

Western Mail



NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF WALES PAPUR CENEDLAETHOL CYMRU InYourArea.co.uk Friday, February 21, 2025 www.walesonline.co.uk £2.15 TRUSTED NEWS SINCE 1869



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NEWS AND
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SPORT

Government strikes deal on £26bn budget

THE Welsh Government has struck a £100m deal with Welsh Liberal Democrat leader Jane Dodds to pass its £26bn spending plans for next year. Ms Dodds, the party's sole representative in the Senedd, secured extra funding for childcare, councils and

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transport in return for her support. Labour, which holds half the Senedd's 60 seats, needed at least one opposition member to break the dead-

lock in order to get its final 2025-26 budget through the Welsh Parliament. Without a deal, ministers faced losing more than £4bn in the financial year from April. Senedd members will vote on the Welsh Government's final budget, as well as Welsh rates of income tax and

the final settlement for councils, on March 4. As part of the agreement, Ms Dodds, who represents Mid and West Wales, is expected to abstain in the crucial vote, which would allow the spending plans

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WM³ TRAVEL

HOTEL OF THE WEEK

Simply stylish: A room at the hotel



PAGE8 HOTEL
Central London

WHERE AND WHY Staying at a hotel in Central London is often reserved for truly special occasions – and this was certainly one of those.

From our deluxe double room, we were able to look down towards the Edith Cavell Memorial and up along St Martin's Lane, a street flecked with theatres and almost no traffic.

The room was bathed in natural light, with white walls featuring wainscot panelling and subtle lighting. The ensuite, finished in imitation marble with discreet gold accents, paired well with the room's blue leather furniture, detailed with gold tacks.

ON THE MENU The menu at the Kitty Hawk Rooftop Bar and Restaurant offered a wonderful array of fresh, vibrant dishes, almost as spectacular as the view. I started with the yellow fin tuna carpaccio (£16), flavoured with sesame, wasabi, and a mango and ginger dressing. For the main, I chose the salt-marsh lamb rack (£38), served with creamed potatoes, an anchovy-crusted heritage carrot, and mint jus which was so excellent I dreamt about it.



The splendid restaurant

My partner began with the courgette, feta, and pea tart (£12), and went on to the roast heritage summer squash (£19). **WHILE YOU'RE THERE** Being slap bang in the middle of London's theatre district, there is no shortage of entertainment, from the Royal Opera House to the Adelphi Theatre.

Nearby Covent Garden can provide some of the country's best retail therapy, and if history is your thing, Buckingham Palace is a 20-minute walk away. **WHAT TO CALL** Rooms start at £225 a night.

page8hotels.com/en/page8
By Bertie Adam

IT'S FIT FOR THE KING

MARIA BRESLIN finds Las Vegas a heady mix with glitz and a cracking canyon

"MAN, I really like Vegas," said Elvis about the Nevada bolthole he made his home away from home.

And having spent a whirlwind 72 hours in "Sin City" I have to concur with the King. Bright, brash and bathed in neon, Las Vegas assaults the senses, it dazzles and promises visitors a glitzy good time.

The famous Las Vegas Strip is the beating heart of this desert oasis, and home to some of the biggest and best-known hotels and casinos. Outlandish, ostentatious and totally over-the-top, you'll find a 541ft replica Eiffel Tower in the grounds of the Paris Las Vegas Hotel, gondolas gliding on the Venetian's "Grand Canal" and a 30-storey pyramid at the Luxor. It's a lot to take in but I love it.

And while Vegas may be synonymous with gambling – though I'm afraid to say this skinflint didn't spend a single penny on the slot machines – it's also celebrated for its big name productions with Celine Dion, Britney Spears, and Adele all playing residencies in the city.

Seeing a show is very much part of the Vegas experience, so we head to the legendary Caesars Palace to watch Absinthe – billed as a "fantastical blend of carnival and spectacle, featuring wild, outlandish acts performed on an intimate circular stage where the audience is as close to the action as you can possibly get".

Critics also say it is "as provocative as it is unforgettable", and they are not wrong.

The party gets started with cocktails and light bites at the Pier 17 Yacht Club speakeasy in the hotel's Green Fairy Garden. But, as we take our seats in the tent, someone whispers to me, "I wouldn't want to be sat there". We're on the end, three rows from the front and my heart is already in my mouth.

Raunchy, rowdy and downright rude, Absinthe is an X-rated, adults-only feast of contemporary circus skills, comedy and burlesque. I lit-

erally spend the whole show on the edge of my seat, in no small part due to the daredevil antics of the graceful performers, but mainly the sheer fear of being targeted by host The Gazillionaire who takes no prisoners.

So when he asks: "Are you a throuple?" My heart skips many beats and I swear he is talking to me. Thankfully the question was aimed at three men sitting behind who, frankly, quite probably are.

We cool off and recover with a sedate stroll down The Strip taking in the undeniably breathtaking Bellagio Fountains. A free music and light show, there are more than 1,000 dancing water jets soaring up to 460ft high into an inky night sky. It is one of many unforgettable "wow" Vegas moments.

Next door to the palatial Bellagio stands The Cosmopolitan, and tucked away in a corner of this five-star luxury resort is a fully-functioning traditional barber's shop. Inside, behind an "unassuming janitor door", lies a dimly lit, prohibition-style bar furnished with classy couches and boasting an extensive whisky menu.

It's karaoke night, the drinks are flowing and it's well past my normal bedtime. But I guess that's the thing about Vegas. The night is always young and you never quite know where or when it will end.

Even the most hardened hedonists need to recharge their batteries from time to time, which makes

A natural beauty: Red Rock Canyon



Who'd have thought Vegas would be home to a museum dedicated to punk rock?



Maria checks out what to see beyond the city

staying slightly off Strip a smart option. Virgin Hotels Las Vegas opened in March 2021 and is a 30-minute walk from the thick of things or a short Uber ride in the soaring 40°C heat.

My king-sized chamber suite in the resort's Ruby Tower is a spacious, stylish and air-conditioned haven with a bathtub for two, a dedicated lounge, and a view over the desert pool oasis.

The 1,500-room hotel is vast with highlights including a 60,000sq ft casino, a branch of upmarket Japanese favourite Nobu, a 4,600 capac-

ity theatre, and Studio 54-inspired social lounge and bar. But for me the real showstopper is the sprawling pool complex – it's the perfect place to unwind

before getting glammed up for yet another night on the tiles.

We do it in style, hiring waterside cabanas where the Veuve Clicquot chills gently in the fridge and the unrelenting sun shines.

And, of course, there is life beyond the Strip. Just a 20-minute drive west of the city and you're in a seemingly parallel universe.

Red Rock Canyon is a naturally