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CASE STUDY

2011 saw the inaugural Ironman Wales take place in Pembrokeshire. Even with all the coverage in the local media and tourism associations in the months running up to the event nothing could have prepared us for the day itself. The buzz which ran through the south of the county was palpable and the sense of community you could feel walking around Tenby and at the marshal point at the top of St Florence made the hairs stand up on the back of your neck.

In the run up to the event we saw our bookings coming in from as early as the November before and by Easter 2011 we were full for the September event. We had guests from France, Germany, Belgium, London, Ireland and Spain. In preparation for the influx of competitors I attended a cookery demonstration in March with Angela Gray which was put on by ffrres/Pembrokeshire Tourism and focused on high energy meal options for athletes. The course proved invaluable to finding new dishes to put on our menu to give the athletes staying with us the best possible start for the event. We amended our breakfast menu to include smoothies, homemade granola bars and a range of omelettes as well as our standard menu. Our evening menus were also changed to include pasta dishes and options with high protein content as well as the complex carbs.

We provided a range of energy drinks, fruit and snack bags of nuts/seeds etc. for the competitors to help themselves to free of charge throughout their stay. We provided early breakfasts in the run up to the day itself and got up at 3.30am to get breakfasts underway on the day of the Ironman. We asked our guests for their competitor numbers so we could track them throughout the day on the live (ish) feed on the Ironman website. We were ready and

waiting with a round of applause when they started coming back in that evening, plus a complimentary beer/drink (for medicinal reasons—obviously) and we gave each of them a print out of their split times. It was great listening to stories of their personal experiences during the day—the overall comment being that it was one of the hardest Ironman they had ever done.

Facebook played an important part for us in the run up to the event—we joined various groups to keep track of any meetings, changes to the swim locations (we briefed our guests on the change from south to north beach as soon as we saw the update on Facebook) and expo information.

We were also able to sell a last minute room that came up just by posting on the Ironman Wales Facebook page —it went within 20 minutes of being put on there.

We spoke to other businesses in the area to discuss what we were doing in preparation and what vacancies they had so we could pass on enquiries. Ritec Valley Quads were offering a reduced price option for Ironman competitors and their families (which we saw on Facebook) so we passed this onto our guests, several of whom took up the option.

It wasn't just the athletes who stayed with us; it was their families as well and with many staying for a week they took time to visit the local attractions and beauty spots.

We're already fully booked for the 2012 event and we will again be getting our cow bells out to stand at the top of the village or in Tenby to experience the amazing atmosphere of the day. We missed out on the expo last year but will absolutely be attending this year as we heard some great feedback.

As you can tell we are big advocates for this event and look forward to many more years of Ironman Wales and its unique atmosphere.