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# Lancashire

**& North West** magazine

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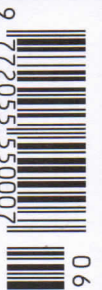
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# The mysterious Ellan Vannin

Andrew Harris explains the reality and charm of the Isle of Man and selects his top 20 attractions

It is a challenge to describe a place where there is an equal but opposite explanation for every feature. This place is the Isle of Man in English but Ellan Vannin in Manx; a holiday island for many but an international business centre for many more. It is a small island in the middle of the Irish Sea but a self-governing Crown Dependency; part of the British Isles but not part of the United Kingdom. HM the Queen is not only the Head of State but also the Lord of Mann.

The contradictions continue. The Isle of Man welcomes visitors but the Manx are prickly about their identity. If you visit, never refer to England as the 'mainland' – it is 'the other island' or 'across the water' or usually just 'across'. Your columnist has fond memories of sharing taxis with hard-bitten politicians bound for the early morning 'red-eye' flights from the island airport. When passing the Fairy Bridge they would – as custom required - greet the fairies (aka the little folk) to avoid their disfavour and bad luck. As we were flying in very small planes from a windy island it seemed a good precaution – but they went to great lengths not be heard by anybody but the fairies!

“The famous TT Races are being held from 30th May-12th June”

The Isle of Man is fascinating. It is just 33 miles long and up to 14 miles wide with a population of 85,000. It is governed for most purposes by the island's parliament Tynwald made up of the House of Keys and the Legislative Council which are (sort of) the island's House of Commons and House of Lords. Tynwald has been in continuous existence since 979





AD (some say earlier) which makes it the oldest continuously governing body in the world.

The island is, of course, best known for the annual Tourist Trophy - or TT - Races. The coming TT fortnight runs from the 30th May-12th June and will use the 37 mile clockwise circuit which starts in Douglas, heads towards Peel, turns north to Ramsey then takes the mountain road back to Douglas. With lap speeds of up to 132 mph it is as spectacular as pictured and attracts participants and spectators from around the world. The first week is for practice - with many bikers using the circuit - but the second week is for the races. You are recommended to visit for the sport and the atmosphere but book well in advance as the planes and Steam Packet (aka the ferry and catamaran) have limited capacity. Some prefer a sailing yacht but that takes 12 hours!

'Bucket and spade' mass tourism used to be the island's life-blood in the summer months with up to 13 Steam Packets or ferries carrying holidaymakers from the Lancashire ports. This melted away in the 1960s and 70s to be replaced from the 1990s by a new role as an offshore finance centre with new forms of tourism using the many special attractions of the island. Both roles have flourished with a spectacular range of attractions featured on [www.visitisleofman.com](http://www.visitisleofman.com). My 'Top Twenty' attractions are shown in the panel but six merit more of a mention as they are extra special or unique.

- The Manx Museum has repeatedly been recognised as the best museum in the British Isles and is bursting with artefacts and treasures unique to the Isle of Man. The island's 10,000 year history is presented through film, galleries and interactive displays. These feature the island's Viking and Celtic past.

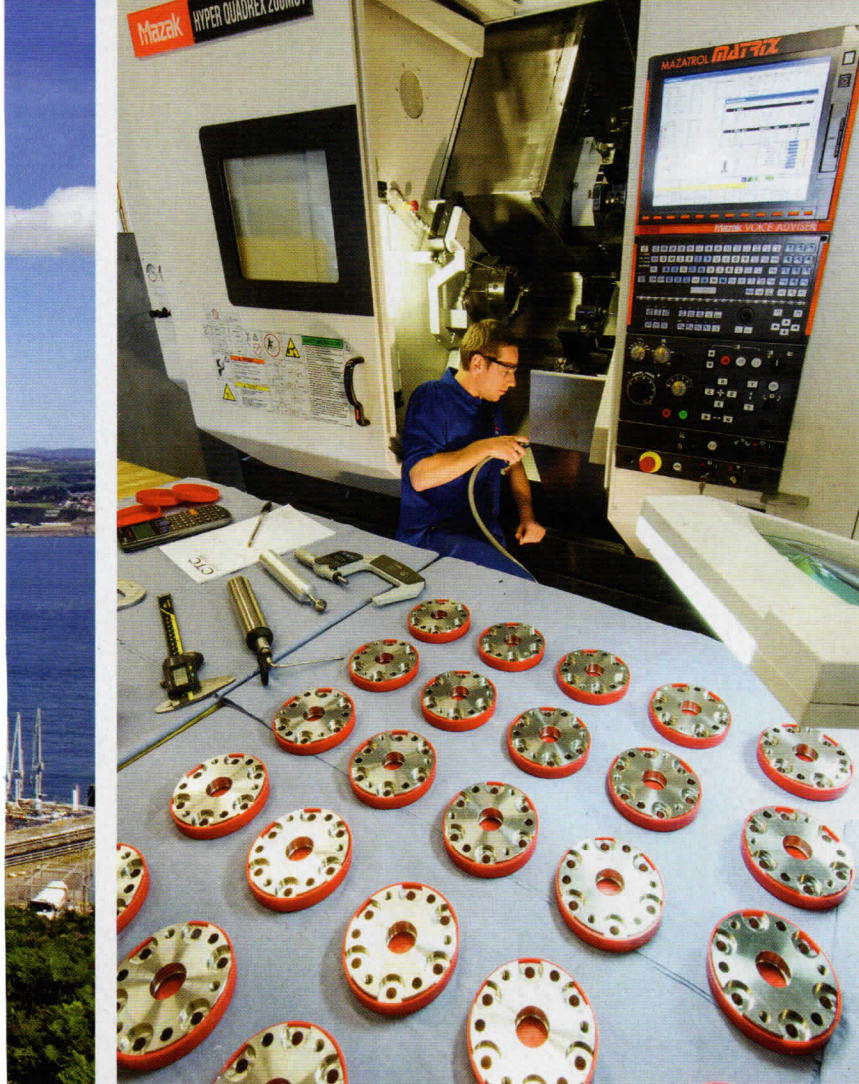
The museum also boasts an excellent café.

- The Douglas Promenade Horse Trams plus electric and steam railways. The electric railway runs from Douglas to Ramsey and links with the Snaefell Mountain Railway at Laxey. Snaefell - or Snow Mountain - is spectacular with views of the seven 'Kingdoms' of Mann: Scotland, England, Ireland, Wales, Manannan - for the sea - and Heaven. The steam railway runs from Douglas to Port Erin in the south and its railway museum.

- The National Folk Museum at Cregneash and the Calf of Man birdlife sanctuary are unique. The former is a working illustration of the Isle of Man in the 19th century. It is set in beautiful countryside and depicts traditional Manx cottages, customs, crafts and skills which characterized the Manx crofter's way of life. The latter is the nearby unpopulated 618-acre island bird sanctuary well worth a visit for a day. Our picture shows the Calf of Man through the windows of the delightful café south of Cregneash.

- The Gaiety Theatre at the southern end of Douglas Promenade is a wonderful, rare and beautifully preserved example of the 82 theatres designed by Frank Matcham between 1879 and 1912. Matcham was largely responsible for the 'golden age' of theatre building in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods when he achieved a combination of functional efficiency and ornate opulence. Tours are available.

- Castle Rushen explains the name Castletown which was the island capital until 1869 when Douglas took over due to its size and importance. It is one of the best preserved medieval castles in the world and overlooks Castletown Harbour. Originally built for a Norse king in 1265, successive rulers developed it between the 13th and 16th centuries and it has



been used as fortress, royal residence, a mint and a prison – but not at the same time! More recently, one of your columnist's daughters was married there.

♦ The Niarbyl Bay Café and Visitor Centre is in the most spectacular of settings adjoining the Niarbyl Bay on the west coast of the island south of Peel. It also offers a menu to match. The website [www.niarbylcafe.com](http://www.niarbylcafe.com) features a 360 degree video of the scenic surroundings. Visits to both are recommended.

The island is keen to attract inward investment and help local firms grow. To achieve this it offers selected companies a range of seven schemes to help with finance, advice, loans, training and best practice plus special help for selected undergraduates to gain business experience and a combination of an allowance, grant and mentoring for small start-up businesses. For full information visit [www.wheretheycan.com](http://www.wheretheycan.com)

“The island's parliament Tynwald is the oldest continuously governing body in the world”

Many spectacular successes have been achieved and these include a cluster of island firms operating at the cutting edge of the space sector as illustrated. The Manx expression Traa-dy-llooare (pronounced tray de lerr) is often parodied. It translates as ‘time enough’ meaning take things easier but is usually described as being ‘like the Spanish manyana but without the same sense of urgency’. Your columnist always thought this rather unfair but it illustrates a further contradiction: the friendly and relaxed approach of the Isle of Man leads to success on all fronts!

♦ Andrew Harris FRICS FCIM headed the Douglas 2000 regeneration partnership which supported the transition of the Isle of Man economy in the 1990s.

**LEFT:**The Douglas waterfront, promenade and bay as seen from Douglas Head.

**MIDDLE:** The Isle of Man has many successes in precision engineering and the space sector.

**TOP RIGHT:** A horse-drawn plough relives the past at the National Folk Museum at Cregneash.

**ABOVE:** The Sound and Calf of Man as seen from the nearly cafe.

#### Andrew's top 20 attractions

1. Manx Museum & Café, Douglas
  2. Manx Electric Railway & Snaefell
  3. The Gaiety Theatre, Douglas
  4. The Medieval Castle Rushen
  5. National Folk Museum @ Cregneash
  6. The Laxey Wheel aka Lady Isabella
  7. Peel Castle & Harbour
  8. Castletown Golf Links
  9. Calf of Man Bird Sanctuary
  10. Laxey Bay & Harbour
  11. Steam Railway & Museum @ Port Erin
  12. Tynwald National Park & Arboretum
  13. Curragh's Wildlife Park, Ballaugh
  14. Douglas Promenade & Horse Trams
  15. Palace Casino, Douglas
  16. Niarbyl Bay Café & Visitor Centre
  17. Camera Obscura, Douglas Head
  18. Tynwald Mills Shopping, St Johns
  19. Seven Michelin Guide Restaurants
  20. Coming Soon: Motor Museum @ Jurby
- For details see [www.visitisleofman.com](http://www.visitisleofman.com)