



## 3 PERFECT DAYS

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### ♥ DAY 1 // HIT THE CITY'S STREETS

Begin with the walking tour on p41. If you stop to explore Cardiff Castle (p42) and the National Museum Cardiff (p45), you'll quickly find that the day has disappeared. Enjoy lunch in Bute Park with picnic treats acquired at Cardiff Central Market (p58) or, if the weather's not cooperating, a meal at any of the reasonably priced central Cardiff eateries we've recommended (p53). Finish the day with a slap-up meal in the genteel northwestern suburbs (p54).

### ♥ DAY 2 // SPEND A DAY TIME-TRAVELLING

Spend the morning steeped in history at St Fagans National History Museum (p62), and if you've got wheels, continue into the countryside to delve into the prehistoric Tinkinswood and St Lythan's Burial Chambers (p62). If you're a *Gavin and Stacey* fan, continue down to Barry (p61). Head to Cardiff Bay: immerse yourself in forward-thinking architecture and get acquainted with Doctor Who Up Close (p50).

### ♥ DAY 3 // CATHEDRAL, CASTLE AND BAR-HOPPING

Head north to Llandaff Cathedral (p52) and discover the millennia of sacred art tucked into its medieval nooks. Continue on to Castell Coch (p63) to see what comes from having an overactive imagination and too much money. Head further north to Caerphilly Castle (p64); it may not have flamboyant interiors but it doesn't skimp on picturesque moats and battlements. For your last night in the capital, blast out the cobwebs in a live-music venue (p56).

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## INTRODUCING CARDIFF

☎ 029 / pop 324,800

**Cool Cardiff. Contemporary Cardiff. Changing Cardiff. The Welsh capital labours under many sobriquets these days, but one thing's for sure: Cardiff feels very much alive. The capital of Wales since only 1955, the city has embraced its new role with vigour, emerging as one of Britain's leading urban centres in the 21st century. Post devolution, Cardiff has blossomed, redefining itself with a new cityscape, a creative buzz, a cultural renaissance and a vibrant nocturnal life that punches well above its weight for a city of its size.**

The old Cardiff was shaped in the 19th century by the world's richest man – John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, third marquess of Bute – whose architectural legacy ranges from the colourful kitsch of Cardiff Castle to the neoclassical elegance of the Civic Centre. The 21st century has made its presence felt with the transformation of the sprawling docks that generated the Bute fortune into glitzy Cardiff Bay, centred on the futuristic flourishes of the Wales Millennium Centre.

However, it was the Romans that got the ball rolling. In AD 75 they built the fort where Cardiff Castle now stands. The name Cardiff probably derives from the Welsh *Caer Tâf* (Fort on the River Taff) or *Caer Didi* (Didius' Fort), referring to Roman general Aulus Didius. After the Romans left Britain the site remained unoccupied until the Norman Conquest. In 1093 a Norman knight named Robert Fitzhamon (conqueror of Glamorgan and later earl of Gloucester) built himself a castle here – the remains stand within the grounds of Cardiff Castle – and a small town grew up around it.

Both were damaged in a Welsh revolt in 1183 and the town was sacked in 1404 by Owain Glyndŵr during his ill-fated rebellion against English domination.

The first of the Tudor Acts of Union in 1536 put the English stamp on Cardiff and brought some stability. One of the few city-centre reminders of medieval Cardiff is St John's Church. But despite its importance as a port, market town and bishopric, only 1000 people were living here in 1801.

The city owes its present stature to iron and coal mining in the valleys to the north. Coal was first exported from Cardiff on a small scale as early as 1600. In 1794 the Bute family (see p40) – who owned much of the land from which Welsh coal was mined – built the Glamorganshire Canal for the shipment of iron from Merthyr Tydfil down to Cardiff.

In 1840 this was supplanted by the new Taff Vale Railway. A year earlier the second marquess of Bute had completed the first docks at Butetown, just south of Cardiff, getting the jump on other South Wales ports. By the time it dawned on everyone what immense reserves of coal there were in the valleys – setting off a kind of black gold-rush – the Butes were in a position to insist that it be shipped from Butetown. Cardiff was off and running.

The docklands expanded rapidly, the Butes grew staggeringly rich and the city boomed, its population mushrooming to 170,000 by the end of the 19th century and to 227,000 by 1931. A vast, multi-racial workers' community known as Tiger Bay grew up in the harbourside area of Butetown. In 1905 Cardiff was officially designated a city, and a year later its elegant Civic Centre was inaugurated.

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