



Cardiff (Caerdydd)

POP 346,000

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Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Cafe Cittá (p57)
- ➔ Woods Bar & Brasserie (p57)
- ➔ Riverside Market (p55)

Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

The capital of Wales since only 1955, Cardiff has embraced the role with vigour, emerging in the new millennium as one of Britain's leading urban centres. Caught between an ancient fort and an ultramodern waterfront, compact Cardiff seems to have surprised even itself with how interesting it has become.

The city has entered the 21st century pumped up on steroids, flexing its recently acquired architectural muscles as if it's still astonished to have them. This newfound confidence is infectious, and these days it's not just the rugby that draws crowds into the city. Come the weekend, a buzz reverberates through the streets as swarms of shoppers hit the Hayes, followed by waves of revellers descending on the capital's thriving pubs, bars and live-music venues.

When to Go

January and February are the coldest months, although Wales' home matches in the Six Nations Rugby Championship warm spirits in February and March.

June is the driest month and in July the summer-long Cardiff Festival kicks off, incorporating theatre, comedy, music and a food festival. In August, the warmest month, knights storm the castle, classic cars converge and gay pride takes over the streets.

Making the most of the December chill, Cardiff Winter Wonderland brings ice-skating and Santa's grotto to the Civic Centre.

History

In AD 75 the Romans built a 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 within the Roman walls 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. 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 – which 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 large, multiracial 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. In 1913 Cardiff became the world's top coal port, exporting some 13 million tonnes of the stuff.

The post-WWI slump in the coal trade and the Great Depression of the 1930s slowed this expansion. The city was badly damaged by WWII bombing, which claimed

over 350 lives. Shortly afterwards the coal industry was nationalised, which led to the Butes packing their bags and leaving town in 1947, donating the castle and a large chunk of land to the city.

Wales had no official capital and the need for one was seen as an important focus for Welsh nationhood. Cardiff had the advantage of being Wales' biggest city and boast the architectural riches of the Civic Centre. It was proclaimed the first ever capital of Wales in 1955, chosen via a ballot of the members of the Welsh authorities. Cardiff received 36 votes to Caernarfon's 11 and Aberystwyth's four.

Sights

Central Cardiff

Cardiff Castle

CASTLE

(Map p54; www.cardiffcastle.com; Castle St; adult/child £11/8.50, incl guided tour £14/11; ☉ 9am–5pm) The grafting of Victorian mock-Gothic extravagance onto Cardiff's most important historical relics makes Cardiff Castle, quite rightly, the city's leading attraction. Until it was donated to the city in 1947, this was the private domain of the Butes, the family who transformed Cardiff from a small town into the world's biggest coal port.

It's far from a traditional Welsh castle, more a collection of disparate castles scattered around a central green, encompassing practically the whole history of Cardiff. The most conventionally castle-like bits are the motte-and-bailey **Norman shell keep** at its centre (built in wood in around 1081 and rebuilt in stone in 1135) and the 13th-century **Black Tower** that forms the entrance gate. William the Conqueror's eldest son Robert, Duke of Normandy, was imprisoned in the wooden fort by his brother, England's King Henry I, until his death at the age of 83.

A grand house was built into the western wall in the 1420s by the Earl of Warwick and was extended in the 17th century by the Herbert family (the earls of Pembroke), but by the time the Butes acquired it a century later it had fallen into disrepair. The first marquess of Bute hired architect Henry Holland and Holland's father-in-law, the famous landscape-architect Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, to get the house and grounds into shape.

It was only in the 19th century that it was discovered that the Normans had built