



Aberystwyth & Mid-Wales

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Why Go?

Bordered by the dramatic landscapes of two national parks, Mid-Wales is often overlooked but this region of lustrous green fields, wooded river valleys and small market towns is something of a well-kept secret. This is Wales at its most rural, a sweep of undulating hills that the Industrial Revolution bypassed, and there's a wonderful, unhurried charm to discovering its winding back roads. Criss-crossed with country lanes and dedicated cycling and walking routes, it's an excellent area to explore under your own steam. Apart from exuberant, student-populated Aberystwyth, you won't find much excitement in the urban areas, it's the places in between, and the people who live in them, that are far more interesting. From struggling farmers to pioneers of sustainable development and the weird and wacky minds of Britain's smallest town, Llandrindod Wells, the region reveals more about the Welsh than you may ever have imagined.

When to Go

Long days and the promise of fine weather make June to September the best time to tackle long-distance walking routes such as Offa's Dyke Path, while the wonderful foliage colours make autumn perfect for walking or cycling the wooded trails around the Elan Valley.

Festivals abound in the summer months with oddballs taking part in some of the weirdest sporting events on the planet in Llanwrtyd Wells in May, June and July; a massive celebration of rural life at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show at the beginning of July; and a look back in time at the Victorian Festival in Llandrindod Wells in late August.

CEREDIGION

Bordered by the vast expanse of Cardigan Bay on one side and the sparsely populated Cambrian Mountains on the other, Ceredigion (pronounced with a *dig* not a *didge*) is an ancient Welsh kingdom founded by a chieftain called Ceredig. The rural communities here escaped the massive population influxes of the coal-mining valleys of the south and the slate-mining towns of the north and, consequently, the Welsh language is stronger here than in any other part of the country except Gwynedd and Anglesea, with over 50% of the local population claiming they speak Welsh.

The lack of heavy industry also left Ceredigion with some of Britain's cleanest beaches, and with no train access south of Aberystwyth, they tend to be less crowded. Adding to the isolation is the natural barrier known as the Desert of Wales, consisting of the barren uplands of the Cambrian Mountains, which separate Ceredigion from Powys. The sandy coves, sea cliffs, wooded river valleys and arid mountains here are as off the beaten track as Wales gets.

Cardigan (Aberteifi)

POP 4180

Small, historically sleepy Cardigan has the feel of a town on the cusp of change. Hip craft shops, trendy home-grown fashion labels, gourmet food stores and stylish B&Bs are creeping up the high street at a steady pace. Dynamic creative types seem to have been drawn here in recent years and although Cardigan hasn't quite shaken off its lacklustre image, it's well on its way. The castle is being restored, the town's reputation for its alternative arts scene is growing and the jumble of historical architecture that lines its streets and lanes has been given a new lease of life thanks to a local heritage initiative.


There's plenty of great walking in the surrounding countryside, lots of outdoor activities and some interesting places to visit such as the Welsh Wildlife Centre (WWC), St Dogmaels and Poppit Sands just across the river in Pembrokeshire. For walkers, Cardigan is the closest town to the end of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (PCP) and the first town at the beginning of the new Ceredigion Coast Path (CCP), so it sees plenty of hikers coming and going.

Cardigan is an Anglicisation of Ceredigion, 'the place of Ceredig', but the Welsh name, Aberteifi, refers to its location at the mouth of the River Teifi. In Elizabethan times this was Wales' second-most important port and, by the 18th century, one of Britain's busiest seafaring centres. By the late 19th century, however, the railway was displacing sea transport and the river began silting up, relegating the town to an altogether quieter future.

Sights

★ Cardigan Castle

CASTLE

( 01239-615131; www.cardigancastle.com; 2 Green St) Cardigan Castle holds an important place in Welsh culture, having been the venue for the first competitive National Eisteddfod, held in 1176 under the aegis of Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd. However, after years of neglect by its private owner when the shored up, overgrown and rapidly crumbling castle turned into little more than a shameful eyesore, the site is now in public hands and a hive of activity. Grand restoration plans are afoot and the castle should eventually reopen in spring 2014 as a community, recreational and education centre. The complex will include a heritage centre, restored gardens, open-air concert area, wet-weather dome, restaurant and self-catering accommodation. Check the website for the latest update.


Guildhall

MARKET

(www.guildhall-cardigan.co.uk; High St) The neo-Gothic Guildhall dates from 1860 and is home to a variety of community meeting spaces, a thriving gallery and Cardigan's Indoor Market which features stalls selling everything from antiques to local cheeses and handicrafts (Monday to Saturday). The field cannon outside commemorates the Charge of the Light Brigade in 1854, which was led by Lord Cardigan (after whom the button-up woollen sweater was named).

Pendre Art

GALLERY

( 01239-615151; www.pendreart.com; 35 Pendre; ☀ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Not only a great place to buy local art, Pendre has an excellent coffee shop serving sandwiches, wraps, baguettes and home-baked scones. Bring your laptop to take advantage of the free wireless connection.