

TRAVEL

A DESTINATION YOU WILL FALLS FOR

PEACE AND QUIET - AND A THUNDEROUS WATERFALL - IS MUSIC TO THE EARS OF **MARTIN SHAW** ON A WELSH BREAK

TRAVEL REPORT WALES

THE highest waterfall in Wales was in full flow - and what a magnificent sight. It takes a bit of finding along the narrow one-track country lanes but it's well worth the drive and the occasional 100-yard reverse to find a passing place.

Some of the 'roads' in this Welsh valley are so little used lush grass sprouts up between the tyre tracks.

Pistyll Rhaeadr has an impressive 240ft (80m) drop and after a soggy summer and a soaking September the waterfall was gushing apace.

Jonathan Greatorex, our host at the cosy Hand at Llanarmon, said if there was one place we should visit it was Pistyll Rhaeadr.

The legacy of a wet summer was a waterfall in full force.

Rumour has it a recent visitor was none other than former England star Sir David Beckham.

He wasn't on the tourist trail with wife Victoria and the kids, however. It's said he was helicoptered into the picturesque - and secluded -

Ceiriog valley to shoot a shampoo advert at the waterfall.

Apparently the reason for his visit was rumbled - after bottles of a certain haircare product were found left on the rocks.

Our autumn visit to this stunning part of the North Wales borderlands meant a two-night stay at the Hand.

This historic former drovers inn dates back to the 16th century and with its roaring open fires it has been welcoming weary or stressed-out travellers for hundreds of years.

Owned by Jonathan and wife Jackie for the last three years the couple have turned the place into a relaxing get-away-from-it-all retreat.

You could say it's in the middle of nowhere. But this 'nowhere' is a glorious place. A secret valley where the countryside is a spectacle to behold.

The Ceiriog valley was once described by former Prime Minister David Lloyd George as a "little piece of heaven fallen to earth."

If so the Hand is a comfy cloud in

The Hand at Llanarmon DC



that heaven. It's loved by its locals but it's got a wider following for those who want to recharge the batteries and indulge a little.

The Hand has a lovely country charm and relaxing rooms and the most super king size beds you could wish for.

But for many what makes the Hand stand out is the fine dining offered by head chef Grant Mulholland and his team.

The Hand has again been included in the Michelin Guide for 2018 and the restaurant was listed in the Daily Post's 50 best restaurants in Wales.

The food is sumptuous and stylish, the bar well-stocked and there's an in-house spa to help restore and refresh so you barely have to step outside the door.

But if you didn't venture out you'd miss what makes this valley so special. When you first get out of your car what hits you is the sound - of silence.

It's peaceful and serene and the views are there to be consumed, particularly as the trees turn to reds and golds for the autumn.

There are walks from the door and Jonathan has helpfully published his own guide book to ensure guests find their way around both on foot and by car.

If you want to get away from it all, the Hand will transport you to another place. And it's a place you won't want to leave in a hurry. And it's a place you're guaranteed to return to.

THINGS TO SEE

■ Pistyll Rhaeadr at Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant, SY10 0BZ. Go early as parking is limited. It can be muddy but great for selfies.

■ The Horseshoe Pass - this winding mountain pass is a great drive with great views but not for the faint-hearted, even in good weather. Have a coffee at the Ponderosa cafe at the summit.

■ Pontcysyllte Aqueduct near Llangollen. A World Heritage site and this amazing feat of Victorian engineering by renowned Thomas Telford lifts the Llangollen Canal over the River Dee. There are canal boat trips over from Llangollen but I prefer to walk it. Station Road, Trevor Basin, LL20 7TG

■ Llangollen - have a mooch around this popular tourist town, some lovely antique and vintage shops. Enjoy a traditional Welsh cream tea and buy a Welsh oggie (meat, potato and leek pasty) to take home.



Jonathan Greatorex (front right) and wife Jackie with some of their staff at the Hand at Llanarmon DC. Back (left to right) John Peace (Chef De Partie), Grant Mulholland (Head Chef) and Eifion Edwards (Second Chef)



Pistyll Rhaeadr, the highest waterfall in Wales



HOW TO BOOK

Martin stayed at The Hand at Llanarmon DC, LL20 7LD. The hotel has 13 bedrooms, starting from £95 per room per night bed and breakfast. www.thehandhotel.co.uk
Tel: 01691 600666
The Hand is a member of Signpost which has been recommending the UK's top privately owned hotels since 1935. See www.signpost.co.uk

News / Brits get booking

A QUARTER of a million people in Greater Manchester are set to book their holiday this month - and Spain will be the most popular choice.

New research by ATOL reveals that most travellers book their breaks in advance to have something to look forward to in the new year, while others feel it helps them stay organised.

Following Spain, the next most popular destinations are Greece, the USA, Portugal, Italy, Australia, the Caribbean, Thailand, India and New Zealand.

Meanwhile, the least popular destinations are Azerbaijan, Colombia, Romania, Slovenia and Scandinavia.

Despite the weakness of the pound driving up costs, the latest data has found that the popularity of the USA is stronger than ever, with more than a million more people looking to travel across the pond in 2018 than 2017.

After enjoying adventurous gap years, the study shows millennials are now keen to holiday a little closer to home with European destinations very much in vogue for the younger generation. Spain, Italy and Greece are all top destinations of choice and Portugal is rapidly closing the gap thanks to its buzzing food scene, photogenic cityscapes and Port making a comeback.

This is in contrast to the older generation who are increasingly using retirement to travel to far flung destinations such as New Zealand and Australia.

The research found that when it comes to booking holidays, top priorities for consumers include guaranteed sunshine, a nearby beach and even access to British TV channels.

For the younger generation, the top three priorities for a holiday include 'good wi-fi', 'free data roaming' and 'instagrammable locations'.

This is in stark contrast to those who are over 55 - who are three times more concerned about having ATOL protection when booking a break.

Richard Moriarty, consumers and markets director at the Civil Aviation Authority said: "We want to make sure as many people as possible understand the benefits of the ATOL scheme."

For more information about ATOL protection see packpeaceofmind.co.uk