

Llanfair Caereinion

Those of a certain age may like to know that Llanfair Caereinion (population 1,783) is where The Stranglers came to record their hit song “Peaches”.

It also hosts a hugely popular agricultural show in late August and a summer carnival every June with a parade of floats, street entertainers, circus workshops and a funfair.

Nevertheless, on any given day you’re still more likely to meet a steam buff than an ageing punk rocker or someone who wants to brush up on their clown skills.

Quite right too. Standing in the hilly streets of Llanfair Caereinion, hearing a toot and seeing a puff of smoke rise across the river would give anyone a goose bump or two.

The Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway opened in 1903 as a super-fast way for local farmers to get their sheep and cattle to market. By 1956 it had closed.

But the narrow gauge track, built to cling to the tight curves and steep gradients of the river valley, now offers human passengers a thrill-a-minute ride after years of careful restoration.

Carriages with open balconies provide a panoramic view as the landscape rolls by with glimpses of deer, hawks and even otters if you’re lucky. If not you can console yourself with a cuppa and a home-made cake in the station tea rooms.

For something a little stronger, try the Goat Hotel. This former coaching inn and Good Beer Guide regular has three real ales to choose from – and a very loyal following for its home-made honey and mustard ham.

You can walk off any excess calories in Goat Field Arboretum on the banks of the river Banwy. It contains 25 different native tree species – but no goats as far as we know. There are, however, plenty of brown trout, chub and grayling in the rushing water beside you.

All around is prime territory for outdoor adventure. Walkers are spoilt for choice with no fewer than 15 routes between here and Welshpool. Nine cycling trails include the 13-mile Llanllugan Epic with its tough climbs and final steep descent.

And at Red Ridge Outdoor Centre in Cefn Coch you can tackle kayaking, archery, abseiling and zooming around on zip wires. But you don’t have to be an athlete to join in. Their motto is “activities for all”.

You could be a person with disabilities, a child enjoying a birthday party or a reveller on a stag weekend. It’s up to you to decide exactly how much of a white-knuckle ride you really want.

They’re also pretty keen on equal opportunities at Pen-y-Bryn in Castle Caereinion. So you don’t just get the chance to stay in a converted barn on a working sheep and beef farm. You get to bring your horse as well – and treat him to a bit of equine B&B in the stable next door.

You'll have great fun exploring the quiet bridleways of old Montgomeryshire. At which point your thoughts will no doubt turn to mastering the art of falconry. That's because Pen-y-Bryn lay on special courses covering all aspects of handling, feeding and flying birds of prey.

Don't worry, you don't have to bring your own this time. Hawks will be provided.

My Way

"Whenever I visit the Welshpool and Llanfair railway I am always excited. The scenery is superb and the length of the journey makes it a real day out. The sound of the steam engines working hard puts the hairs on my neck up!"

Howard, Nantwich