



They say good things come in threes and we've got three of our favourite castles, historic houses, art galleries and gardens for you to discover when you come to stay with us.

*Three castles – one for a Prince, one for a King and one for the founder of a dynasty*

Just a short drive to the south west of Betws-y-Coed you'll come to the village of Dolwyddelan. A steepish 500m walk from the car park just beyond the village takes you up above the valley floor to the imposing ruin **of Dolwyddelan Castle** [www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/dolwyddelan-castle/?lang=en](http://www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/dolwyddelan-castle/?lang=en). Llywelyn the Great, Prince of Gwynedd (1173-1240) built this 13<sup>th</sup> century fortress, along with nearby Dolbadarn and maybe Prysor too, to form strategic defences in the major routes through the mountains. Standing up at the top of the castle it is easy to imagine them scouring the landscape for potential invaders.

Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, a visit to **Conwy Castle** [cadw.gov.wales/daysout/conwycastle](http://cadw.gov.wales/daysout/conwycastle) is a must while you're in the area.

Built for Edward I during his conquest of Wales, Conwy Castle is amongst the finest surviving medieval fortifications in Britain. As you approach the town you'll be impressed by the site of the Castle perched high on a rock overlooking the Conwy estuary. And just wait until you get inside - with an outer ward containing a great hall, chambers and kitchen, and a more secluded inner ward with private chambers and a royal chapel, it is very easy to imagine this Castle in its day. And if you have a head for heights, don't miss the walk along the battlements – the views of the mountains of Snowdonia and out to sea are astonishing.

A little closer to Betws-y-Coed, you'll discover one of the finest Tudor houses in Wales. **Gwydir Castle** [www.gwydircastle.co.uk](http://www.gwydircastle.co.uk) was formerly the ancestral home of the powerful Wynn family. After falling into dereliction, its current owners have undertaken a painstaking restoration to create an evocative and atmospheric visitor experience. As you step inside, you'll step back in time. As you wander from room to room with the cries of peacocks echoing in the garden, you can almost feel the presence of the castle's earlier inhabitants.

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[hazel@snowdonia-glamping.co.uk](mailto:hazel@snowdonia-glamping.co.uk)

01690 710067

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### ***Three Historic Houses – from three different ages ....and lifestyles***

Some say The Ugly House near Betws-y-Coed was a “tŷ unnos” – built in just one night. With four walls and a chimney smoking by dawn, the builder could claim it as his own. Other legends say it was built by robbers and thieves, taking advantage of travellers on the old A5 as they journeyed through Snowdonia – ugly people that gave the house a fearsome reputation. Others say the name is a corruption of the name of the River Llugwy which flows past it. Or maybe it’s the big, crude boulders that give the house its name – the word ‘hyll’ in Welsh can mean rough or crude, as well as ugly. Whatever the mythical origin, the house is now in the care of the [Snowdonia Society](#), and remains an unusual and beautiful place to visit with a tea room, an information centre about bees and a buzzing wildlife garden.

Head a little further afield to Conwy and as you approach the walled town itself, the first thing you’ll see in front of the majestic castle is Thomas Telford’s **Suspension Bridge**. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/conwy-suspension-bridge](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/conwy-suspension-bridge). Look more closely and you’ll see the associated toll-house too. On a visit to this National Trust run site, you can walk across the bridge, one of the first road suspension bridges in the world and once the gateway to Conwy, and discover how a husband and wife kept it open every day of the year, whatever the weather.

No visit to Conwy would be complete without a visit to the finest Elizabethan townhouse to be found in Britain. Built between 1576 and 1585 for the influential Welsh merchant, Robert Wynn, **Plas Mawr** [www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/plasmawr](http://www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/plasmawr) is an architectural gem.

Particularly fine is the plaster overmantel in the hall, restored and repainted in its vivid original colours, which immediately proclaimed Wynn’s wealth and status. Other notable features include the decorated plasterwork ceilings and friezes, skilful carpentry and period furniture – some original to the house.

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### **3 galleries in 3 distinctive homes**

Behind an impressive Edwardian terracotta façade in the traditional seaside town of Llandudno, the six gallery spaces in Mostyn, Llandudno [www.mostyn.org](http://www.mostyn.org) exhibit the best in Welsh and international contemporary art and craft.

Oriel Ffin y Parc Gallery in Llanrwst [www.welshart.net](http://www.welshart.net) has quickly grown to become one of the most successful art galleries in Wales. The artists are diverse in their styles and subjects, but share strong Welsh roots and connections. The gallery hosts twelve exhibitions a year, with prices starting from under £200. We also have works for sale by the best of 20th Century Welsh artists.

Once the home of Clough Williams-Ellis, the architect famous for creating the Italianate village of Portmeirion nearby, Plas Brondanw is a better-kept secret but is well worth a visit nonetheless. The gallery in Penrhyndeudraeth <http://www.plasbrondanw.com/oriel-brondanw> was newly opened late last year in the house by the Susan Williams-Ellis foundation – Susan being the creator of the famous Portmeirion pottery. Alongside the visiting exhibitions there's a permanent representative display of non-ceramic art by Susan Williams-Ellis [www.susanwilliamsellis.org](http://www.susanwilliamsellis.org) in the unique and intimate artistic space that is Oriel Brondanw. Whilst you're there, don't miss the gardens at Plas Brondanw which will whet your appetite for our next 3 good things:

### ***3 Beautiful Gardens.... in 3 different settings: coastal valley, woodland, and mountainside***

**Plas Cadnant** [www.plascadnant.co.uk/2/en-GB/THE-HIDDEN-GARDENS](http://www.plascadnant.co.uk/2/en-GB/THE-HIDDEN-GARDENS) is an historic coastal estate in Menai Bridge on the Isle of Anglesey. The Georgian house dates from 1803 when it was built by John Price as his family home. But the main reason to visit Plas Cadnant is for the ten acres of formal and informal gardens. The most well-known feature at Plas Cadnant is the procession of Yew pyramids leading down to the ancient rectangular pool. The unusual south facing Walled Garden follows the contours of the valley almost creating an amphitheatre. Cordons of Welsh heritage apples are trained against a south facing stone wall and a display of heritage vegetables reflects former days when the productive garden provided fruit and vegetables for the house.

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Not far inland of the north coast of Wales, you'll find **Bodnant Garden** [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden). Catch the famous laburnum arch as it goes into full bloom in May but don't despair if you're not visiting at the right time as Bodnant Garden has treasures all year round. The rose garden is a delight, as is the wooded dell – in summer providing a lush shady retreat from the sun.

The Victorian gardens at **Plas Tan y Bwlch** [www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/study-centre/tea-rooms/gardens](http://www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/study-centre/tea-rooms/gardens) are set amidst the stunning mountain scenery of Snowdonia. Covering 13 acres, this garden for all seasons hosts a variety of rhododendrons and azaleas in spring, including a 120-year-old rhododendron tunnel. In summer the flowers of the South-facing sunny borders are a delight and autumn leaf-colours are not to be missed.

It's true to say that nowhere other than here in North Wales can you experience the diversity of historical and cultural attractions in such spectacular and contrasting settings. It's a rich life indeed here in beautiful Betws-y-Coed.

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