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**Catalunya (Catalonia)**

*Països Catalans (Catalan Nations)*

## **‘Vampire tourism’ breathes new life into small town**

### **Timber town welcomes fans of Stephenie Meyer’s ‘Twilight’ with open arms**

Pounding rain and heavy mist are constant in this timber town where logging's decline left a graveyard of rusting timber mills and unemployment. Businesses shut down. Parts of the local high school were condemned. Families started to drift away.

Until an unlikely cast of vampires breathed new life into the town.

"I fell in love with it," says 18-year-old Samantha Cogar, who dragged her grandparents on a 2,500 mile roadtrip to Forks from Louisville, Kentucky, earlier this summer. "I can't wait to go back."

Cogar is one of thousands of visitors who have flocked to Forks in response to "Twilight," the hottest series to hit shelves since "Harry Potter." Set in Forks, on the gritty edge of the Olympic Mountain Range, the books have captured the hearts of readers around the world.

In a town framed by towering Douglas fir, hemlock and spruce and the occasional western red cedar, where rough, blue collar edges are tangible, the unexpected attention seems to be a second chance for the economy. Inspired by a world of make-believe, "Twilight" fans are bringing the town back to life.

Four years ago, Author Stephenie Meyer introduced the world to Bella Swan, a 17-year-old who moves to Forks and is torn between the love of classmate Edward Cullen and best friend Jacob Black. But before long, she realizes something isn't right: Edward is a vampire and Jacob, a werewolf.

Readers were hooked, and three more "Twilight" books followed. "Breaking Dawn," the fourth and final book of her "Twilight" series, came out in July and has remained at the top of best seller lists ever since. Teens throughout the country celebrated the release of the book by dressing up as characters from the series for midnight parties at bookstores — much the way "Harry Potter" books are launched.

As the pages kept coming, the series' cultlike following increased. Before long, fans started showing up in Forks, looking to see if magic would spark when imagination collided with reality. What they found was a two-stoplight town where more than a foot of rain falls each month. A place where success is measured in sweat and four-wheel drive.

But Forks was quick to embrace the frenzied fans.

### **More than 100 fans a day**

Forks' "Twilight"-inspired turn has been nothing short of magical, Marcia Bingham, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, says.

"We've probably had more than 100 people a day," says Bingham, who has eagerly watched as van after van of giddy readers — mostly female — pull up in front of the town's visitors center.

For many fans, the line where reality ends and imagination begins is starting to blur, says Michael Gurling, who caught inspiration from the tourism boom and started his own Twilight Tours.

After enlisting a few locals, he asked for help in picking out houses that could serve as stand-ins for the book's famous Forks' stops: Bella and Edward's houses, a field where vampires play baseball. Other locations, such as the police station, where Bella's father works, and the hospital, where Edward's father is a doctor, play their own parts. They chipped in, providing cruisers near which fans may take pictures and reserving a spot for "Dr. Cullen" in the parking lot.

"The most popular spot is probably the beach, in LaPush, where Bella finds out the truth about Edward," says Gurling.

On a recent Friday, Gurling's van headed out of the visitor's center parking lot — packed, as it is most every weekend, with teenage girls. Outside the stand-in for Edward's house, a sign on the door says "Cullens" are volunteering a blood drive.

"It's not quite how I thought it would be," says Yena Hu, a University of Washington sophomore who made the four-hour trek from Seattle to visit. "They're always talking about all the windows — and in the book, the house is on the water."

But it's surprising how much Meyer did get right, considering she'd never been to Forks when she wrote the first book. A quick Internet search revealed Forks was one of the rainiest places in the world, and from her home in Arizona, the stay-at-home mom began rewriting history.

While locals are accepting of their newfound fame, they're all too aware of the mania that is continuing to grow.

Almost everyone has a "Twilight" story: the teen who dropped his library card, only to discover Twilighters had found it and kept it; the cheerleader who has out-of-town mothers stop her on the street offering cash for her uniform; the Quileute native, who heads to LaPush to chop wood and sees giddy teenagers snatching up driftwood as souvenirs.

Jessica Hartman, an 18-year-old who works at the town's pharmacy says "Twilight" has more than doubled profits for the corner store.

Flipping through a guest book for Twilighters, the recent Forks High School grad smiles as she touches signatures from around the globe — Europe, Asia, South America. They're all here, recorded in the tattered pages that spell out the town's fame.

### **Businesses cash in**

Spurred by the boost in tourism and influx of money, are businesses eagerly trying to cash in on the craze.

Wander down the town's main drag and you'll see "We Love Edward and Bella" signs in store windows and a Forks' Speedway sign welcoming "Vampires and Racers."

Restaurants have started offering Twilight-themed options: Subway's "Twilight Special" which oozes marinara and the ever popular Bella Burger at local hangout Sully's Drive-in, which comes with special sauce and pineapple.

Stacks of "Twilight" T-shirts sit behind almost every counter in town.

Associated Press, 21 Sept.

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### **Whitby does not own Dracula patent**

The subject of the link between Slains Castle and Dracula has flushed out, in the person of Mr Leeming, someone who knows what he is talking about.

May I suggest that, in future, on any subject like this, you seek his opinion.

By the way Mr Leeming, believe me, I have read the book.

I thought my letter would send the professional Whiby-ites scurrying to their Googles and libraries.

Anybody who spent 40 years weighing up evidence will know the knowledge Mrs Clegg now parades in your columns has been freshly acquired in the last three weeks.

It is as simple as this – Harry Ludlam's 1962 biography of Bram Stoker was read and reread by Bram Stoker's son Noel Thornley Stoker, although he died shortly before publication.

He says Slains Castle was the inspiration for the Count's castle.

Dorothy Clegg dismisses the claim out of hand.

Who are we to believe?

While giving penny lectures to other people about how "rudeness never wins an argument" could she not consider that, to dismiss somebody else's opinion out of hand without examining the evidence on which such opinion is based is really, truly rude?

May I remind you of her reaction to the claim: "I'm sick of this, it's just not true" as if the claim was a personal attack on her, or an attempt by somebody to rob Whitby of part of its heritage.

Would she make the same reply now that she has acquired some knowledge of the subject.

Juries consider the evidence and then give a verdict – not the other way round.

Her reaction not only displayed parrot-squawk ignorance but pathetic, parish-pump, shoot-from-the-hip, knee-jerk ignorance. This is what does not win arguments.

Whitby Town Council does not own a jealously-guarded patent on the name Dracula.

Noddy did live in Toytown.

Noddy was based in Toytown. Dracula did not live in Whitby and was not based in Whitby.

However, Dracula and Noddy do have something in common – they are both entirely fictional creatures – figments of their authors' imaginations. Time to grow up?

Maclaren Hargan

Whitby Gazette, 30 Sept.

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