



**DELIGHT** Port Sunlight and Peel Hey Guest House (below)

**T**HE Wirral is not an obvious destination which springs to mind for a weekend away. But with fantastic places to eat and a raft of things to see and do, it should be.

Less than an hour away in the car from Bolton is the welcoming Peel Hey Guest House in Frankby — an award-winning bed and breakfast offering luxury, boutique-style accommodation.

From the lovely rooms to friendly staff and tasty food — I recommend the scrumptious eggs benedict — it is the perfect base for a weekend's exploration.

When it comes to things to see and do, Wirral has a variety of visitor attractions and activities including culture and heritage, the arts, shopping, family and leisure attractions.

Anyone visiting Wirral from Bolton should stop off at Port Sunlight, a purpose-built village created by Bolton-born William Hesketh Lever in the 19th century to house his soap factory workers at Lever Brothers.

The Port Sunlight Museum tells the story of how the soap magnate,



who was born in 1851 and lived in Wood Street, went from working at his father's grocery business to creating Port Sunlight, based on the four principles of industry, art, education and charity.

It is fascinating to learn how this forward-thinking philanthropist, who went on to become Lord Leverhulme and then Mayor of Bolton in 1918, created the enchanting village.

Visitors can enjoy a leisurely stroll around the 800 Grade II listed buildings and houses, set in superb gardens, imagining what life was like there in the 19th century.

Once you have worked up an appetite, stop off at the museum's tea room where you can indulge in a mouth-watering old English-style afternoon tea.

The Wirral Peninsula, placed between the River Dee and the River

# Explore historic Wirral

**Melanie Wallwork takes a short trip by car to enjoy a special weekend away**

Mersey, is home to some of the finest restaurants and food producers in the North West, including The Riverhill Restaurant, Oxtan, run by Claire Lara, winner of 2010 BBC Two series MasterChef: The Professionals.

Here you can expect impeccable service and a mouth-watering seasonal menu, from a la carte fine dining to a more informal early dinner option.

After poring over the impressive menu, I opted for a starter of pan-seared wood pigeon with crispy smoked bacon, followed by a Cumbrian beef fillet main course. The food was fresh and fabulous.

For a slice of history, visit the U-Boat Story at Woodside Ferry Terminal, Mersey Ferries, Birkenhead — a £5million attraction

which tells the story of World War II German submarine U-534.

Peering inside the sections of the submarine, which was sunk in May 1945 and salvaged in 1993, visitors get a fascinating insight into life on board during wartime.

The informative tour also reveals the enduring mystery of U-534 and features original film archive and interactive displays.

For a healthy dose of fresh air, visit Birkenhead Park, the first publicly funded civic park in Britain, which was designed by Joseph Paxton and inspired by New York's Central Park.

To discover an area where years gone by merge with the modern world drop in to Birkenhead Priory, a Benedictine monastery founded in 1150. It is the oldest standing building on Merseyside but is surrounded by modern Birkenhead, factory units and a shipyard, with views from St Mary's Tower, across the River Mersey to Liverpool.

For celebrity chef fans another dining out option is Marco's, a family-friendly New York Italian restaurant by Marco Pierre White in the seaside town of Hoylake.

The menu is inspired by his Italian heritage and love for American dishes and diners can enjoy a relaxed meal beneath disco mirror balls and above a black-and-white chequered floor.

After a weekend of enjoyable days, restful nights, and having sampled an array of scrumptious grub, it was time to return home — and we were back within the hour.

## FACTFILE

■ **Peel Hey Guest House, Frankby Road, Frankby, ranges from £55 to £85 for room only at this time of year, during the week, and £95 at the weekend. Breakfast is £9.75 per person. Visit peelhey.co.uk or call 0151 677 9077**  
 ■ **Entry to U-Boat Story, Woodside Ferry Terminal, Mersey Ferries, Birkenhead, is £6 for adults, £4 child, family £16 (two adults, three children) and concession £5. Visit u-boatstory.co.uk or call 0151 330 1000. Entry to Port Sunlight Museum is £3.75 for adults, concession £3, child £2 and parties of 10 or more, £2.50 per person. Visit portsunlightvil lage.com or phone 0151 644 6466.**

# Where ancient meets modern

**TRAVEL**  
by **SHEREEN LOW**

IT'S almost 9pm, and a group of people are starting to gather in the middle of Xianxia park in Shanghai's Changning district.

Taking off their jackets, they limber up with stretching exercises: twisting, tilting and turning. But this isn't a flash mob of youngsters showing off the latest break-dancing moves; instead, the majority of these movers and shakers are over the age of 50.

Some locals use the dance sessions as a means of keeping fit and nimble while socialising, but some of the single men and widowers see the dances as a step-up to courtship.

This event takes place every night for around three hours without fail. Even though I decline offers to join in, this is certainly an experience I'll never forget.

In the surrounding streets, the smell of delicious street food wafts from simple stalls. But only a few blocks away, shiny new buildings are a sign that Shanghai, in east China, is a city that's changing day by day.

Thanks to an economic boom, the largest city in the People's Republic of China (PRC) is growing at an exciting rate.

With flights now servicing the destination with greater frequency (Cathay Pacific now fly to the former trading port via Hong Kong five times a day), tourist numbers are also set to rise.

But despite all the new developments, the city's cultural core remains the same.

For every fancy hair salon, there is a cheaper, and more basic, alternative next door, where 60 RMB (around £6.30) buys you a dry shampoo wash, cut, blow-dry, head and shoulder massage, a cup of tea and even ear wax removal (not for the sensitive).

And while Western practices are becoming more popular, locals still follow a very traditional Chinese way of life.

Away from the tourist centres of the Bund, Nanjing Road and

Huaihai Road, at People's Park in Huangpu, there are paper flyers advertising eligible bachelors and bachelorettes.

The Chinese government still operates strict internet censorship controls — social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter are banned — so forget Instagram selfies and Facebook check-ins, and instead enjoy Shanghai the old-school way.

Start with the historical and beautiful Yu Garden, a haven of peace away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Built in 1559 as a private garden, during the reign of Ming Emperor Jiajing, it was declared a national monument in 1982.

With stunning rock formations and intricate carvings, it's a must for any visitor.

Surrounded by traditional shikumen (stone gate) houses,



**TRADITION** Yu Yuan Gardens Shanghai

Xintiandi, which translates as "new heaven and earth", was where the Communist Party of China first met in July 1921.

These homes have been redeveloped into an affluent area full of shops, eateries and bars, although history buffs can get their fill at the Museum of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

Likewise, the Concession — the former settlement for the French in 1849 — has been

turned into bars, restaurants and homes, frequented by expats and locals.

But I finish off my stay with a truly authentic Chinese massage experience at a local salon in the Changning district. This no-frills, hour-long treatment, complete with sparse decor, bright lighting and vigorous kneading and pummelling, costs just 78 RMB (£8). I leave feeling relaxed and with a spring in my step.

It's fair to say that for all the changes taking place in Shanghai, there are still plenty of traditions worth preserving.

## HOT DEALS OF THE WEEK

- **WINTER SUN:** On The Beach (0871 474 3000)deps incl seven nights' B&B at four-star Solana Hotel, Mellieha, Malta, from £147, ex-Leeds Bradford Nov 14; seven nights' B&B at four-star Golden Beach Hotel, Agadir, Morocco from £296, ex-Manchester Nov 14.
- **SCOTLAND MORAY COAST:** Unique Cottages (01835 822277) offers three nights' self-catering in The Wee House for £175 per couple until Dec 14, based in fishing village of Gardenstown with 18th century harbour and terraces linked by pedestrian walkways.
- **EUROPE CITY BREAKS:** Cresta (0844 879 8014) offers two nights' B&B at three-star Ecotel Berlin Charlottenburg, Berlin from £199, saving £75, ex-Manchester with easyJet Dec 1.