



Weekend away MONMOUTHSHIRE

With excellent afternoon teas, award-winning wine and incredible scenery, get your fill in the foodie capital of Wales, says writer **DEBORAH FRASER**



WYE NOT?

The county of Monmouthshire in south-east Wales is pretty special. It's the gateway to the Brecon Beacons National Park and home to a sizeable swathe of the Wye Valley, where rolling hills, thick woodland and the meandering River Wye have made it one of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Monmouthshire's location and fertile land means it produces some of the best produce in the country, too, and with the annual Abergavenny Food Festival, a sprinkling of Michelin-starred restaurants and a fresh crop of local foodie businesses, you certainly won't go hungry.

FEAST ON NATURE

The Severn Estuary is the ultimate spot for a crash course in foraging, and Chloe, founder of Gourmet Gatherings, will lead you on a fascinating treasure hunt where you'll nibble your way around the estuary, meadow and hedgerow. The wild chef will have you sampling more than 30 plants, all bursting with flavour - it's no surprise she supplies some of the best restaurants in the area. A 90-minute guided walk costs £45, while a day's Forage & Feast experience is £120 - and worth every penny, as you get to sit down to a 10-dish meal made using foraged ingredients. Tuck into slow-roasted juniper and cider pulled venison wraps, porcini puff pastries and lavender shortbread (Gourmetgatherings.co.uk). Also taking advantage of the food on its

Monmouthshire is a natural beauty; take a tea break at the Angel Hotel; it excels at other suite stuff, too; get a warm welcome at the hotel bar; watery wonders in nearby Penallt; go foraging!

doorstep is Calon Rhaglan, a restaurant inside the 15-acre Raglan Country Estate. Newly opened, it aims to get all its veg from within a five-mile radius, and it's working towards zero waste. The roasted Raglan lamb rump, £23, is incredible, as is the potato and leek strudel, £15 (Raglandcountry.estate).

WINE & MINE

The award-winning wine grown at White Castle Vineyard in the village of Llanvetherine deserves all the hype. Around 10,000 bottles are produced each year, with each variety selling out fast. Enjoy a tour with a wine tasting for £17 (Whitecastlevineyard.com). Visit from May to October to coincide with growing season, but it's particularly picturesque in September. Bottles to take home start from £17, but before you get too tipsy, take in some sightseeing at the area's landmarks. A day exploring Raglan Castle, which dates back to 1435, is a history lesson in itself, or visit Abergavenny Museum, which hosts fun family activities and is a great spot for a picnic

(Abergavennymuseum.co.uk). A short drive away is Big Pit National Coal Museum. Brave the 300ft journey into the mine while listening to tales of those who once worked in the tunnels (Museum.wales/bigpit).

GET A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Surrounded by seven hills and mountains, the bustling market town of Abergavenny makes a great base. Get the best views with an exhilarating hang-gliding or hot-air-ballooning session, or stay grounded with hikes, horse riding or mountain biking - you really can't get bored (Activityuk.com). Shopping here is proudly local, with Abergavenny Market showcasing a range of clever crafters and plenty of foodie souvenirs. Meanwhile, the Angel Hotel, sitting right on the edge of the Brecon Beacons, is a former coaching inn with a Georgian facade and 34 guest rooms, costing from £155 per night (Angelabergavenny.com). If you can't nab a room, book in for a fab afternoon tea, from £40. Think hoisin duck samosas and brandy profiteroles - yum! **F**

FYI

A host of famous musicians have recorded songs at the renowned Rockfield Studios in Monmouth, including Queen, Oasis, Simple Minds and Coldplay.

Plan your trip at Visitmonmouthshire.com.