


INTRODUCING WALES

WHAT MAKES WALES SPECIAL? EASY. ITS CAPACITY FOR SELF-REINVENTION. THIS SMALL COUNTRY WITH A BIG PERSONALITY REMAINS A HOLIDAY HAVEN WHILE MOVING WITH THE TIMES.



 They talk a lot in Wales about *hiraeth*. A typically Welsh word, it refers to a sense of longing for the green, green grass of home. Even if you're not from Wales, the sense of *hiraeth* will be with you from the first visit, only sated when you return. Such is the draw of this small but thrillingly diverse UK nation.

Wales has traditionally had an image problem: heavy industry, grey-slate towns, surly landladies hovering on the steps of floral B&Bs and greasy-spoon cafes with plastic tablecloths. But those stereotypes are history. Wales has been resurgent since the turn of the millennium. Devolution ensures the National (Welsh) Assembly now speaks for the nation, and Welsh culture today finds ever more forms of self-expression, cherishing its rich heritage and celebrating its contemporary voice.

That's why Wales gets under your skin, beckoning visitors with its friendly locals, fine food, remarkable landscapes, cultural draw, historic castles and green awareness. Truly the cornerstones of a country with its sights set firmly on a rosy future.

TOP The wedding-cake architecture of the Llandudno waterfront (p267) **BOTTOM LEFT** Cross the drawbridge at Cardiff Castle (p42) **BOTTOM RIGHT** The butterscotch sweep of Rhossili Bay (p125) – watch out for the dragon!

NEEL SECHERFIELD



LLANDUDNO



CARDIFF

MANFRED GOTTSCHALK



BREND TSCHEKERT/IMAGI/BROKER

THE GOWER PENINSULA



TINTERN ABBEY



SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK



MARCO REFFY
GREG GAWLONSKI



PEMBROKESHIRE COAST PATH



JULIE COOMBE

ST DAVIDS

TOP LEFT Sky, the only roof at Tintern Abbey (p77)
TOP RIGHT Walk the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (p148)
BOTTOM LEFT Ramble amid the wilderness of Snowdonia National Park (p210)
BOTTOM CENTRE Hidden in a hollow: St Davids Cathedral (p157)
BOTTOM RIGHT Llanthony Priory (p90) – as pretty as a (JMW Turner) picture

ASP BELDON / ALAMY



LLANTHONY PRIORY

ACCOMMODATION

Wales has plenty of options for every budget – from funky camping yurts to cosy hideaway hotels. The mainstay of any visit, however, is the great Welsh B&B. And it's here that you will really enjoy a richer cultural experience, with family-run places offering warmth, hospitality and home-cooked food. The big new trend across Wales is the restaurant with rooms, combining boutique accommodation and locally sourced gourmet food. It highlights just how far Welsh hospitality has come in recent years. For more on accommodation, see p321.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

HEATHROW AIRPORT (www.heathrowairport.com) The main international hub for Wales with a raft of global onward connections.

CARDIFF AIRPORT (www.tbicardiffairport.com) Regional air hub for the south with scheduled and charter flights across Europe.

FISHGUARD HARBOUR (Terminal Rd, Goodwick) This ferry terminal welcomes two to three car ferries a day from Rosslare in Ireland. Trains at the neighbouring station are timed to whisk arriving foot passengers on to Cardiff and beyond.

THINGS TO TAKE

- ★ Waterproofs for those summer showers
- ★ Lots of layers for climbing mountains, exploring coastal paths or city sightseeing
- ★ A good road map (satnav just doesn't get those country roads)
- ★ A taste for lamb and an appreciation of good cheese
- ★ An open mind to get away from tired old stereotypes



EON CLARKE

WEBLINKS

SEIZE THE DAYS (www.lonelyplanet.com/132days) Weekly updates on UK events.

TRAVELINE CYMRU (www.traveline-cymru.info) Essential public transport information.

VISIT WALES (www.visitwales.co.uk) Official resource for tourist information.

WALES 1000 THINGS (www.wales1000things.com) Inspiration for adventures.

WALES ONLINE (www.walesonline.co.uk) News and views concerning Welsh life.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

WALES



TOP/ALAMY

FEBRUARY/MARCH

SIX NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP

CARDIFF

The highlight of the Welsh rugby calendar with the best action at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium (p51).

ST DAVID'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

March 1st honours Wales' patron saint.

MAY/JUNE

ST DAVIDS CATHEDRAL FESTIVAL

ST DAVIDS

Ten-day festival of classical music against the sublime cathedral backdrop (p157).

VICTORIAN EXTRAVAGANZA

LLANDUDNO

Victorian dress-ups over the May Day holiday weekend in the resort town (p270).

HAY FESTIVAL

HAY-ON-WYE

This ever-expanding festival of literature and the arts brings an intellectual influx to book-town Hay (p92).

JULY

INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL EISTEDDFOD

LLANGOLLEN

A week-long festival of international folk music, an eclectic fringe and big-name evening concerts at Llangollen's Royal International Pavilion (p277).

ROYAL WELSH AGRICULTURAL SHOW

BUILTH WELLS

Prize bullocks and local produce at Wales' biggest farm and livestock show at Builth's Royal Welsh Showground (p177).

CARDIFF FESTIVAL

CARDIFF

A summer-long festival taking in a food festival, cultural events and family fun at venues across the capital (p39).

AUGUST

NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD OF WALES

The largest celebration of native Welsh culture, steeped in history, pageantry and pomp (p296).

LEFT International Musical Eisteddfod at Llangollen (p277) **RIGHT** Big Weekend, part of the Cardiff Festival (p39)

BRECON JAZZ FESTIVAL

BRECON

Smoky sounds at one of Europe's leading jazz festivals (p100).

WORLD BOG SNORKELLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

LLANWRTYD WELLS

Scores of competitors converge on Britain's smallest town to submerge themselves in murky bog waters for the 110m swim and their five minutes of fame (p189).

SEPTEMBER

TENBY ARTS FESTIVAL

TENBY

A festival of autumnal music, literary and theatre events in the seaside town (p143).

ABERGAVENTNY FOOD FESTIVAL

ABERGAVENTNY

The mother of all food festivals and the champion of Wales' burgeoning food scene (p86). Essential stuff.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

DYLAN THOMAS FESTIVAL

SWANSEA

A celebration of the man's work with readings and events at Swansea's creative hub, the Dylan Thomas Centre (p119).

DECEMBER

CARDIFF WINTER WONDERLAND

CARDIFF

Festive fun for families at the heart of Cardiff's Civic Centre (p52).



CULTURE

WALES



EON CLARKE

WALES IN WORDS

SIXTEEN SHADES OF CRAZY (Rachel Trezise, 2010) Debut novel of the latest literary name to watch.

NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL (Mike Parker, 2007) Informed look at Anglo-Welsh rivalry.

SKIRRID HILL (Owen Sheers, 2005) Imagery-rich collection of poetry.

SHEEPHAGGER (Niall Griffiths, 2002) Gritty fiction from lauded new voice.

ABERYSTWYTH MON AMOUR (Malcolm Pryce, 2001) Spoof detective story with a healthy dose of irony.

RAPE OF THE COUNTRY FAIR (Alexander Cordell, 1998) Powerful tale of family life.

WORK, SEX & RUGBY (Lewis Davies, 1993) Darkly comic take on Valleys life.

THE MABINOZION (Penguin Classics, 1976) Classic collection of folk tales.

WELSH LITERATURE

The Welsh literary movement is surprisingly rich with a clutch of standout tomes to better understand the evolving Welsh culture. An essential read, albeit by an English author, is George Borrow's *Wild Wales: Its People, Language and Scenery* (1862). The evocative and entertaining account of an 1854 walking tour of Wales makes for a fascinating historical record. Equally rich in the lyricism of its descriptions is Jan Morris' *Wales: Epic Views of a Small Country* (2000), a love letter to Wales from the celebrated globe-trotter and world citizen, celebrating the origins of Welsh culture. But the best-known writer remains literary bad-boy Dylan Thomas, whose *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1940) captures the lovely-ugly dichotomy of his Swansea home and evokes the stoic spirit of early-20th-century South Wales. For more, see p290.



NEIL STEWART

TOP LEFT Llechwedd Slate Caverns (p223) **LEFT** Resting place of Wales' most famous writer (p128) **CENTRE RIGHT** Green Man Festival (p96) **FAR RIGHT** An eisteddfod: a modern take on an ancient tradition (p296)

TOP CULTURAL EVENTS

URDD NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD Europe's largest youth arts festival alternates between North and South Wales; late May/early June.

GREEN MAN Regarded as Wales' best music festival for its green policy and family-friendly site; August (p96).

CROISSANT NEUF SUMMER PARTY Child-friendly weekend festival of music and arts events; August.

DYLAN THOMAS FESTIVAL Annual celebration of literary Wales in Swansea; October/November (p119).



DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Opera – Catch a rousing performance at the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff (p49)
- ★ Fringe events – Try offbeat drama or dance at the Aberystwyth Arts Centre (p184)
- ★ Folk music – Tune up for a singalong session of traditional songs at the Ucheldre Kitchen, Holyhead (p259)
- ★ Male voice choirs – Witness the harmony of a traditional choir at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen (p278)
- ★ Drama – Avant-garde and Welsh-language productions, plus arthouse cinema, at Cardiff's edgiest arts venue, Chapter (p57)
- ★ Poetry readings – Welsh National Literature Promotion Agency Academi (www.academi.org) arranges literary evenings throughout Wales

TOP ALBUMS

- MANIC STREET PREACHERS** *Everything Must Go*
 - CATATONIA** *Way Beyond Blue*
 - SUPER FURRY ANIMALS** *Mwng*
 - GORKY'S ZYGOTIC MYNCI** *Bywd Time*
 - MAN** *Endangered Species*
 - BUDGIE** *Squawk*
 - THE ALARM** *Strength*
 - Y CYRFF** *Atalnod Llawn 1983-1992*
 - FFA COFFI** *Pawb Am Byth*
- Compiled by Spillers Records (p59), Cardiff

CULTURE

WALES



WALES ON FILM

THE EDGE OF LOVE (2008) The biopic of Dylan Thomas' tempestuous life focuses on a complicated love triangle.

HUMAN TRAFFIC (1999) The story of drug-fuelled hedonistic youth captured the late-Nineties zeitgeist.

TWIN TOWN (1997) Comedic exploration of urban decline set in Swansea, which launched the career of Rhys Ifans.

HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY (1941) John Ford's classic – a sentimental yet evocative look at the South Wales mining industry.

GALLERIES GALORE

The art gallery scene is exploding across Wales.

MOSTYN GALLERY Reopened after extensive refurbishment with galleries, events and cool photography exhibitions in the cafe (p270).

MOMA WALES Machynlleth's arts hub has one gallery for Welsh art and another for international works (p201).

ORIEL Y PARC St Davids' fantastic new tourist-office-cum-art-gallery showcases Pembrokeshire landscapes (p160).

ORIEL YNYS MÔN Home to the must-see Kyffin Williams collection (p260).

SCALA ARTS CENTRE (www.scalaprestatyn.co.uk) Prestatyn's brand new arts centre includes exhibitions to bring local history to life.

THE EISTEDDFOD

Nothing encapsulates Welsh culture like the eisteddfod – it's infused with a sense of Celtic history, drawing heavily on the Bardic tradition of verbal storytelling. The modern eisteddfod is the descendant of ancient tournaments in which poets and musicians competed for a seat of honour in the households of noblemen. The first recorded tournament dates from 1176, while the first modern-day eisteddfod was staged in Carmarthen in 1819. Today, the National Eisteddfod of Wales celebrates Welsh-language culture and is one of Europe's largest cultural events. Spin-off events are the International Musical Eisteddfod and the Urdd National Eisteddfod. For more, see p296.

LEFT The red dragon is an ancient and potent symbol of Wales (p312) **RIGHT** Conwy Castle (p264), one of the world's finest medieval castles

WELSH-LANGUAGE ARTS

The move to establish a stronger sense of cultural identity for Wales is attributed by many to the birth of Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C; Channel 4 Wales) in 1982. The dedicated Welsh-language TV station is credited with rejuvenating a threatened language, strengthening national identity and taking Wales to the world. The station is heavily subsidised and often criticised for broadcasting to a niche audience, but research shows it has done much to revive interest in the Welsh language. The long-running soap opera *Pobol y Cwm* (*People of the Valley*) is even transmitted with subtitles to the rest of Britain. BBC Radio Cymru also flies the flag for Welsh-language programming. For more, see p292.

TOP THEATRE VENUES

- ★ Catch big-name acts and Welsh productions at Venue Cymru, Llandudno (p272)
- ★ Soak up events, exhibitions and performances at Galeri Caernarfon (p235)
- ★ Don't miss the atmosphere of the converted-church venue, Cardiff's Norwegian Church Arts Centre (p51)
- ★ Theatre, dance, comedy and live music are all on the program at Swansea's Taliesin Arts Centre (p121)
- ★ For the best of local theatre, head to the recently reopened Theatr Twm o'r Nant, Denbigh (www.theatr-twm-or-nant.org.uk)



FOOD & DRINK

WALES



HEMI JONES / ALAMY

COOKING CLASS

COOKING WITH ANGELA

GRAY (www.angelagray.co.uk) Tailored courses from the Welsh TV chef (p318) set in three fantastic period locations across North and South Wales, plus one-to-one and private group tuition.

DROVERS REST (p190) Private and group classes from dinner parties to Welsh game held at a charming Mid-Wales restaurant. Cook up then eat in.

DRYAD BUSHCRAFT (www.dryadbushcraft.co.uk) One-day Wilderness Gourmet course combines bushcraft with wild camping.

FUNGI FORAYS (www.fungi.forays.co.uk) Mushroom hunting, preparation and cooking in Mid-Wales as part of weekend breaks in October.

THE CULINARY COTTAGE (www.theculinarycottage.co.uk) One-to five-day themed courses, plus the option to stay on-site near Abergavenny.

REGIONAL CUISINE

Wales has seen a food revolution in recent years, from the growth of farmers markets championing organic produce to the rise of the Welsh restaurant with rooms, and burgeoning awareness of the food-miles issue. Wales is today home to some of the most exciting young chefs in Great Britain, many embracing the idea of using only local and seasonal produce.

Of course, the country is blessed in that respect. Wales has an abundance of superb-quality regional produce and, despite the odds, has maintained an agricultural industry to handle it. Next-generation chefs are taking the basic ingredients of the Welsh larder – lamb, black beef, cheese, mussels and laver bread among others – and giving them a contemporary new spin. Wales never tasted so good.

For more, see (p316).



KEITH MORRIS / ALAMY

TOP LEFT Say cheese! Wales is famous for it (p317) **LEFT** Shane Hughes at Ynysir Hall (p186) **CENTRE RIGHT** Laver bread (p317) – not bread at all! **FAR RIGHT** A traditional Welsh dish: *cawl* (p316)

TOP CHEFS

WALNUT TREE (www.thewalnuttreeinn.com) Shaun Hill's eatery remains the doyen of the food scene (p87).

HARDWICK (www.thehardwick.co.uk) Chef Stephen Terry has done great things for this gastropub with a twist (p87).

CROWN AT WHITEBROOK (www.crownatwhitebrook.co.uk) Head chef James Sommerin racks up the Michelin stars at this Monmouthshire restaurant with rooms (p78).

YNYSHIR HALL (www.ynyshirhall.co.uk) Shane Hughes is one of Wales' newly Michelin-starred chefs (p186).



NEIL SITCHFIELD



FOOD/OLIO/ALAMY

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Farmers markets – Sniff out a local market such as Cardiff's Riverside Real Food Market for the pick of organic produce (p53)
- ★ Distillery tours – The return of Welsh whisky is celebrated with tours and tastings at the Penderyn Distillery (p102)
- ★ Real ale – Stock up on Snowdonia Ale at the Purple Moose Brewery, one of Wales' growing band of microbreweries (p247)
- ★ Cafe culture – Catch the sun, indulge in some people-watching and sip espresso at Cardiff's fashionable Mermaid Quay (p49)
- ★ Michelin stars – Wales now boasts four Michelin-starred eateries for fine-dining Welsh style; book ahead (p318)

LOCAL TREATS

- ★ *Bara brith* – rich, fruit tea-loaf
- ★ *Cawl* – hearty broth of meat and vegetables
- ★ Faggots – seasoned pork and liver meatballs served with peas and gravy
- ★ Laver bread – boiled seaweed mixed with oatmeal and served with cockles or bacon for breakfast
- ★ Perl Las – the king of Welsh cheeses, blue yet with a subtle flavour
- ★ Sewin – wild sea trout
- ★ Welsh cakes – small, scone-like griddle cakes with fruit

FOOD & DRINK

WALES



CHRIS HOWES/WILD PLACES PHOTOGRAPHY / ALAMY

FOOD BOOKS

FIRST CATCH YOUR

PEACOCK (Bobby Freeman)
Classic guide to Welsh food, combining proven recipes with cultural and social history.

FOOD WALES (Colin Press-dee)
Encyclopaedic guide now with follow-up tome, *Food Wales A Second Helping*.

THE VERY BEST FLAVOURS OF WALES (Gilli Davies)
Celebration of Welsh cookery with the qualified Cordon Bleu chef.

THE WELSH TABLE (Christine Smeeth)
Simple, traditional Welsh dishes, kitchen anecdotes and words of wisdom.

REGIONAL TREATS

Our pick of the specialist food outlets in Wales.

ALBERT REES LTD (www.carmarthenham.co.uk)
Delicious ham produced the farmhouse way; Carmarthen Market.

E ASHTON'S (www.ashtonfishmongers.co.uk)
Fantastically fresh sea trout; Cardiff Central Market.

KIDMENOT (www.kidmenot.co.uk)
Smooth and sweet goats' milk fudge made on the farm; Llandeilo.

PENARTH VINEYARD (www.penarthwines.co.uk)
Fruity Welsh wines – try the Pinot Noir; Welshpool.

RHUG ESTATE FARM SHOP (www.rhug.co.uk)
Slow-grown and grass-fed Welsh beef; Corwen.

TREALY FARM CHARCUTERIE (www.trealy.co.uk)
Sausages made from traditional-breed pigs; Monmouthshire.

FARMERS MARKETS

The concept of farmers markets is booming in Wales with some 60 markets now working on a regular basis – more per capita than anywhere else in the UK. The leading light is Cardiff's Riverside Real Food Market, established in 2004 to bring regional food to the street markets and promote social regeneration. Ask at the local tourist office about the nearest market to visit. The National (Welsh) Assembly now even backs an initiative by local councils to let people order fresh seasonal produce online direct from producers and have it delivered to a designated collection point. See p316 for more.

TOP LEFT Take part in an old Welsh tradition: the pub (p317) **RIGHT** A foodie wave has broken on Wales, leaving behind a string of award-winning gastropubs and restaurants (p318)

CHEERS TO WALES

There's no need to go thirsty in Wales. A raft of local producers is championing microbrewery beers, ciders, wines and even whiskies. Some use traditional methods and maintain family recipes (try Upper House Farm in Monmouthshire for oak barrel-stored cider), while others are pioneering new methods and techniques (try the Penderyn Distillery near Brecon for Welsh whisky and a shiny new visitor centre). Real ale, too, is enjoying a revival with some 35 breweries now across Wales, including the Purple Moose Brewery in Porthmadog, winner of the Champion Beer of Wales. To sample the whole lot, catch the annual CAMRA Great Welsh Beer & Cider Festival held in Cardiff each July. Hic! See p317 for more.

FOOD FESTIVALS

Abergavenny is the cornerstone, but Wales' program of food festivals grows each year.

BIG CHEESE FESTIVAL Tastings and events in the shadow of Caerphilly Castle in July (p64).

CARDIFF INTERNATIONAL FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL Showcase for Welsh produce in July (p52).

GWLEDD CONWY FEAST Traditional street market held in Conwy each October.

MOLD FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL Food-themed activities each September.

PEMBROKESHIRE FISH WEEK Celebrates the fruits of the coast in June/July (p319).



OUTDOORS

WALES

GREEN SPACES

Wales has five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

ANGLESEY COAST Rocky coves, towering sea stacks and limestone cliffs for coastal walks make for a perfect, scenic escape from the crowds (p259).

LLŶN PENINSULA Rugged cliffs, beach coves and deserted beaches for an end-of-the-earth escape (p237).

CLWYDIAN RANGE A landscape of rolling green hills and upland moors for gentle hiking, it offers a breeding ground for the rare Black Grouse and is home to the iconic Jubilee Tower (p273).

GOWER PENINSULA Family-friendly beaches contrast with rugged coastal paths for serious hikers (p122).

WYE VALLEY A majestic riverside glen for walkers and canoeists to explore (p77).



DAVID TOMLINSON

THE WALES COAST PATH

The National (Welsh) Assembly is working on an ongoing project to link the whole of the Welsh coastline with the 850-mile Wales Coast Path. It is due for completion by 2012. The path, running from Queensferry to Chepstow, aims to improve access to the coast and when connected with the existing Offa's Dyke Path will enable ramblers to walk around the whole of the country. Large sections of the Welsh coastline already have long-distance coastal paths, notably the Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path (125 miles), the Llŷn Coastal Path (84 miles) and the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (186 miles). The newest section of coast path to open is the North Wales Coast Path (27 miles) from Prestatyn, Denbighshire, to the West Shore of Llandudno, Conwy.



KEITH MORRIS / ALAMY

TOP LEFT Sail at Abersoch (p241) **LEFT** Wales' rivers, lakes and coast are ideal for water sports (p303) **CENTRE** **RIGHT** Hike the Snowdon Horseshoe (p227) **FAR RIGHT** Surf the Atlantic breakers at Freshwater West (p150)

TOP WALKS

The three national trails are open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and are way-marked with an acorn symbol.

GLYNDŴR'S WAY (132 miles; www.nationaltrail.co.uk/glyndwrsway) Connecting sites associated with the rebellion led by Owain Glyndŵr in the early 15th century (p177).

OFFA'S DYKE PATH (177 miles; www.offas-dyke.co.uk) Skirting the Wales–England border through an astonishing range of scenery and vegetation (p195).

PEMBROKESHIRE COAST PATH (186 miles; www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk) Hugging the sea cliffs of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, this is one of the UK's most beautiful coastal walks (p148 and p158).



GARETH MCCORMACK



THE PHOTOGRAPHY WALLS / ALAMY

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Birdwatching – Some of the best twitching in Wales can be found around South Stack in Holyhead (p258)
- ★ Ancient stones – The most mythology-rich are in Pembrokeshire's Preseli Hills (p170)
- ★ Footsteps of greatness – Explore the Taf Estuary around Laugharne (p128), the landscape that inspired Dylan Thomas
- ★ Industrial history – Follow the canal path from Llangollen to Trevor then take a boat trip over the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct for a World Heritage-inspired cruise (p274)
- ★ Wildlife encounters – Get close to grey seals, porpoises and dolphins on boat trips around Pembrokeshire's Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm Islands (p155)

BEST BEACHES

- ★ **CASWELL BAY** Popular family beach for lazy days (p123).
- ★ **CEMAES BAY** Perfect for rock pooling and crabbing (p254).
- ★ **LAUGHARNE** A walkers' beach with historic connections to a literary giant (p128).
- ★ **LLANDUDNO WEST SHORE** Away from the crowds for pure ozone (p269).
- ★ **TENBY** Pembrokeshire's favourite family haunt (p139).

OUTDOORS

WALES



NEIL SPICFIELD

NATIONAL PARKS

SNOWDONIA (designated in 1951; www.eryri-npa.gov.uk) The North Wales stalwart is also home to the tallest mountain in England and Wales and is great for off-season walking (p210).

PEMBROKESHIRE COAST (designated in 1952; www.pcnpa.org.uk) Coastal walking plus boat trips to a scattering of nearby islands lends an ozone-blown frisson to a walk (p144).

BRECON BEACONS (designated in 1957; www.breconbeacons.org) A rural haven for flora and fauna amid the rugged landscape of the history-carved mountains (p88).

RESOURCES FOR WALKERS

MID-WALES & BRECON BEACONS (www.exploremidwales.com) Superb yomping country with the national park and twin national trails.

NORTH WALES BORDERLANDS (www.northwalesborderlands.co.uk) Home to the Clwydian Range and trails around Llangollen.

PEMBROKESHIRE (www.visitpembrokeshire.com) Home to the must-visit coastal path and the lesser-known Preseli Hills.

SNOWDONIA MOUNTAINS & COAST (www.visitsnowdonia.gov.uk) North Wales' must-walk national park with a heritage-rich coast to boot.

WYE VALLEY & VALE OF USK (www.visitwyevalley.com) Work up an appetite around food-loving Monmouthshire by walking peaceful valley trails.

CYCLING IN WALES

After walking, cycling is the most popular outdoor activity among visitors. There are 1197 miles of National Cycle Network, 331 miles of traffic-free rides and 11 cycle-hub destinations around the country, all of them chosen for their access to day-cycling routes and for their cycling infrastructure. Best of all, the variety of landscape ensures there are routes for all abilities, from easy-riding touring routes and day trips to serious mountain-biking circuits that test endurance and skill. Local cycling operators can advise on regional routes, while a handful also offer pan-Wales packages for a countrywide adventure. Look out, too, for local cycling events and festivals. For more, see p302.

LEFT Wales has thousands of miles of cycling paths (p302) **RIGHT** Climb it, scramble on it, ride it, jump off it – coastering (p163)

PLAYING GOLF IN WALES

The golf industry in Wales is booming with a slew of new facilities and infrastructure in recent years. But it was the staging of the highly prestigious Ryder Cup tournament at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport, South Wales, in October 2010, which really cemented Wales' reputation as a golfing hub. Golf is not new to Wales, however. It may have taken 83 years to lure the Ryder Cup to the country, but the sport has been steadily attracting increasing numbers of visitors to Wales. The 200 well-crafted and scenery-rich golf courses take in snow-coated mountain valleys and wind-swept coastal stretches, while facilities at the 19th hole are increasingly open to all ages and abilities. For more, see p304.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- ★ Blue Flag beaches (www.keepwalestidy.org) Guide to the best of Welsh beaches
- ★ Fishing (www.fishing.visitwales.com) Essential details on the burgeoning Welsh game-fishing industry
- ★ Golf (www.golfasitshouldbe.com) Wales boasts 200 courses and a Ryder Cup event
- ★ Mountain biking (www.mbwales.com) Guide to Wales' biking centres and bases
- ★ Walking (www.walking.visitwales.com) Swot up on 500 miles of National Trails
- ★ Water sports (www.waleswatersports.co.uk) For all things wet and wild



FAMILY TRAVEL

WALES



KEITH MORRIS / ALAMY

TOP LODGINGS

ANGLESEY FARM STAYS

(www.angleseyfarms.com) A group of farmstead guesthouses around the island for cosy, rural retreats.

BLUESTONE

(www.bluestone.wales.com) Wales' answer to Center Parcs has all the family bases covered and a greener take on short breaks.

FFYNNON (p339) Superb B&B combining child-friendly features with design-led style at the heart of Snowdonia.

VALE RESORT (www.vale-hotel.com) Voted the UK's Best Large Family Friendly Hotel at Hotel Excellence Awards 2010.

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

CENTRE FOR ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGY Educational, fun and truly green, CAT is great for curious kids (p203).

GREENWOOD FOREST PARK An all-day visit to keep kids busy with rides, activities and Wales' coolest roller coaster (p236).

ANGLESEY BEACHES From making sand-castles to licking ice creams, it's the classic family chill-out island (p254).

DOCTOR WHO UP CLOSE Don't hide behind the sofa. This exhibition charts the adventures of every family's favourite time lord (p50).

NATIONAL WATERFRONT MUSEUM For a hands-on family visit on a rainy day, Swansea's landmark museum is hard to beat (p117).

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

Wales is well geared towards family travel. Children are generally made to feel welcome at guesthouses and restaurants (including some of the more high-end establishments), facilities are uniformly good and there are discounts at many attractions for family tickets (typically two adults, two kids), plus under fives often go free. Public transport is easy to negotiate with buggies (strollers) and baby-changing facilities are widespread. So far so good. For parents, then, it's simply a case of some simple forward planning. Do call ahead to the B&B to ask for a child's bed in the room and don't be shy to enquire about bottle warmers. People are happy to help.

TOP RIGHT Under construction: the latest of Wales' many castles

THE AUTHORS



PETER DRAGICEVICH

Coordinating Author, Itineraries, regional chapters (except Anglesey & North Wales), Accommodation, Transport

With over half a dragon in his surname, Peter has had a fascination with Wales ever since he was sent to write about Welsh castles for one of his first newspaper travel features. Since then he's coauthored 19 Lonely Planet titles, one of the most memorable of which was *Walking in Britain* where he got to trek around the entirety of the beautiful Pembrokeshire coast.



DAVID ATKINSON

Introducing Wales, Anglesey & North Wales, Background, Accommodation, Directory

Lapsed Welshman David Atkinson has been chasing the call of *hiraeth* for three editions of Lonely Planet's Wales now, focusing this time on the green, green grass of North Wales. David writes widely for newspapers and magazines, and blogs about travel around Northwest England and Wales at Hit the North (<http://nowhitthenorth.wordpress.com>).

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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ITINERARIES

THE FULL WELSH LOOP

TWO WEEKS // CARDIFF TO CHEPSTOW // 505 MILES

Start at modern **Cardiff** (p34) then cut through Glamorgan, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire to ancient **St Davids** (p157). Continue up the coast to studenty **Aberystwyth** (p180) and then ecofriendly **Machynlleth** (p200), historic **Dolgellau** (p210) and



castle-dominated **Harlech** (p218). Drive alongside cloud-grazing **Snowdon** (1085m; p226) to more castles at **Caernarfon** (p232) and **Beauamaris** (p254). Proceed along the north coast to walled **Conwy** (p264) and beachy **Llandudno** (p267) before turning south to forest-dwelling **Betws-y-Coed** (p222). Head to genteel **Llangollen** (p272), stop at Powis Castle in **Welshpool** (p198), then continue on to book-loving **Hay-on-Wye** (p90). Call in at **Brecon** (p97) and food-focussed **Abergavenny** (p83), then skirt Monmouth and edge down the peaceful **Wye Valley** (p77) to **Chepstow** (p74).

SOUTH WALES CIRCUIT

10 DAYS // CARDIFF TO CHEPSTOW // 325 MILES

From rejuvenated **Cardiff** (p34) proceed through rejuvenating **Swansea** (p111) to the beach-lined **Gower Peninsula** (p122). Head back through Carmarthenshire and into Pembrokeshire, stopping at candy-striped **Tenby** (p139). Travel through **Pembroke**

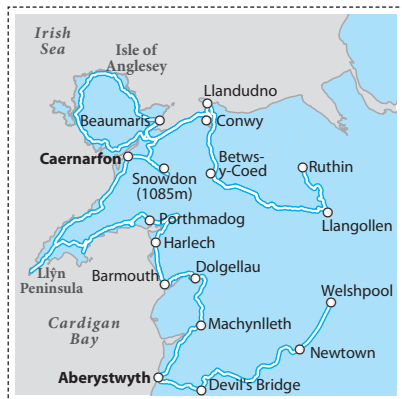


(p150) and **Haverfordwest** (p153) en route to intriguing **St Davids** (p157). Continue through **Fishguard** (p165) to food-loving **Newport** (p168), then **Cardigan** (p178) and along the lush Teifi Valley. The Cambrian Mountains stand between here and lovely **Llandeilo** (p133), so cut south towards Carmarthen before heading east. Head on through **Llandovery** (p133) and on to **Brecon** (p97), then peaceful **Crickhowell** (p94) and **Abergavenny** (p83). Finish with a saunter down the Wye Valley, past romantic **Tintern Abbey** (p77), to **Chepstow** (p74).

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

10 DAYS // RUTHIN TO WELSHPOOL // 310 MILES

Start at historic **Ruthin** (p278) and cut down to charming **Llangollen** (p272). Go west to tree-shaded **Betws-y-Coed** (p222) for a taste of Snowdonia National Park before heading north to beach-loving **Llandudno** (p267). Continue through fortified **Conwy** (p264) to



Beaumaris Castle (p254) and circle the **Isle of Anglesey** (p254). Cross the Menai Strait and head up to **Snowdon** (1085m; p226) before cutting back to **Caernarfon Castle** (p233). Circle the remote **Llyn Peninsula** (p237) and continue through **Porthmadog** (p244), **Harlech** (p218) and **Barmouth** (p216) before following the Mawddach Estuary to **Dolgellau** (p210). Head south to **Machynlleth** (p200) before rejoining the coast at buzzy **Aberystwyth** (p180). Stop at the **Devil's Bridge** (p187) waterfalls, market-centred **Newtown** (p196) and Welshpool's **Powis Castle** (p199).

STATION TO STATION

ONE TO TWO WEEKS // CHEPSTOW TO HOLYHEAD // 381 MILES

It's possible to zigzag your way through Wales by train, from its southeast to its northwest extremities. From **Chepstow** (p74) head to **Cardiff** (p34) and **Swansea** (p111). Take the Heart of Wales Line through **Llandeilo** (p133), **Llandovery** (p133),



Llanwrtyd Wells (p188), **Knighon** (p195) and on to Shrewsbury, before taking the Cambrian Line to **Welshpool** (p198), **Newtown** (p196) and **Machynlleth** (p200), then the Cambrian Coast Line to **Barmouth** (p216), **Harlech** (p218) and **Porthmadog** (p244). From here you can catch the Ffestiniog Railway to **Blaenau Ffestiniog** (p223), then continue on the Conwy Valley Line to **Betws-y-Coed** (p222) and Llandudno Junction, where the North Coast Line continues to **Conwy** (p264), **Bangor** (p261) and **Holyhead** (p256).

INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

ONE WEEK // BLAENAVON TO LLANGOLLEN // 295 MILES

Trace the Industrial Revolution from ironworks to coal mines, along with the railways, canals and bridges that connected them together. There's no more fitting place to start than the South Wales valleys. From **Blaenavon** (p104) head



through **Merthyr Tydfil** (p106) to the **Rhondda Heritage Park** (p108) and on to **Swansea** (p111). Stop at the **National Wool Museum** (p136) en route to **Machynlleth** (p200), where the Centre for Alternative Technology heralds a new era of green technology. Visit the slate mines at **Corris** (p204), **Blaenau Ffestiniog** (p223) and **Llanberis** (p230). Check out the famous **bridges across the Menai Strait** (p254) before heading to **Llangollen** (p272) and the World Heritage-listed **Pontcysyllte Aqueduct** (p275).

CASTLING THROUGH CYMRU

ONE WEEK // CHEPSTOW TO CONWY // 306 MILES

This itinerary only scratches the surface of Wales' preposterous preponderance of castles, yet it covers a good cross-section of styles, and the four that make up the Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd Unesco World Heritage Site. Start with



the oldest, **Chepstow Castle** (p74), then head to Cardiff for sturdy but beautiful **Caerphilly Castle** (p64), Disney-esque **Castell Coch** (p63) and **Cardiff Castle** (p42). Head northwest to the remote ram-parts of **Carreg Cennen Castle** (p115) and then on to Welshpool for garden-draped **Powis Castle** (p199). Cross to the coast for the views from **Harlech Castle** (p218) and then north to domineering **Caernarfon Castle** (p233). Cross the Menai Strait to Anglesey for beautiful **Beaumaris Castle** (p254) and then back again for breathtaking **Conwy Castle** (p264).

WELSH CULTURAL ICONS

FIVE DAYS // ANGLESEY TO CARDIFF // 340 MILES

Start from **Anglesey** (p254), the Druids' island, and then head to the emblematic mountain of **Snowdon** (1085m; p226), with **Dinas Emrys** (p228) at its base, the mythical battleground of the red and white dragons. The Llŷn Peninsula has the **Welsh**



Language & Heritage Centre (p238); **Bardsey Island** (p240), the legendary resting place of Merlin; and **Llanystumdwy** (p243), birth and burial place of David Lloyd George. Head south to **Harlech** (p218) and **Machynlleth** (p200), both associated with Owain Glyndŵr; **Aberystwyth** (p180), seat of Welsh learning; and on to **St Davids** (p157), hometown of Wales' patron saint. Continue to **Cardiff** (p34), home of Welsh rugby, birthplace of Dame Shirley Bassey and the incubator of Welsh rock music.

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