Llandudno

Llandudno is truly a fine and handsome place, built on a generously proportioned bay and lined along its broad front with a huddle of prim but gracious nineteenth-century hotels that reminded me in the fading light of a lineup of Victorian nannies. Llandudno was purpose-built as a resort in the mid-1800s, and it cultivates a nice old-fashioned air. I don't suppose that Lewis Carroll, who famously strolled this front with little Alice Liddell in the 1860s, would notice a great deal of change today.

To my consternation, the town was packed with weekending pensioners. Buses from all over were parked along the side streets, every hotel I called at was full, and in every dining room I could see crowds — veritable oceans — of nodding white heads spooning soup and conversing happily. Goodness knows what had brought them to the Welsh seaside at this bleak time of year.

Farther on along the front there stood a clutch of guesthouses, large and virtually indistinguishable, and a few of them had vacancy signs in their windows. I had eight or ten to choose from, which always puts me in a mild fret because I
have an unerring instinct for choosing badly. My wife can survey a row of guesthouses and instantly identify the one run by a white-haired widow with a fondness for children, and sparkling bathroom facilities, whereas I can generally count on choosing the one run by a guy with a grasping manner, and the sort of cough that makes you wonder where he puts the phlegm. Such, I felt, would be the case tonight.

All the guesthouses had boards out front listing their many amenities – COLOUR TV, HOSPITALITY TRAYS, FULL CENTRAL HEATING, and the coyly euphemistic EN SUITE ALL ROOMS, meaning private bathrooms. One place offered satellite TV and a trouser press, and another boasted CURRENT FIRE CERTIFICATE – something I had never thought to look for in a B&B. All this heightened my sense of unease and doom. How could I possibly choose intelligently among such a variety of options?

I selected a place that looked reasonable enough from the outside — its board promised a color TV and coffee making facilities, about all I require these
days for a Saturday night — but from the moment I set foot in the door I knew it was a bad choice. I was about to turn and flee when the owner emerged from a back room and stopped my retreat with an unenthusiastic "Yes?" A short conversation revealed that a single room with breakfast was for £19.50. It was entirely out of the question that I would stay the night in such a dismal place at such an exorbitant price, so I said, "That sounds fine," and signed in. Well, it's so hard to say no.

My room was everything I expected it to be — cold and cheerless with laminated furniture, grubbily matted carpet, and those mysterious ceiling stains that bring to mind a neglected corpse in the room above. There was a tray of coffee things but the cups were disgusting, and the spoon was stuck to the tray. The bathroom, faintly illuminated by a distant light activated by a length of string, had curling floor tiles and years of accumulated dirt packed into every corner. I peered at the yellowy tile around the bath and sink and realized what the landlord did with his phlegm. A bath was out of the question, so I threw some cold water on my face, dried it with a towel that had the texture of shredded wheat, and gladly took my leave.

Llandudno is described as a...

1. ...fashionable 19th century resort.
2. ...beautiful growing resort.
3. ...place where Lewis Carroll lived.
4. ...place famous for its comfortable hotels.