

(CARDIFF)

Tourists haunt Wales' ghostly hotspots for thrills out of this world

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ANY castle that can boast a drowning pit, whipping pit and torture dungeons is, quite frankly, asking to be haunted.

Add the execution of a jealous wife who murdered her husband's lover with an axe and the chance of the place not bursting at the seams with wailing ghosts is practically nil.

It's not surprising then that Ruthin Castle in North Wales is one of the leading beneficiaries of a new wave of "haunted tourism" sweeping Britain.

Boosted by programmes such as Most Haunted - shown on the ironically-titled Living TV channel - ghosts, ghouls, spectres and poltergeist which were once politely not talked about are now being heralded in guide books, tours and advertising blurbs.

Even seaside golfing hotspot Porthcawl is getting in on the act.

Bridgend Council has just produced a visitors' guide book detailing "haunted Porthcawl".

It turns out the town has an eccentric group of apparitions, ranging from the rather lacklustre "ghost of a limping dog" in the Farmers Arms at Nottage to the far more spectacular spectral vision of an entire steam train at the ruined former station near Moor Lane.

The guide book, Ghostly Pubs of Porthcawl, is now available from local tourist information centres and at many of the haunted pubs and places mentioned.

The guide has been put together thanks to the research of local writer Hayley Williams, who has written a book on the haunted history of Porthcawl.

Bridgend Council tourism officer Graham Muschialli said: "With the help of the booklet it is possible to tour all the listed pubs and haunted places and check out the local 'ghosts' as well as trying beverages in each of the haunted licensed premises along the way.

"Can you think of a better way to spend an evening?

"The idea has created so much interest that there are plans to perhaps have regular guided walks throughout the season starting with a lecture and walk during the annual Porthcawl Sea Festival."

A spokeswoman for Visit Wales agreed that haunted tourism was paying big dividends for Wales.

She said: "There are many myths and legends surrounding the castles and historic buildings of Wales and there are numerous ghost tours and haunting tours available.

"As well as being fun activities for everyone if a little scary at times, they also provide information on the history and heritage of Wales.

"Visit Wales recently organised a Haunted Wales tour taking in many castles and stately homes.

"Working with Cadw as well as with tour guides that specialise in haunted areas created a very interesting and spine-tingling experience."

Wales already has a number of established ghost tours, which include:

■ Llancaiach Fawr, a semi-fortified mansion house near Caerphilly, said to feature the ghost of King Charles I, phantom children and some "icy entities".

■ Creepy Cardiff, a tour of the capital's "dark side" including the spot (in Cardiff Market, site of the former County Jail)



HAUNTING: Florence Hannah Thomas, mother of Dylan, looks out over Carmarthen Bay from the Boathouse at Laugharne on April 29, 1958. Her ghost is said to haunt the 'seashaken house on a breakneck of rocks' where Dylan wrote Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night for his dying father, and where she died in August 1958 PICTURE ©

where working class hero Dic Penderyn was hanged and is said to haunt.

■ Carew Castle, built 1280-1310, said to be haunted by the spirit of an unfortunate woman called Nest who had several children by Norman lords who captured her.

■ Nanteos Mansion, a Georgian home near Aberystwyth favoured by Da Vinci Code enthusiasts as it was said to have once hosted the Nanteos Cup, thought of in some quarters as the Holy Grail, is also claimed to be packed with ghosts.

■ Skirrid Inn in Monmouthshire, apparently haunted by dozens of victims of the rope-obsessed Judge Jeffries, the original hanging judge.

Groups such as the Ghost Research Foundation International regularly organised paranormal and ghost hunting tours in Wales.

A spokesman said: "These events are

having a positive effect on tourism and they also throw up a lot of history so are also very educational."

Citizens of Denbigh however were not impressed with Most Haunted last year after the programme labelled it "the Village of the Damned".

Denbigh council leader Colin Hughes said at the time: "The whole town was outraged with what the TV company said.

"We agreed to let the film crew in to shoot a few episodes of the Most Haunted show but the producers put a bad slur on the town's name.

"How on earth can anyone say a town is damned or cursed by witches when they have no proof at all?"

Antix productions, which makes Most Haunted said: "Most Haunted never sought to bring distress to viewers of the programme."



FEY TRIPS: Clockwise from the top left are: the Skirrid Inn, Ruthin Castle, Castle Hotel in Neath and Cardiff Market

Where to see a hovering severed head

■ Dylan Thomas' former Laugharne Boathouse, the "seashaken house on a breakneck of rocks" where he wrote Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night. It is said to be haunted by the ghost of his mother Florence, who died there.

■ Ruthin Castle, believed to be haunted by Lady Grey the wife of a powerful man whose lover she murdered with an axe. Sentenced to death, she was buried outside the castle walls. Her ghost now apparently walks the battlements and the castle chapel. Other sightings include a soldier and the spirit of a little girl, and there have been unexplained noises.

■ The Castle Hotel, Neath, where the WRU was formed 128 years ago, has a collection of ghosts including a hanged woman, a baying wolf and an Edwardian boy.

■ Allegedly only men can see the ghosts of the Old Maids of Plas Newydd, Llangollen,

who visit on Christmas Eve.

■ Llanina House, near Aberaeron, is said to be haunted by a hovering severed head belonging to a young murdered bride. There are also reports of a phantom man whose clothes are saturated with water.

■ Aberconwy's Penrhyn Old Hall is reportedly haunted by a screaming priest. Most likely source is a priest who was hung, drawn and quartered in a nearby field.

■ Kenfig near Bridgend, the ghost of an entire town is said to be heard at midnight (bells), believed to be a community which sunk into marshes. The walls of the Prince of Wales pub in Kenfig were also investigated by Japanese scientists who believed minerals in them acted like "tape recorders", capturing ancient conversations, but actually the Japanese were picking up local radio station Swansea Sound, the old pub acting like a giant receiver.

