

A village modeled on a dream

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tat, Sir Clough was not constrained by convention. With a more restrictive budget, his village would provide a home for “fallen buildings,” “found objects” from urns to unwanted structures, gathered up and lovingly transported to his idyllic property on the coast. Both men had little taste for modern architecture.

With the dedicated passion of a collector, Sir Clough (1883-1978) grasped each opportunity as it arose. And there were times when the cart came before the horse. On one occasion, a 17th-century ballroom ceiling for the bargain price of 13 pounds presented itself and he unhesitatingly moved on it. His preemptive action meant that he had to erect — with some haste — a building in which to install his new acquisition.

This shrewd entrepreneur and mostly self-taught architect, came by all manner of odds and ends for his village. A giant plaster statue of Buddha was used in an Ingrid Bergman movie “Inn of the Sixth Happiness.” The purchase of 30 mermaid panels from a Seaman’s Mission sale caused a furor. When the mission’s financial position improved they wanted their mermaids back. But no luck.

According to guide Meurig Jones, antiquing for the required effect was not out of the question. “Sir Clough acquired numerous urns and buried them in the woodland for ageing. As sometimes happens, nobody remembered where they were buried and they were discovered years later by the gardeners.”

Today Portmeirion moves ever forward. It has been called weird, batty, a monumental joke, a ridiculous Welsh fantasy, and even a take on Disney World.

Its 50 buildings — all habitable, each with a unique theme and ranging in hue from peach to cinnamon, turquoise, French blue, terra cotta, orange, and sunshine yellow — would fit well not only in Italy but also in Mexico, Spain, or even India.

The architectural style is eclectic; a bell tower complete with a chiming clock rescued from a brewery about to be demolished; a Town Hall in the Arts-and-Crafts style with mulioned windows from Emral Hall, Welsh home of the Puleston family for seven centuries; a colonnade built in Bristol in 1760, transported and rebuilt in Portmeirion in 1959; an Italian piazza; and Romeo and Juliet balconies. Leaning from a terrace overlooking the sea, a ceramic Shakespeare adds a whimsical touch.

As we stroll along winding paths toward the piazza, Burmese goddesses “dance” on Ionic columns and a 17th-century stone lion leers as I trip on the cobbles. Jones points out the



ANNE GORDON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Once a lodge and stable block, Salutation cottage offers a tearoom, shop, and accommodation.

If you go . . .

Getting there

Portmeirion is 2½ miles south of Porthmadog on the west coast of Wales. It is about a 2-hour drive from Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham; from London, the easiest option is Virgin Trains (London Euston station; www.virgintrains.co.uk). Bangor is the closest station in Wales (about 50 minutes to Portmeirion). Guests can telephone 011-44-01766-70000 and arrange for a taxi (fare about 50 pounds).

Where to stay

Portmeirion
Gwynedd, Wales
011-44-01766-770000

www.portmeirion-village.com

There are two hotels — Castell Deudraeth, modeled on a castle, and Hotel Portmeirion, a Victorian villa with wonderful views — as well as numerous cottages. Rates for two including full breakfast at Hotel Peacock Suite/Castell Penthouse, from about \$430. Hotel rooms, Castell rooms and suites, starting at about \$330. Village suites, village rooms, Dolphin suite and Watch House, starting at about \$260.

Information

North Wales Tourism
011-44-1492-531731
www.nwt.co.uk

domes on the lighthouse and Town Hall. “They look real don’t they, but look closer — they’re overturned pig boilers.” If the genuine item was not available, Sir Clough never failed to find a substitute.

“Our most popular cottage is Watch House,” Jones says. “It’s very romantic.” And I can imagine sitting on the balcony on a moonlit night, sipping mead and seeing a knight on horseback galloping along the coastline. There is a dreamlike ambience in Sir Clough’s village, where cottages are named Dolphin, Mermaid, Salutation, Unicorn, White Horses, and Neptune.

Celebrity sightings are a possibility. Visitors have included the Duke of Windsor, King Zog of Albania, and actors Liam Neeson, Jude Law, and Bergman. Brian Epstein, manager of the Beatles, spent many a summer in his fa-

vorite abode, The Gate House. “His one complaint,” says Jones: “There were not enough wardrobes for his clothes so he brought along his own.”

Noel Coward, the famous playwright and raconteur, found the village just the place to head off a period of writer’s block brought on by the incessant bombing of London during World War II. Settled in Upper Fountain cottage, Coward took just five days to write his classic play “Blithe Spirit.”

Patrick McGoohan and his 1960s TV series “The Prisoner” lifted Portmeirion to new heights. Using the village as the backdrop for the series garnered a huge visitor base. Each August fans of the cult classic take over Portmeirion for their three-day convention.

Close to 100 years old, Portmeirion prospers still in the

hands of Sir Clough’s grandson, the novelist Robin Llywelyn. Creativity lives on in Y Gwylt, the woodlands surrounding the village. Susan, daughter of Sir Clough, was not only the talented landscape artist responsible for this magical wild garden, but she was also a potter of national repute. Her Portmeirion dinnerware and the “Botanic Garden Collection” in particular, is a favorite with collectors. Each piece features a different plant.

A visit to Portmeirion, a weird but wonderful place, provides a tantalizing glimpse into the mind of Sir Clough.

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Granite State brews

The New Hampshire Brewery Map, available for free download at www.visitnh.gov, highlights 16 breweries, microbreweries, and brew pubs throughout the state. Use it to tour: Tuckerman Brewing Co. in Conway, which runs tours and tastings every Saturday at 3 p.m.; The Flying Goose Brew Pub & Grille in New London, which produces 16 homemade beers; Redhook Ale Brewery in Portsmouth, a craft brew house with a pub that offers daily tours and sampling sessions; and Elm



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Dogs are pampered with doggy ice cream, bottled water, gourmet treats, and plush beds at the Pan Pacific Hotel Seattle.

City Brewing Co. in Keene, where you can try dishes that incorporate freshly brewed beer. The map also includes fun beer facts and a timeline that traces the state's brewing history. 603-271-2665, www.visitnh.gov/itineraries/nh-brewery-map.pdf

Central Park runaround

You can stay in shape when you stay at The Carlyle on the Upper East Side. The new managing director, marathon runner Erich Steinbock, has launched The Carlyle Road Runners Club, through which he takes guests on

a morning run in Central Park; the hotel is just blocks away, on 76th and Madison. On this 3-mile complimentary tour, you pass the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Reservoir, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Guggenheim, along the same running route favored by Onassis, former president Clinton, and Madonna. En route, you can enjoy great views of the park and other landmarks like the Empire State and Chrysler buildings, and the Time Warner Center. 212-744-1600, www.thecarlyle.com

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