

## Vassar Travel Program

Educational Excursions for Alumnae/i, Family, and Friends

## Inspirational Wales

**Friday, August 7th** Departure from your chosen US gateway city. **Overnight: Plane**

**Saturday, August 8th** Individual arrivals at Manchester Airport will be greeted for the transfer to our nearby hotel. After checking in there will be time to unpack, relax or take a stroll into the nearby village of Holmes Chapel for lunch. We will gather this afternoon for an introductory talk by Professor Walen, followed by dinner at the hotel. **(D) Overnight: Cranage Hall**

**Sunday, August 9th** We head south today, down through the Welsh Borders. We'll stop first in Shrewsbury, a stunning town with over 660 historic "listed" buildings, including a Norman abbey dating to 1083. We'll explore the town's Shuts and Passages, a unique maze of narrow medieval alleys before we continue south to Ludlow, described by *Country Life* as "the most vibrant small town in the country," and dominated by an exquisite Norman castle. We'll end the day with dinner at our hotel in Stratford-upon-Avon. **(B, D) Overnight: Stratford-upon-Avon**

**Monday, August 10th** A day of homage to the immortal bard. We'll begin our walking tour of Stratford with a visit to the Trinity Church, where Shakespeare is buried, and then continue to the Birthplace Trust. Here we will have a special presentation in their library on the performance history of the play that we will be seeing this evening. Lunch is included in a nearby hostel. The afternoon will be free to explore the town before we gather again to attend a performance of *Othello* at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. **(B, L) Overnight: Stratford-upon-Avon**

**Tuesday, August 11th** Crossing back over the river Severn into Wales we explore the lower Wye Valley, the first "tourist attraction" in Britain, inspiring the Picturesque movement, which attracted such luminaries as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Turner. We'll visit Tintern Abbey and, after time for lunch in Chepstow, we continue on to Caerleon, a major Roman settlement and, according to some (rather dubious) sources, the site of King Arthur's Camelot. From here, we drive north of Cardiff, to Swansea. Dinner is included this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: Swansea**

**Wednesday, August 12th** Swansea will be forever associated with Wales' great poet, Dylan Thomas. We'll enjoy a private performance by the local Lighthouse Theatre Company of his play *A Return Journey* and pay our respects at the Dylan Thomas house and museum (he was born 100 years ago in 1914). We'll be treated to lunch here by the current owner and perhaps do a short group reading from *Under Milk Wood* as we sit and digest. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore the town and possibly do a little shopping. Early this evening we'll gather again at the hotel, where Professor Walen will give another talk, which will be followed by a private recital by noted Welsh Harpist, Llinos Daniel. The rest of the evening is free to sample a local restaurant. **(B, L) Overnight: Swansea**

**Thursday, August 13th** This morning, we'll take a leisurely drive around Carmarthen Bay to Laugharne and round out our Dylan Thomas experience with a visit to the Boathouse at Laugharne, where he did most of his later writing. We'll continue on around the St. David's peninsula, stopping in the city of St. David's, the smallest city in Britain, to visit the cathedral. Continuing up the Cardigan Bay coast, we'll stop at Pentre Ifan, an ancient dolmen in the heart of the National Park and end our day in Lampeter, where we'll have dinner at our hotel. **(B, D) Overnight: Lampeter**

**Friday, August 14th** Heading north up the coast we reach Aberystwyth, a thriving, seaside university city, and home to Wales' National Library, housing some of the world's most treasured manuscripts. We'll stop here for a quick visit and then head inland through Machynlleth to Corris, where we'll visit the abandoned slate mines. Echoing chambers, disused machinery and even personal items left behind by the workers give the place a real sense of history. From here, we drive to the north coast of Wales and our hotel in the town of Conwy. Dinner is included at the hotel this evening. **(B, D) Overnight: Conwy**

**Saturday, August 15th** Our first visit today is the strange village of Portmeirion. Portmeirion was the brainchild and life's work of the architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, who decided he wanted to bring the Italian Riviera to the west coast of Wales. The result was so extraordinary it was used as the film set for the 1960s cult TV show *The Prisoner*. It's a short drive from here to the imposing Caernarfon Castle and from here we drive up through the Llanberis pass, stopping briefly at the ruins of Dolbadarn Castle, into the heart of the Snowdonia National Park. With Mt. Snowdon on our right, we descend to the town of Betws-y-Coed, a center for hiking in the national park, and complete our circuit of North Wales heading back to Conwy for a free evening (we may be able to attend a rehearsal of a Welsh male voice choir this evening). **(B) Overnight: Conwy**

**Sunday, August 16th** Leaving the coast, we head up the valley of the river Conwy to visit Bodnant garden, generally considered to be one of the finest in Britain. From here, it is a short distance to Hawarden, where we will stop for lunch and a visit with Vassar Alum Sheri Bankes, before taking a tour of the Gladstone Library. Then it's back across the border into England to Chester, an ancient Roman city with large sections of its city wall still intact. We'll visit the City Museum and have time to explore the "Rows," covered Victorian arcades of shops, before we continue to our final hotel, back in Alderley Edge. A farewell reception and dinner this evening rounds out our tour (Note that we may be able to arrange a private tour of Hawarden Castle after visiting the library, which would mean a shorter stop in Chester). **(B, D) Overnight: Alderley Edge**

**Monday, August 17th** Morning transfers to Manchester Airport for returning flights to the US, or perhaps stay on. **(B) Overnight: Home**

### Optional Chatsworth Extension:

**Monday, August 17th** Bidding a fond farewell to some of your recent traveling companions, you'll enjoy a day out today to two beautifully preserved historic properties. Our first stop this morning will be to Little Moreton Hall, a splendid example of a moated, half-timbered house from the Tudor period. Our next stop will be Peover Hall, an Elizabethan manor house built in 1585 and known for its magnificent gardens. We'll return to our hotel for a free evening. **(B) Overnight: Alderley Edge**

**Tuesday, August 18th** A short drive this morning through the glorious Peak District National Park, brings us to Chatsworth House, "The Palace of the Peaks." Chatsworth contains a boundless collection ranging from Old Master paintings to the geological specimens brought by the last Duke. Sumptuous baroque interiors and contemporary sculpture make this an animated tour, and the gardens are also abounding with modern sculpture with many works by Elizabeth Frink. We'll have a tour of the palace in the morning and the afternoon will be free to explore the grounds or re-enter the house at your own pace. We return to the Alderley Edge hotel this evening for a farewell dinner. **(B, D) Overnight: Alderley Edge**

**Wednesday, August 19th** Morning transfers to Manchester Airport for returning flights to the US. **(B) Overnight: Home**