

Press Release
For immediate release

Introducing our Valleys Vacationers

Valleys campaign announces online reporters for summer events season

A couple from Caerphilly and a family of four from Rhondda have been appointed as the official Valleys Vacationers and have been given exclusive access to this summer's hottest Valleys events.

Viv and Maria Watkins from Blackwood and Esther Nagel, her partner Kevin Lavis and their children, Liam, 14 and Marcus, 18 months from Ystrad in Rhondda, were chosen to review this summer's top Valleys events and blog about their experiences on The Valleys' website.

From partying to the sounds of The Blackout at Merthyr Rock and sampling the finest ciders at the International Cider Festival in Llancaiach Fawr near Nelson, to experiencing the area on foot at this year's Wales Valleys Walking Festival, the Valleys Vacationers will really get a feel of the range of events taking place across The Valleys this summer.

Maria and Viv Watkins, who both work for Caerphilly County Borough Council, attended Caerphilly's Big Cheese Festival last weekend. Viv said: "We love holidaying in Britain but the beauty, character and heritage of our local area can often be overlooked. The Valleys is home to a number of attractions steeped in history and culture, from 16th century manors to 13th century castles, and most of these venues play host to a variety of exciting events throughout the year.

"It's a real pleasure to attend these summer events and to be able to capture the atmosphere and excitement of The Valleys and share this with others."

Esther Nagel, a Volunteering Officer for Age Concern Neath Port Talbot, and her partner Kevin Lavis, a bus driver for Stagecoach, took their family along to this year's Ponty's Big Weekend. Esther said, "We're really delighted to have been selected to become official Valleys Vacationers. We're an adventurous family who enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities and often go kayaking or hiking in The Valleys at the weekends.

"Between us, we also have a wide range of interests including history, gardening, music and walking and it's great to see that there's such a variety of different events taking place across The Valleys this summer. It just shows that you don't need to travel far to find something to keep everyone in the family entertained!"

Visit www.thevalleys.co.uk to read Esther's review of Ponty's Big Weekend and find out what Maria and Viv got up to at the Caerphilly Big Cheese Festival.

And to help people plan their summer visit to The Valleys, which spans from Kidwelly in the west to Pontypool in the east, The Valleys Heart and Soul has launched a 'Which Valleys Vacationer Are You?' quiz on its website to reveal whether visitors are a Hipster, Cosmopolitan, Foodie or Adrenaline Junkie and a suggested itinerary of events and activities based on their personality.

The Valleys Heart and Soul initiative is a three year campaign led by partnership organisations from the Heads of the Valleys, Western Valleys and Valleys Regional Park, and aims to change perceptions of The Valleys to bring long-term economic benefits to the area with the overarching aim of attracting more tourists to the region.

- Ends -

A flavour of the festivals and events taking place in The Valleys this summer:

International Cider Festival, Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Nelson, 12-14 Aug – Calling all cider connoisseurs! Alongside listening to live music, sample the extensive range of ciders and perry from producers from all over Wales, the UK and the world! The perfect way to spend a summer's day.

Steelhouse Festival, Hafod-Y-Dafal Farm, near Ebbw Vale, 19-20 Aug – A new classic rock festival, which will bring international artists to the heart of the South

Wales Valleys. Enjoy a weekend of incredible music from established artists, up-and-coming breakthrough acts and the best tribute bands around, surrounded by beautiful countryside and breathtaking views.

Merthyr Rock, Cyfarthfa Park, Merthyr Tydfil, 2-4 Sept – The organisers behind the Hay Festival bring a new signature event to The Valleys – and we're proud to welcome Merthyr Rock! Cyfarthfa Park will be transformed into a tented village with great bands including Ocean Colour Scene, Funeral for a Friend and Merthyr's very own The Blackout. A day ticket price is only £20, so come and be part of something massive in Merthyr Tydfil, it could be next year's Glastonbury. With this line up, it's sure to soon become a festival-goers favourite!

Wales Valleys Walking Festival, Various Routes Across The Valleys, 3-18 Sept – Now in its seventh year, the annual festival is a celebration of walking and the breathtaking scenery in The Valleys. Hundreds of visitors are expected to take part in the series of walks which take place at various scenic and cultural locations across The Valleys, including medieval villages, lakes, waterfalls and hidden caves. All walks are free and are led by local and experienced guides, all hoping to encourage more people to get out into the countryside and enjoy The Valleys.

BBC Proms in the Park, Caerphilly Castle, 10 Sept – Enjoy a spellbinding evening of magical music at the BBC Cymru Wales, in collaboration with Caerphilly County Borough Council, "Magic and Wizardry" themed Prom. Joining the UK-wide revelry of the Last Night of the Proms, the enchanting evening will include the BBC National Orchestra of Wales

Notes to editors:

Image captions:

1) Esther Nagel, Kevin Lavis and their children, Liam and Marcus at this year's Ponty's Big Weekend

2) Maria and Viv Watkins at Caerphilly's Big Cheese Festival

For further information please contact Elinor Evans or Helen Newton at Equinox Communications on 029 20764100 or email valleys@equinoxcommunications.co.uk

The Heads of the Valleys regeneration programme is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund, together with match funding from the Welsh Assembly Government and other partner organisations. The 3-year campaign aims to bring economic benefit to Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Bridgend, northern parts of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot and the eastern Valleys of Carmarthenshire.

Aimed at changing perceptions of the Valleys both to local people and outsiders, the campaign will encourage more visitors and attract potential investors.

www.thevalleys.co.uk