



SWANSEA, THE GOWER & CARMARTHENSHIRE

3 PERFECT DAYS

♥ DAY 1 // SWAN AROUND SWANSEA

Potter around Swansea's Maritime Quarter in the morning, splitting your time between the Dylan Thomas Centre (p117) and the National Waterfront Museum (p117). Devote your afternoon to exploring the Gower (p122): scoot down to Three Cliffs Bay (p123), hike up to Arthur's Stone (p126) and wander along Rhossili Bay (p125). Cap it off with a pint at the Joiners Arms (p127) before heading back to Mumbles (p118). Slip into your smart-casuals for an evening stroll along the promenade, dinner, and a nightcap at Jones (p120).

♥ DAY 2 // COUNTRY ROADS

Take a long, leisurely drive into the Carmarthenshire countryside. Choose between birds, bastions and botany for your first stop: take a gander at a Canadian goose at the National Wetland Centre (p128), storm Kidwelly Castle (p128) or get green-fingered at the National Botanic Garden of Wales (p132). Call into Carmarthen Market (p130) for some ham, then follow the A484 as it meanders along the River Gwili and then the Teifi as far as pretty little Cenarth (p136). If you've got time, call into the National Wool Museum (p136) on your way back, before pressing on to Llandeilo (p133) for the night.

♥ DAY 3 // CASTLES AND GARDENS

After yesterday's solid driving, spend today within a few miles' radius of Llandeilo. Carreg Cennen Castle (p134) is a highlight of any Carmarthenshire trip. Spend the morning among the lonely battlements before heading back to Llandeilo for lunch (p133). Divide your afternoon between Dinefwr Park & Castle (p132) and Aberglasney Gardens (p132) or, if you didn't make it there yesterday, the National Botanic Garden.

SWANSEA (ABERTAWE)

☎ 01792 / pop 229,100

Dylan Thomas called Swansea an ‘ugly, lovely town’, and that remains a fair description today. Wales’ second-largest city sprawls along the 5-mile sweep of Swansea Bay, ending to the southwest in the smart seaside suburb of Mumbles at the foot of the Gower Peninsula. It’s currently in the grip of a Cardiff-esque bout of regeneration, slowly transforming the drab, post-war city centre into something worthy of its natural assets. A new marina, a national museum, a water park, an architecturally tricky footbridge and a transport centre have already opened and plans are afoot to bulldoze and rebuild the central shopping precinct and create a fitting seaside boulevard out of shabby Oystermouth Rd.

Swansea makes up for its visual shortcomings with a visceral charm. A hefty student population takes to the city’s bars with enthusiasm and a newly minted restaurant scene has emerged from among all the Chinese and Indian takeaways.

Swansea’s Welsh name, Abertawe, describes its location at the mouth of the Tawe, where the river empties into Swansea Bay. The Vikings named the area Sveins Ey (Swein’s Island), probably referring to the sandbank in the river mouth.

The Normans built a castle here, but Swansea didn’t really get into its stride until the Industrial Revolution, when it developed into an important copper-smelting centre. Ore was first shipped in from Cornwall, across the Bristol Channel, but by the 19th century it was arriving from Chile, Cuba and the USA, in return for Welsh coal.

By the 20th century the city’s industrial base had declined, although Swansea’s oil refinery and smaller factories were still judged a worthy target by the Luftwaffe, which devastated the city centre in 1941. It was rebuilt as a rather soulless retail development in the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s, and now has another date with destruction, courtesy of a wrecking ball.

A small pocket around Wind St and Castle Sq escaped the wartime bombing and retains a remnant of Georgian and Victorian Swansea as well as the ruins of 14th-century **Swansea Castle** (closed to the public). The castle was mostly destroyed by Cromwell in 1647, but had a brief lease of life as a prison in the 19th century.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

EMERGENCIES // **Morrison Hospital**

(☎ 702222; Heol Maes Eglwys, Morrison) Accident and emergency department, 5 miles north of the city centre.

Police station (☎ 456999; Grove Pl)

TOURIST OFFICES // **Mumbles** (☎ 361302;

www.mumblestic.co.uk; Methodist Church, Mumbles Rd; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Sat Sep–Jun) **Swansea** (☎ 468321; www.visitswanseabay.com; Plymouth St; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat year-round, 10am–4pm Sun Jun–Sep)

ORIENTATION

The compact city centre clusters around Castle Sq and pedestrianised Oxford St on the west bank of the River Tawe. To its south and east are the redeveloped docklands of the Maritime Quarter, linked to the new SA1 district on the Tawe’s east bank by the graceful Sail Bridge (2003). The bus station and tourist office are on the western edge of the city centre, by the Quadrant shopping

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