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An Evening of Eric and Ern

Our anti-clockwise guide to The Isle of Man

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OUR ANTI-CLOCKWISE GUIDE TO THE ISLE OF MAN

By Andrew Harris





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The Isle of Man – or Ellan Vannin in Manx – is only 33 miles long and 65 miles from Heysham yet it has lots of attractions which are unknown to many. We try to reveal some of the mysteries of this fascinating island by taking you on an anti-clockwise tour with 24 images. UK citizens do not need a passport to visit the island so come with us on our tour.

1. Arriving in Douglas – or Doolish in Manx - you see the Conister Rock and the sweep of the Douglas promenade in the background. Many sailors were shipwrecked on this and perished until Sir William Hillary built the Tower of Refuge to save those stranded from the rising tide. This inspired Hillary to create what became the Royal National Lifeboat Institution

in 1824 which has saved more than 140,000 lives in the UK and Ireland during the next 195 years.

2. The Gaiety Theatre is a short walk from the Sea Terminal. Designed by the famous theatre architect Frank Matcham it opened in 1900 and has been faithfully preserved. The Gaiety and the adjoining Villa Marina jointly offer live drama, music, films, children's events, functions and tours. The Gaiety is described as the jewel in the Manx Heritage crown.

3. The film star and comedian Norman Wisdom loved the Isle of Man which loved him. He spent his later years on the island until he died in 2010 aged 95. Your columnist can testify to how many manx charities he supported. His memory is



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preserved by his statue on the Harris Promenade in Douglas. A fond memory.

4. The Manx Museum 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. It claims to be the perfect starting point on your journey of discovery around the island and its Viking and Celtic past. The Manx Museum has won many awards as the best museum in the British Isles and is well worth a visit. For details of the museum and heritage sites visit www.manxnationalheritage.im



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5. The Douglas Bay Horse Tramway runs for 1.6 miles from near the Sea Terminal to Derby Castle at the northern end of the promenade. After 140 years the track is currently being refurbished but the service will resume shortly. It links with the Manx Electric Railway which runs north to Laxey and Ramsay. The picture shows an Electric Train heading north.

6. The world-famous Laxey Wheel is built into the hillside above the village of Laxey. It is the largest waterwheel in the world with a diameter of 72 feet 6 inches and did revolve 3 times a minute but is currently out of action until repairs are

completed. It was built in 1854 to pump water from the Great Laxey Mines and is also known as Lady Isabella after the wife of the governor of the island at the time.

7. In Laxey the Manx Electric Railway connects with the Mountain Railway which takes about 30 minutes to reach the summit of the Snaefell Mountain which is 2,036 feet above sea level. On a clear day the views are amazing and local folklore has it that 7 kingdoms can be seen – the Isle of Man, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Manannan – the sea. A café with a bar offers refreshments for the weary. For more formal ‘Seven Kingdoms Dinners’ call 01624 662525.

8. Travelling further north by car or electric train brings a tourist to Ramsay – the most northerly town of any size on the island. Amiable controversies always rage on the Isle of Man and Ramsay is deciding between a new marina – discussed for more than 25 years – or renovating a potentially spectacular pier as pictured. Some argue that it has to be one or the other but this town of great charm needs both.

9. The Isle of Man Motor Museum is in the north west of the island on the former RAF Jurby airfield which is now a trading estate. Designed for petrolheads it exhibits more

than 500 vehicles. It has unique prototypes, TT winning motorcycles, early steam cars, 1980s hot hatches, a soviet space capsule, charabanc and greyhound bus. It displays the evolution of motoring from the very beginnings to the present day. The museum reckon that 3 hours are needed to do justice to their collection but beware the charge of £12.50 per adult with concessions for others. For details visit www.isleofmanmotormuseum.com

10. Travelling south you reach Peel which is a seaside town, fishing port and yacht harbour. It is the third largest town on the island after Douglas and Ramsey. Peel was the capital of the island until 1344 when the King of Mann moved to Castle Rushen. It has great character and being on the west of the island is known as the ‘sunset city.’ The most spectacular feature of Peel is the Castle. Construction was started by the Vikings in the 11th century using local red sandstone and completed by others in 1860. It is located on tidal St Patrick’s Isle and dominates the view from the town. It is open to visitors during the summer and can give artistic events an amazing setting.

11. Time to go inland on the A1 to St Johns to find Tynwald Hill. It is 4-tiered and symbolises the independence of the Isle of Man as a self-governing crown dependency –



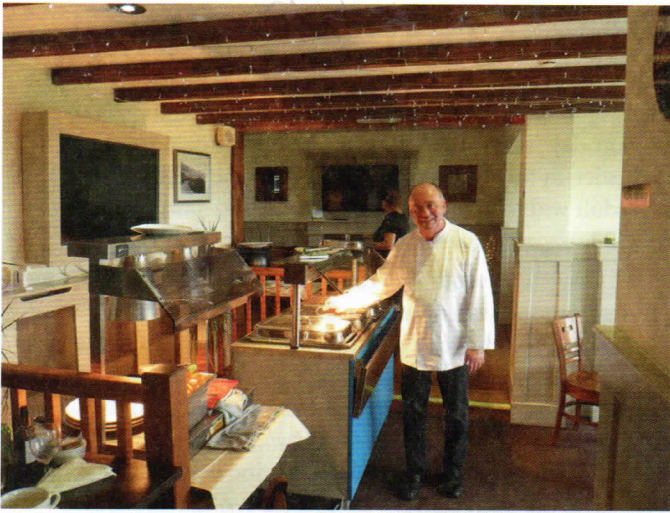
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the Lord of Mann is HM the Queen. Since the 13th century it has hosted open-air meetings of the island's 1,000 year old parliament on the 5th July every year – or the following Monday if the 5th falls on a weekend – when all bills that have received the Royal Assent are promulgated, petitions are presented and certain public officials are sworn in. Part of the ceremony is held in the nearby Royal Chapel of St John the Baptist. As the picture show, it is quite a spectacle and a demonstration of democracy in action.

12. Tynwald Mills are well hidden behind Tynwald Hill. They are not well sign-posted but well worth a visit. Tynwald



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Mills was established more than 30 years ago and is the only department store on the island. The shopping centre incorporates an historic mill and brings many brands together under one roof. For details visit www.tynwaldmills.com

13. Turning off the A27 at Dalby the Niarbyl Café and Visitor Centre can be found on the coast. It is really a restaurant in a spectacular location. It overlooks Niarbyl Bay and is probably the most beautiful location on the island. The area is designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest and the local geology is fascinating. Robin – pictured – and Jana are great hosts. To book call 01624 481718.



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14. The view across Niarbyl Bay is a wonderful backdrop for weddings and events at Niarbyl. Our picture shows the view. It is spectacular – and visitors don't have to have a wedding to enjoy it!

15. Joining the A36 going south takes the visitor past South Barrule – and its fort – on the left on the way to Port Erin at the extreme south west of the island. Port Erin describes itself as the 'Jewel of the Isle of Man' with some justification. The sweep of the western-facing bay and beach – as pictured – is dramatic. It comes into its own when the wind is from the east. It has another attraction regardless of the weather.

16. The Isle of Man Steam Railway Museum is in Port Erin – which is also the end of the line for the steam railway which runs from Douglas via Port Soderick, Santon, Ballasalla, Castletown, Colby and Port St Mary. The service normally runs every 2 hours and is a unique combination of heritage and a functioning railway. The museum tracks the history of the Isle of Man Railway from its opening in 1873. It is open daily in the summer and there is a small charge for those without a valid railway ticket. The train pictured is leaving for Douglas.

17. Your next visit could be to the National Folk Museum at Cregneash. It is set in beautiful countryside and is a living illustration of a Manx farming and crofting community in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Previously run by your columnist's son-in-law, it brings to life how people worked and lived all those years ago. The museum includes preserved cottages and shows how people lived and used their weaving,



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knitting, blacksmith and farming skills.

18. The Calf of Man is an unspoilt 2.5 square kilometre island off the southern coast of the Isle of Man. It is a bird sanctuary owned by Manx National Heritage and managed by the Manx Wildlife Trust since 2006. The Calf of Man is home to a breeding population of Manx Shearwaters which are seabirds deriving their name from their presence in Manx waters. The Calf also has a large colony of seals which live and breed on the rocky coastline. It has an observatory which can accommodate up to 8 self-catering visitors. It can be booked through Manx National Heritage.

19. The Sound of Calf also has a café – the Sound Café – which has floor to ceiling windows which provide uninterrupted views of the Calf of Man and the Sound. It is a spectacular spot to enjoy morning coffee, afternoon tea and local Manx dishes.

20. The next attraction on our anti-clockwise journey is Port St Mary which arguably has the island's best yacht harbour which is sheltered from the prevailing westerly wind. Among other interesting features the village has a memorial to the loss of the Steam Packet *Mona's Queen* which – with other steam packets *King Orry* and *Fenella* – was lost when rescuing British and French soldiers from Dunkirk in 1940. The centrepiece of the memorial is the starboard anchor of *Mona's Queen* which was recovered and restored in 2010. Many Manx sailors lost their lives in the Dunkirk evacuation.

21. Castletown – our next visit – was the capital of the Isle of Man until 1869 when it moved to Douglas. The centre



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of the town is dominated by Castle Rushen –one of the best preserved medieval castles in the world. Originally built for a Norse King about 1200AD, Castle Rushen was developed by successive rulers until the 1600s. During its time it has been a fortress, royal residence, a mint and a prison. More recently it was a stunning venue for the wedding of your columnist's elder daughter. Visitors can climb the stone spiral staircase to the roof from where they can experience panoramic views of Castletown and the island.

22. The Manx Aviation and Military Museum is next to the A5 on the way to the island's airport or seaport of Douglas. It is a modest size and has a focus on people rather than events. It displays the amazing story of civil and military aviation on the Isle of Man and what local people achieved

in wartime – especially the feats of the Manx Regiment. It is often compared to Dr Who's Tardis. The museum's acclaimed World War 1 Exhibition was opened in 2018 to commemorate the end of that conflict. The museum is open daily from late May to the end of September each year and weekends in the winter. Entry is free.

23. The Isle of Man Airport at Ronaldsway has scheduled services to the UK and Ireland plus seasonal services to Spain and Switzerland. Last year it served 847,251 passengers with 23,378 aircraft movements. In World War 2 it was RAF then Royal Navy Air Station Ronaldsway when it was a training station for the Fleet Air Arm.

24. Visitors with cars leave the island from the seaport of Douglas but if they want good luck they must say hello to the fairies at the fairy bridge as they travel the A5 to get there. A last view of the Isle of Man as they sail away shows the topography of the centre of the island silhouetted by the western sky. A lasting impression.



Our previous Isle of Man articles by Andrew E. Harris were 'The mysterious Ellan Vannin' in June 2015 and 'Going to Sea on the Ben-my-Chree' which can be seen as

Environmental and Marine Topics respectively under Published Articles at www.andrewharris.co.uk.

The images are by your columnist except the map and picture 11 which are courtesy of the Manx Government Press Office and pictures 1 and 24 which are courtesy of the IOM Steam Packet Company.