

# Snowdonia & the Llŷn



Snowdonia never ceases to inspire. From the spectacular mountain scenery to the welcoming Welsh hospitality in small villages among the peaks, Wales' rural heartland is one of the most attractive and visited areas of the country. It's not just about panoramas, however. Snowdonia is also a hub for activities, with walking, climbing and a new penchant for water sports the main drawcards.

Away from the hiking trails, there's the glorious Portmeirion, an Italianate village nestling on the North Wales coast; Edward I's formidable castles at Caernarfon and Harlech, part of a joint Unesco World Heritage Site with those at Beaumaris and Conwy; and lively hubs for active travellers at Betws-y-Coed and Bala.

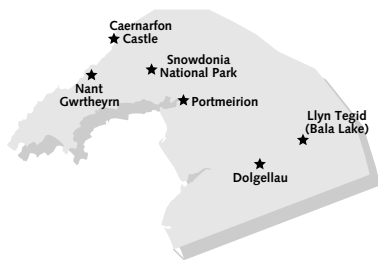
The northwest is the most traditionally minded and heavily Welsh-speaking corner. Indeed, modern Gwynedd is more than 70% Welsh-speaking, while old Gwynedd was a stronghold of the Welsh princes. The Snowdon highlands sheltered Llywelyn ap Gruffydd in the 13th century and Owain Glyndŵr in the 15th during their struggles against the English.

With such a formidable mountain shield, it's little wonder that the Llŷn Peninsula has held with even greater confidence to old Welsh ways, making it the one of the lesser-known areas, but one worthy of discovery.

For more information about the region, check the website [www.visitsnowdonia.info](http://www.visitsnowdonia.info).

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore **Snowdonia National Park** (opposite), a crescendo of mountains, lakes and valleys. This dramatically beautiful area is the UK's second-largest national park (after the Lake District).
- Visit **Portmeirion** (p252), a beautiful celebration of kitsch
- Soak up the history with a stroll around the World Heritage Site of **Caernarfon Castle** (p254)
- Try your hand at white-water sports, or try to spot the monster of the lake at **Llyn Tegid** (p245)
- Stretch your legs around **Dolgellau** (p241), climbing Cader Idris or tackling the Precipice Walk
- Venture to the end of the earth and learn a new language in the process with a trip to the **Welsh Language & Heritage Centre** (p274) at Nant Gwrtheyrn



## ACTIVITIES

One of the best regions in Wales for getting out and about, Snowdonia is prime climbing, cycling, mountain biking, walking, scrambling country, while the Llŷn is one of the best areas in Wales for water sports, including sailing (p256, p247), surfing (p270) and wakeboarding (p271). Just contemplating the list of activities could tire you out.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

The region's biggest bus operator is **Arriva Cymru** ([www.arrivabus.co.uk](http://www.arrivabus.co.uk)) for bus connections between major towns; service is poor on Sundays. Most of the services to trailheads within Snowdonia National Park are operated by **Snowdon Sherpa** ([www.gwynedd.gov.uk/bwsgwynedd](http://www.gwynedd.gov.uk/bwsgwynedd)), a park-run association of local companies, whose dedicated blue-liveried buses run on a network of routes around the park, making it easier for people to leave their cars outside the park. Buses run on fixed schedules every hour or two (less often on Sunday).

Railway travel is more important here than in many parts of the country, thanks to the **Cambrian Coast line** ([www.thecambrianline.co.uk](http://www.thecambrianline.co.uk)), which runs right down the coast from Pwllheli on the Llŷn Peninsula to Machynlleth in Mid-Wales; and the **Conwy Valley line** ([www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk](http://www.conwyvalleyrailway.co.uk)) in the north. The **Rheilffordd Ffestiniog Railway** ([www.festrail.co.uk](http://www.festrail.co.uk)) links them.

For details of travel passes, see p326.

# SNOWDONIA

## SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK (PARC CENEDLAETHOL ERYRI)

Snowdonia National Park was founded in 1951 (Wales' first national park), primarily to keep the area from being loved to death. This is, after all, Wales' best-known and most heavily used national park, with the busiest part of the park around Mt Snowdon (1085m). Around 750,000 people climb, walk or take the train to the summit each year, and all those sturdy shoes make trail maintenance and repair a frantic job for park staff. The Snowdonia Society (see the boxed text Local Voices, p264) estimates that the park is visited an average of 10 million times each year.

The Welsh name for Snowdonia, the Snowdon highlands, is Eryri (eh-ruh-ree). The Welsh call Snowdon itself Yr Wyddfa (uhr-with-vuh), meaning Great Tomb – according

to legend a giant called Rita Gawr was slain here by King Arthur, and is buried at the summit (for more on King Arthur, see p77).

Like Wales' other national parks, this one is very lived-in, with sizeable towns at Dolgellau, Bala, Harlech and Betws-y-Coed. Two-thirds of the park is privately owned, with over three-quarters in use for raising sheep and beef cattle. While the most popular reason for visiting the park is to walk, you can also go climbing, white-water rafting, pony trekking, even windsurfing.

The park is the only home to two endangered species, an arctic/alpine plant called the Snowdon lily (*Lloydia seotina*) as well as the rainbow-coloured Snowdon beetle (*Chrysolina cerealis*). The gwyniad is a species of whitefish found only in Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake), which also has probably the UK's only colony of glutinous snails (*Myxas glutinosa*).

## Orientation & Information

Although the focus is on Mt Snowdon, the park – some 35 miles east to west and over 50 miles north to south – extends all the way from Aberdovey to Conwy.

The park's **administrative head office** (☎ 01766-770274; [www.eryri-npa.co.uk](http://www.eryri-npa.co.uk); Penrhyndeudraeth) is situated 4 miles east of Porthmadog, although it's not a public enquiries office. This office manages six local tourist offices, including Betws-y-Cod, Dolgellau, Beddgelert and Harlech, where you can pick up a copy of *Eryri/Snowdonia*, the park's free annual visitor newspaper, which includes information on getting around, park-organised walks and other activities.

The office also runs – under licence from the Met Office – its own 24-hour **weather service** (☎ 08709-000100; [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)). Most tourist offices also display weather forecasts, as do several outdoors shops in the area.

## Activities

### WALKING & CLIMBING

Mt Snowdon (p239) is the main destination for walkers and Llanberis (p263) the favoured base. For climbers, Cader (or Cadair) Idris (p244), near Dolgellau, is the most popular and rises to 892m. Choose your time carefully to escape the crowds. There are gentler walks in the forests and hills around Betws-y-Coed (p260).

The park information centres and some tourist offices stock useful brochures on each of the six main routes up Snowdon, while Dolgellau and a few other offices have