

**SARA WALKER** takes a trip around the horse riders' paradise that is the island of Anglesey off the north west coast of Wales. Photography by **MIKE CLARK**.

# equestrian Anglesey

**W**ith its miles of forests and beaches and stunning views round almost every corner, Anglesey is a deservedly popular destination for horse riders and walkers alike. I'm on my way to investigate The Cottage at White Beach Cove near Beaumaris, a luxury self-catering cottage with one unusual feature - the facility for you to bring your own horse.

We reach the island on a scorching summer's hot day, and drive through the picture-postcard town of Beaumaris to reach the cottage, down a network of narrow lanes, with meadowsweet, honeysuckle, dog roses and gorses scenting the air through the open windows.

The cottage, which is hundreds of years old, sits on a good-sized plot near the end of a single track road just a few hundred yards from the sea. A one-storey, white painted building, it boasts immaculate gardens and purpose-built stone and wooden stable blocks for six horses.

Owner Julian Wood is on hand to meet us, and to explain the cottage's history.

"It started off as my parent's holiday home, and they built the stone stables for their own horses," he explains. A horseman himself, Julian used to breed Lusitanos at the site, at one point having 16 horses. Although he no longer breeds horses, he still has one stallion of his own, who's kept at a safe distance from the cottage.

The Cottage has been available for self-catering holidays since 2006, but in January 2014 Julian decided to make the stable facilities available as well, so that customers could bring their horses.

"The riding round here is so fantastic, it's a shame for people not to take advantage of it," he explains. "When riders bring their horses here, the first trip is generally to Red Wharf Bay for a beach ride. That's around a 45 minute hack from here, or 15 minutes by trailer. You can ride for two or three hours then have a drink at the historic Ship Inn, which makes a nice day out. On the second day, for something completely different, Newborough Forest is very popular. That's a big Forestry Commission site 40 minutes away by trailer, with eight miles of forest and beach riding."





The view over White Beach Cove, adjacent to The Cottage.



The coastal town of Beaumaris has its roots in the 13th century.



The Cottage near White Beach Cove promises a five star luxury escape for you and your horse.



A secure tack room, horse sauna and shower are on offer in the adjacent stable block.



The Cottage boasts every facility for a comfortable stay.

Photograph: White Beach Holidays



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Our group of five charges up the beach, sending spray up from 20 pounding hooves as riders laugh and whoop for joy.





Miles of sandy beaches and forest trails make Anglesey a riders' paradise.

The Cottage is rated as five star accommodation by Visit Wales, the Welsh Tourist Board, and the equine facilities have been accredited by the British Horse Society. As Julian gives me a brief tour, I can see why - the facilities have definitely been designed by a horseman, and include roomy stables with automatic waterers and rubber matting, a tack room with a lavatory, sink, washing machine, tea making facilities and microwave, feed room, rug room, horse sauna, horse shower, horse walker and outdoor arena.

It's an incredible setup, and enough to make any visiting horse feel at home.

"I love that people can come here with their horses and have a great holiday, when we get a new group it feels like Christmas Day for me as I'm so pleased at their excitement," laughs Julian.

Inside the cottage, the human accommodation, which sleeps five in two double bedrooms and one single, is equally luxurious and Julian's tried hard to think of everything. There's wifi, a large screen 3D TV, linen sheets, dressing gowns and a general feeling of care and attention about the place. Outside, there's a view of the turnout paddock and stables from the hot tub, and what more could any horse owner want?

There's also spacious parking for a couple of trailers and a horsebox at Julian's farm next door, and,

although the narrow lane itself may prove a slight challenge, he's quick to reassure me that it's much wider than it looks beneath all the summer bracken and hawthorn.

"If anyone needs a hand though, I'm always available to drive boxes or trailers through, I've had years of practice!" he smiles.

Once settled in, we take a five minute stroll with our dog, who's also welcome in the cottage, to the headland to admire the view and the little rocky cove beneath us. Walking back through the fields we pass a herd of Welsh Mountain Ponies, used for conservation grazing. Anglesey has a mild, temperate climate with no extremes of temperature, and I spot wild flowers I've never seen in my home in the north west, including pyramidal orchids, a distinctive plant with a pyramid-shaped head of bright pink flowers; wild sweet peas and hedges of semi-wild fushias.

The following day, Julian's arranged for me to visit Anglesey Riding Centre, a forty minute drive away along the coast, to experience the stunning countryside from the saddle.

Owned by Anglesey local John Knock and his partner Fay, the British Horse Society approved centre has around 30 school horses and is one of the biggest on the island. My mount is Relma, a homebred 16hh thoroughbred/cob cross mare who's one of the





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centre's most reliable horses. Thanks to the foresight of a previous owner, all the centre's hacking is privately owned and in no time we're wending our way down a narrow gorse-lined track towards the beach.

After picking our way through a narrow rocky strip, our group of five charges up the beach, sending spray up from 20 pounding hooves as riders laugh and whoop for joy.

Turning round to walk back down the sand, ride leader Amy points out Caernarvon Castle and Snowdon on the other side of the narrow Menai Strait, and I'm wishing I had my own horse here for the week so I could do this every day.

Once back on the ground, we visit nearby Newborough Forest briefly for a picnic before heading back to The Cottage for a restful afternoon,

The following morning, we decide to take a trip to nearby Beaumaris, just a ten minute drive away.

This historic town used to be marshland before it was drained in the 13th century, and in fact 'Beau Maris' means 'beautiful marsh'. A pretty little town, it's best known as the site of Beaumaris castle, the impressive project of the English king Edward I, begun in 1295 to dominate the Welsh. Although it was never completed as funds ran out, it's still the most technically perfect castle in Britain and is a World Heritage site. The town itself boasts a pretty high street and several cafes and restaurants



scattered along the sea front, as well as the Liverpool Arms hotel, once Anglesey's first post office.

That afternoon, we take a boat trip to Puffin Island with Starida Sea Cruises. A large island at the end of the Menai Strait, Puffin Island is best known as a bird sanctuary and has been uninhabited since the 1930s when the telegraph station there was rendered obsolete by

modern technology.

The trip, which takes around 70 minutes, is only available during the summer months when the birds are on the island. The rocky outcrop is teeming with bird life, and in a few minutes we'd spotted guillemots, kittiwakes, cormorants, several species of gull and one or two puffins, as well as a colony of grey seals basking in the sunshine.

If you're taking your own horse to Anglesey, go a little further and use the Britannia Bridge rather than the oldest, more picturesque and much narrower Menai Bridge as there's more room for boxes and trailers. Otherwise, my only advice is to make sure you have plenty of time for your equestrian holiday - with so much wonderful riding available on the island, you'll need every moment.

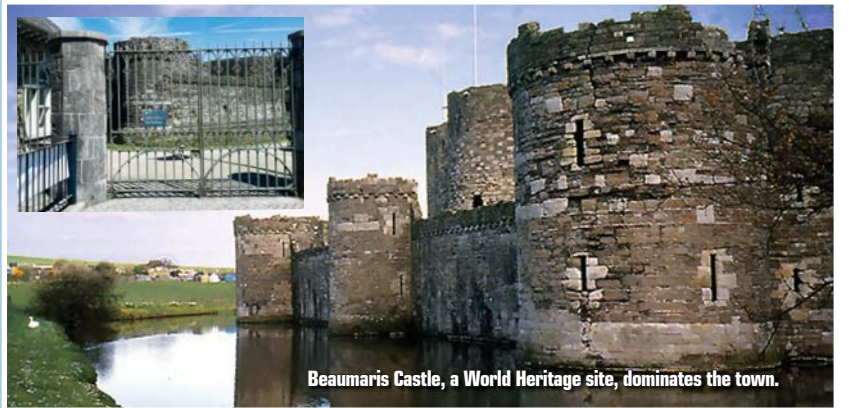
For more information about holidaying with your horse on Anglesey, visit [holidaysforhorses.com](http://holidaysforhorses.com). Details about Anglesey Riding Centre are available at [angleseyridingcentre.co.uk](http://angleseyridingcentre.co.uk).

Trwyn Du Lighthouse stands between Puffin Island and Anglesey, and was built in the 19th century after a devastating shipwreck.





Red Wharf Bay is a popular destination for walkers and riders.



Beaumaris Castle, a World Heritage site, dominates the town.



Puffin Island is also called Ynys Seiriol or Saint Seiriol's Island, after a 6th century saint believed to be buried there.



Grey seals and many species of sea bird thrive on the island.