he's only four years old and says, granddad, is there a two legged lamb running around outside somewhere? So that carried. That carried me all day with a bit of a laugh and a chuckle. yeah. So whilst I'm cooking, I like a drop of Welsh wine. And not, many people know we produce wine in Wales. So, We've got about 18 different vineyards across the country. So again, one of my new tours this year is actually to introduce people to a Taste of Wales. And so we'll be going to the vineyard, we'll be getting the, Welsh rare, but we'll be getting another national dish, leaked potato soup.

Tracy: Oh, nice.

John: We got cheeses as well in Wales. We've got some great cheeses. And, if you're not into visiting a vineyard, wasting time, I can bring out a little picnic and we go out to a castle site in Snowdonia and sit in the hills with the views. so, yeah, there's another nice day for you that might be better than the Welsh caviar day.

Tracy: Yeah, I think so. I think so.

Tasting of Wales has become pretty good, particularly with gin

But now I have to do it. Now you've said it, I have to try it.

John: amongst the taster, Wales, we've got things like, Welsh whisky. we got lots of microbreweries and popping, up. Recently there's been quite a range of, gin people. So, you know, gin tasting, in Wales has become pretty good and we've Got a couple of very good producers here in the north that I go to. So, again, I introduced it sort of on the soft sell this year when we're passing by. I said, how do you fancy a taste of Wales with a taste of gin? And people were raving about it and actually I couldn't get them out and they were out with bottles loading the car up, so it must have been good. yeah. So, you know, chuck all that together, you're not going to be lost. for a good taste of Wales. And we've got a couple of traditional dishes like cowl and lobscous. They're the stews from simple sort of mining and farming communities. so it's a very cultural sort of, style of, dining. Again, we can pop into places where they do the lobscos and cowl as well. So that's just a. A few little tasters for you to get your taste buds going.

Tracy: Oh, no, definitely. Well, so we've experienced some football, we've experienced some outdoor kind of activities and enjoying the. The views. We've, we've now got some experience of some history and culture and we've talked about some food.

So what else would you say people have to experience when they go to Wales

So what else would you say that people have to experience when they go to Wales?

John: how about some hidden gems? We've got quite a few of them in Wales now. A few I've just pulled out the bag are quite easy ones to reach if you're travelling independently or you come on tour with us. We're a small country, so we're no bigger than the state of Massachusetts in the US. So give you an idea. We're roughly just over 3 million people, but we have unique places like the smallest house in Great Britain. We have the smallest church or chapel, which is close by and just down the road. We've also got the smallest cathedral. And now those. Those all pop up on a following day from the. The Borderland tour. we talked about just around the Wrexham area. In that same vicinity, we have got, a holy shrine called Saint Winifred's well, and that when I take people there, they're amazed. Why don't we know about this? And that officially is one of the seven wonders of Wales, which was written in a poem by a tourist in the 17th century. And, it talked about Wrexham with its steeple, Gresforth with its, church, Snowdon without its people, Pistol Rider, which is a waterfall, Llangollen with its bridge. And of, course, St Winifred as well. So, yeah, this is one of the old hidden gems. Now that shrine goes back to mediaeval times and we have had kings, and queens come to actually bathe in the waters there. It's got very good healing powers and bizarrely I've witnessed people come out cured who couldn't walk. They went in, helped in out of

wheelchairs or they came in on crutches to the poolside and they walked out freely unaided. And I met a guy from Spain recently there and he said I, I come here every year to take the water because it's cured me. And he said I was a triple, I couldn't walk and I didn't believe until actually saw it. And you know there are a lot of Catholics who go there because it's a Catholic shrine. So it's just worth seeing because the architecture of the place is nice and it's got a unique story attached to it. So I'm going to leave that for the people to come and hear it from me because it's a beautiful story, connected to Saint

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John: Winifred who's ah, the saint of the well itself. So it's known as Saint Winifred's well and it is a real hidden gem, off the sort of tourist domain but quite easy to reach. waterfalls if you like the great outdoors. They're in abundance and we've got three, four. Pistol Rider I just mentioned is the biggest of the waterfalls hidden in the borderlands. Very difficult and awkward to get there but you know, if you love your hiking, a little bit of a scramble and a climb up. The views from the top of the waterfall are amazing but you need two to three hours there to see it properly. little roadside drop Swallow Falls, it's our famous waterfall. They're beautiful any time of year. and then if you like a little bit of a walk for about two hours on the coast near where they make the famous gin, called Aber Falls Gin, the distillery. So you either start with the gin with the gin, you walk up there and it's about two and a half hour round trip walk to the fantastic waterfalls there. what else can we take you? let's think Snowdon, the mountain, the coastline. so Snowdon is unique in its own way in that we've got a railway that goes to the top of the mountain and so you can take a train or a diesel train to the top. That is probably the most popular element that people go for when they come. They put it up there as number one choice. I gotta give you a tip if you're gonna come and think about doing it.

one, you have to gauge the weather because if you book your ticket, you can't get a refund on a cloudy day. two, it excels out nearly every day of the week, so especially weekends. And you have to sort of get it. If that's a must do with a lot of people do have it at the top of their list, then grab hold of that early and book it. You can book it online. Another great little place I go to the bottom end of, Sorry, it's not the bottom end. It's in the middle of Snowdonia and it's hidden away. It's a farm, traditional farm that the, Snowdonia Society have opened and invested in, has got the most fantastic cultural story. Attached to it is where a very famous poet came from in Wales and he used to win our, nationalised Stedfords for his best stories and poetry. And that is absolutely fascinating when I get people into that. one year you're on open farmland, roaded countryside and you walk into this 17th, going on 18th century farmhouse and, it's in a time warp and, is absolutely spectacular and again, people love it. It's got a lovely visitor centre with a cafe there and bathrooms. so it's a little bit off the beaten track and hard to find. But again, if you're coming on a private tour, the great thing about working with somebody like myself is I know the lay of the land, I know what we can get into a day. And usually, what I do when I start talking to people, I give them a menu of like, here's what you can see, but like a restaurant menu. You pick out what you want, you know, what you want to eat, what you want to do and, I try and frame the tour personally around that. So that's just a few things in a nutshell. Of course, you've got the island of Anglesey, an area of outstanding beauty. one of the great things of getting onto that island, it's got a beautiful, spectacular coastline, 125 miles of coastal walks around it take you about 12, 13 days. If you want to be that energetic.

Tracy: No, I wouldn't.

John: And where we've got the port of Holyhead, there's a, there's a mountain, a country park, and on the far side of that there is, some ocean cliffs with a spectacular

lighthouse and it's called South Stack. That is a top One, for people. And it gets you onto the island to see by the island because same thing with the island. Unusual, quirky, got to be Welsh. Go to the town with the longest name. I'll give you a challenge. Count letters. Okay. And anybody who wants to write in about that qualifying factor is you're not going to be Welsh. Okay. Count the letters, let me know how many you see. Because most people get it wrong.

Tracy: All right. I'm going to guess 48. And you can tell me whether I'm right or wrong or you can just tell me I'm wrong.

John: Probably you're wrong. We could be here all day. I could go higher, lower, like a card game.

Tracy: I thought it was higher.

John: I'll give you a clue. We have a Welsh Alphabet, so it's a trick question.

Tracy: okay.

John: Well, there's another unusual cultural feature with Wales. it's my get out of jail card.

Tracy: Yeah.

John: Right.

One area people mostly miss out on when travelling in Wales is the Clyn Peninsula

So also, one other area that people mostly miss out on, when they come to the north is there's a little bit of land that goes out into the Irish Sea called the Clyn Peninsula. So if you look at Conway Carnarvon and go south of Carnarvon, you come onto the Clin Peninsula. So people have heard of places like Portmeirion, the Italian style village, which is really unusual. Quite controversially, it's not really Welsh because it was built by a controversial architect, but it's a beautiful village to go into. Famous where they film the Prisoner. So any prisoner fans out there that's, on the must do list for you.

Tracy: My husband has a T shirt from there. I'm not a number or whatever. Something like that.

John: Yeah, A big golf ball out to catch you on the sands.

Tracy: That's right. That's right. It is beautiful though.

John: It's beautiful with the painted houses and the gardens in the summer. And, I'll give you a little inside tip there. Even if you're travelling independently. This is for all the people who travel independently who hire cars and don't need the tour guide. You get to Portmeirion, they've got a gate fee and it's about 20 pound to go in. So it's quite expensive. But it is a unique experience. Now the trick is if you go and have lunch at the castle before you go into Portmeirion. So the Castle Dudroy is at the top of the drive before you go down into the village, have a lunch there and as long as you have two courses, they give you a ticket to go in. Complimentary, but You've got to have the lunch first. Now, the lunch will cost you about 25 to 28 pound, roughly. It, it does move around

a little bit. Depends what they've got on the menu. So if you budget, say, 30 pound, you get like a free bar. Yeah, the lunch in that place is absolutely fantastic. Plus it's a real taste of Wales because pretty, much what they do is a, Is a taste of Wales on the menu. So, yeah, that's another place you should go.

Tracy: And see, I have been, I have been there, but, but I didn't do the launch now, you see, I should have spoken to you before that. But yes, I have been. And we, we're there in a beautiful sun, blue sky day. And it was, it was stunning there. It was gorgeous.

John: Yeah, it's one of those places. I get people going in for like half an hour all day. my philosophy is it's your tour, you know, you come a long way to see it. I don't dictate, oh, you've got half an hour here or 40 minutes or whatever I say, I guide you and say you can have a. If you want to see it properly, it's about two hours. you can stay there all day and wander through the forests. You know, they've got hundreds of acres of land. Yeah. A couple of hours. Normally you can get through the site and allow, another hour at least for lunch.

Tracy: Yes.

When is the best time or not the time to visit Wales

Now, I'm going to put you on the spot a little bit about seasons and when is the best time or not the time to visit Wales. And if there's anything in particular that if you've got a kind of free reign and you can visit any time from January to December that you would say, oh, come for this because it's amazing, or don't come in this period of time because it's not great time to come to Wales. What would you say?

John: Right, we are Britain, so we're on the west side of Britain. We get the westerly weather that comes in off the ocean, so we do attract a little bit of rain. So you can get rain any time of the year. But enough this year, sorry, last year we had the highest rainfall on record. but normally I would say if you want the best time of year to visit, May and June, I'll give you an example of how popular that is. I pretty much sell out for May and June, by the end of February. So, you know, that tells you it's one of the most popular times. September is also popular. You're going to get the main summer season, July, August when the kids are off school. So not, that's not everybody's favourite time to come because we got quite a big UK holiday market that comes in and takes the domestic holidays in Wales. So there's lots of cottages, farm houses, B B hotels etc so we got beautiful beaches and coastlines. So that's what people come for. The bucket and spade brigade as we call them. if you're going to come and like you, if you like hiking and walking then it's a great destination. There are thousands of miles of trails. We have 870 miles of coastline to walk. We have the unique Offa's dyke through the backbone of Wales. You never heard of it? Look it up. Offa's dyke was so called constructed by the King of Mercia who was known as King Offa in around about the late 6th early 7th century during COVID we were doing some excavations and there's a best preserved section is in mid Wales on the border with England. And they were digging up lots of Roman artefacts and they were saying that the archaeologists that they're predating it sort of three to five hundred years earlier in time which puts it into the Roman occupation. So they're trying to prove it was actually built by the Romans now and not offer. We think Arthur put his name on it after the Roman occupation to keep the unruly Welsh out of England or.

Tracy: To take the glory. I built it. I built it.

John: Yeah, yeah. Hiking is a fantastic thing but season wise, you know, if you go to

mountains you're going to get, you can get four seasons in a single day. you know we can get snow from November to March, April, in the mountains, must say we haven't had a lot of heavy snow. It tends to be quite light so the roads still run clear. It's when you go out into the mountains, when you're trekking underfoot

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John: that they get quite icy and quite dangerous. And we have wardens at all the major walk points usually saying the walks are safe or not safe. And my advice is you take the advice of the warden there, you know, don't attempt to go on the mountains. People do come up for days out for example and ignore their advice and they're the ones that end up in trouble. So yeah, Wales is beautiful no matter whether it's wet or sunny. And I have had quotes like that on TripAdvisor from touring days that it was a rainy day but wow, he brought the destination alive with all the history and all the things to see and do. And there are, there are places to go indoors, on a wet day. Places like, place, Newyth on the Isle of Anglesey. National Trust, Penryn Castle. It's not a mediaeval castle, it's what we call a folly. so there was a tycoon who bought a mountain who was involved in the slavery trade when the British banned it. And he bought a plot of land in Wales and bought a mountain and got into slate mining and made his fortune for his family that way. So yeah, that's an interesting story and place to visit as well. In the north, that's just up near the city of Bangor, Penryn Castle. So yeah, I think you can come here. You know, I mean we do get domestic tourism. Our hotels are staying open year round now, so they're staying open for the message. This week I've got some ladies arriving from Australia touring with me for three days in Snowdonia. And yeah, we've got a mixed bag of a forecast. We've got a bit of snow around, we've got a sunny day, we've got a wet day, you know, and I do brief people and, and you know, the great thing is you can watch the forecasts, they do move a little bit, but generally they're,

they're a lot clearer than they used to be and it does help, you know, so.

Tracy: I guess you can, you can shift things around if you need to. If you've got somebody on a multi data, I guess if you do come.

John: In the wind, if you do come in the winter, you need to bring like thermals and wrap up basically hats, gloves, scarves, that sort of stuff. you know, if you, if you don't want to travel, you can buy them when you get here. You know, the shops, shops are here as well and there's all the walking equipment. So if you need poles or new boots or shoes or whatever, you don't want to carry them, then you can get them here.

Tracy: Perfect.

My biggest tip to anybody coming from overseas is don't underestimate Wales

Now if somebody's there thinking, I want to, I want to experience all of these fantastic things that Wales has got to offer. what practical tips do you have that could kind of help them experience this as well as obviously with you?

John: Yeah, well, take me out of the frame. Okay? My biggest tip to anybody coming from, you know, overseas, internationally is don't underestimate Wales. now you might be thinking listening to this that you're planning a trip to Europe and you're going to visit Britain and you're looking for new things to do in Britain. And your tour might take you through England and into Scotland and maybe also into Ireland. But sitting right on that west coast is Wales. Small little country. biggest fault that people make is not allowing

enough time and you'll realise it when you get here. And that is the biggest feedback I get from international visitors. I wish we'd have realised what we were coming to. I wish we had researched it more. I wish that allowed more time for our visit. So that is the biggest thing to look at. People come for a day and say yeah, I've seen Wales done it but you can't physically do it all in a day. And I do get people wanted to want me to drive them through Wales in a day. I do do it. It's a long day, it's like 12 hour touring day and I'm just touching it and it's like a whistle stop tour. So give yourself five days. Okay? That's not me pitching for the business here. Give yourself five days. That's if you're touring independently with a car, for example, you'll thank me or you'll thank Tracy for it, I know you will. And have a look at the areas you come into because every area you go to here in the north, I can give you five good touring days without overlapping the same area. There's so much to see and do in each day. that is the big surprise. You're not going to be trying to fill a day out with something. And people say to me, you know about my tours when they come out with John, wow, we've seen so much today. We've seen about three or four times more than we could have ever done on our own. Well that's the benefit of doing a private tour because I know the lay of the land. You don't have to think about driving or parking or speeding and stuff like that. You know, there's the benefit of a private tour and using somebody local. You have their knowledge and you know they know where to park the car, they know where all the attractions are, they know where all the restaurants are. You know, you're on vacation, enjoy it. You know, it's worth the extra investment to do that. That's me pitching for the business now.

If you want you can base yourself in North Wales and from there experience England

Tracy: But I was also going to say because I did, I did talk about, I did mention Liverpool

at the very beginning. And the reason I'm saying this is that if you want you could base yourself in North Wales and From there you can experience some of England too. So Chester's not far away, Liverpool isn't far away. So actually, and I know that's,

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Tracy: that's something that you offer that not only can you give them the experiences in North Wales and Wales, but you can actually also cross over the border, there's no passport control. And take them in to see some of those beautiful English cities as well.

John: Yeah, I do a two city tour with Chester and Liverpool. In between we've got a beautiful village, workers village, industrial workers village, Very, very pretty. And it's a secret gem called Port Sunlight. Lord Leverhulme who built it for his workers. It's a fantastic little place. People just. Wow. Was this where their workers lived? You know they can't believe the quality of the place. And it sits right between Liverpool and Chester. Cheshire just over the border is a beautiful county. And I'm doing a tour featuring Chester. A little bit of history. Walk around the walls in the city. Then we pop out to a beautiful country in. You've got to come on this one. this little inn is up on a hill overlooking the Cheshire plain. It's on the walking trail and then the next hill along on the trail is where there's a mediaeval castle, built to protect the border with the English to the Welsh. And it makes a fantastic little day out. So I'm getting a lot of interest from cruise passengers on that tour for a day out from the ship because they want to get out of Liverpool. But yeah there's, there's something there for everyone. You know, if you're into your music then Liverpool's the home of the Beatles. And that is my new new big tour this year, the Beatles. I've really done a lot of research. I've got into it massively. My wife's going, God you are fanatic. You could, you could do a, take a degree and you know everything about everyone and you know all about the family and where, where

they were born, where they lived, all the houses and everything. So I got a lot of quirky little stories on the beach Paul, which is fascinating stuff and you do like a half a day or a full day. People think of the Cavern, you know, where they, they played and made the name. But there's a place that actually made them before they got to the Cavern. Made them with all the locals and yeah, fascinating stuff. So yeah, there's loads evolving and the reason all this has happened is I've actually moved closer towards the border. I still live in Wales, but, we've moved closer to where the family live, which is by Wrexham, to be honest. and getting into Chester and Liverpool is quite convenient now. So I am getting a lot of people asking for tours out of Liverpool and Chester who are there visiting to bring them into Wales. And ah, if you're in transit and touring around and you're hitting Ireland, Dublin, there's a fantastic ferry service, a very quick ferry service, takes about two hours to get across with the fast ferry from Dublin only 60 miles away. And I've got people who fly in to Dublin and come over to Wales to tour and then go back to Dublin. some go off to the Cotswold, some go to Scotland and the English Lake District. So again, if you're going off in that sort of direction, I can do a feed of what I call a transit tour day. So you're not wasting your touring time.

So lots happening as ever. I'm just trying to think how I'm actually going to ever go out on a day with you

So lots happening as ever.

Tracy: There is, there's lots. I'm just trying to think how I'm actually going to ever go out on a day with you because, there's so many I want to go out on, but you're so busy. You get booked up so well in advance because you're so popular. I don't know. And I'll be back later on in the year in the uk so maybe we can sort something out then. John.

John: Definitely we're going to get you in that.

Just share with our listeners where they can find you on UK Travel Planning podcast

Tracy: Now. Just share with our listeners where they can find you because that's, that's, that's the next question. I need you to tell everybody where you are and how they can get in touch with you to book.

John: Okay, so you'll find the website at, www.boutiquetours.wales. that's without the H because everybody tried to put a H in W A L E S. So Wales, we're not the ocean animal. Okay. you can also, WhatsApp me. you can email me, which is simply info. There's a contact form on, on the website. So that's the easiest one to use because if you fill that out, I've got some of your details and you can tell me what you're looking for. And if you've got nothing like planned and you want guidance and that's where it all, that's where I come in. I'm a very good tour planner. I call myself a tour director today. Very posh.

Tracy: I was going to say.

John: That sounds very posh, but yeah, People actually do say you are a true tour director by all your suggestions, because I'll suggest accommodation and I'll suggest restaurants to dine out at lunch stops. So it's more than just putting a tour together. It's all the little extras, like, you know, so it's one stop shop, basically.

Tracy: Perfect. Well, I will put a link to your website in the show notes@,

uktravelplanner.com forward slash, episode 143. Can you believe it? Episode 143. I can't believe I'm, at that point. I'm not sure. I know you will be back on the podcast, I'm sure sometime this year, John, but thanks so much for coming on again and chatting about your tours and about all things Welsh.

John: Yeah, my great pleasure message, to everybody listening in, you know, please do

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John: look us up in Wales because you are in for a great surprise and a beautiful destination. It won't fail, I promise you that. And I did say to somebody, when you go on tour with me, if it doesn't hit the mark, you get a full refund.

Tracy: Oh, okay. Well. Well, I'm sure it will hit the mark. Yeah. That confident 100%.

John: That's the feedback from everybody is always so positive when they come to Wales.

Tracy: Perfect. Oh, thanks, John.

John: Lovely. Thank you again. I look forward to the next.

Tracy: Thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the UK Travel Planning podcast. As always, show notes can be found@uktravelplanning.com if you've enjoyed the show, why not leave us feedback via text or a review on your favourite podcast app? We love to hear from you. And you never know, you may receive a shout out in a future episode. But as always, that just leaves me to say, until next week, happy UK Travel.

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