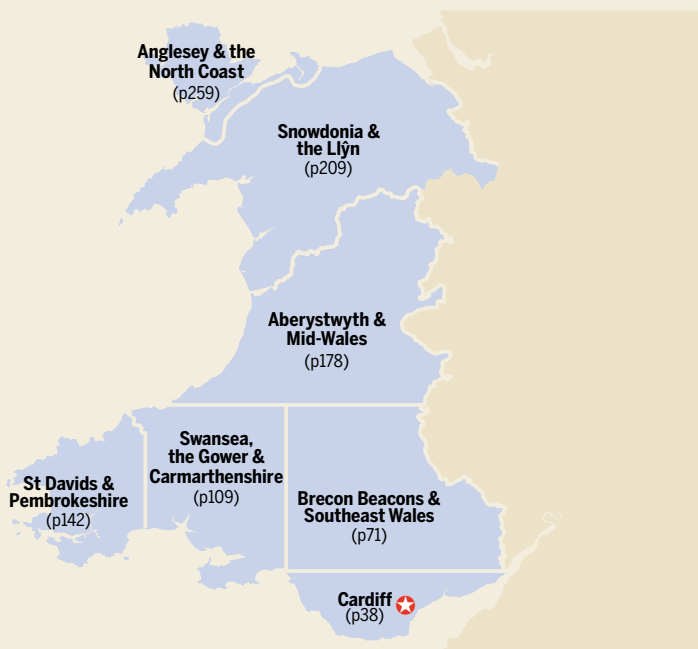




Wales



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Peter Dragicevich

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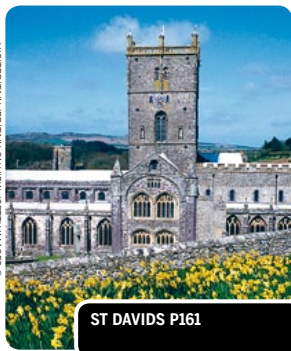
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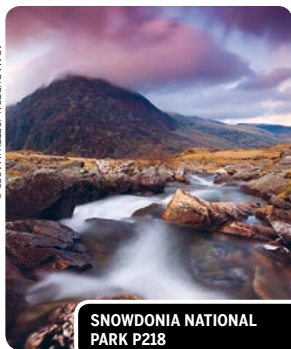
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SNOWDONIA NATIONAL
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Welcome to Wales

The phrase ‘good things come in small packages’ may be a cliché, but in the case of Wales it’s undeniably true.

Wilderness

Compact but geologically diverse, Wales offers myriad opportunities for escaping into nature. It may not be wild in the classic sense – humans have been shaping this land for millennia – but there are plenty of lonely corners to explore, lurking behind mountains, within river valleys and along surf-battered cliffs. An extensive network of paths makes Wales a hiker’s paradise – and thousands of people duck across the border from England each year for that reason alone. Things are even more untamed on the islands scattered just off the coast, some of which are important wildlife sanctuaries.

Stones with Stories

Castles are an inescapable part of the Welsh landscape. They’re absolutely everywhere. You could visit a different one every day for a year and still not see them all. Some watch over mountain passes, while others keep an eye on the city traffic whizzing by; some lie in enigmatic ruins, while others still have families living in them. There’s also an altogether more inscrutable and far older set of stones to discover – the stone circles, dolmens and standing stones erected long before castles were ever dreamt up, before even histories were written.

Beaches

Just because it’s not exactly tropical doesn’t detract from Wales being a superb beach-holiday destination – and the melanoma risk is considerably lower here! The beauty of the British coast is cruelly underrated, and Wales has some of the very best bits. When the sun is shining the beaches fill up with kids building sandcastles and splashing about in the shallows. And when it’s not? How about a bracing walk instead.

Hospitality & Hiraeth

Beyond the scenery and the castles, it’s interactions with Welsh people that will remain in your memory the longest. Perhaps you’ll recall the moment when you were sitting in a Caernarfon cafe, listening to the banter in the ancient British tongue dancing around you. Or that time when you were in the pub, screaming along to the rugby with a red-shirted mob. 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, a feeling of *hiraeth* may well hit you when you leave, only to be sated when you return.



Why I Love Wales

By Peter Dragicevich, Author

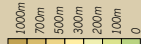
I well remember my first time in Wales – a short trip to Cardiff with a fellow Kiwi living in London. We were so impressed with the castle that we took the train to Caerphilly the following day for an extra serving. I returned shortly afterwards to walk the extraordinarily beautiful Pembrokeshire Coast Path, and since then I've been back numerous times and explored every corner of the country. I've met lots of interesting people, been repeatedly surprised by the beauty of the scenery and I've seen an awful lot of castles. What's not to love?

For more about our authors, see p352

Wales



ELEVATION



Llandudno

Vibrant slice of Victorian culture (p274)

Conwy

Living history within ancient walls (p269)

Porthmadog

Scenic railways and craft beer (p248)

Snowdonia

Snowcapped peaks and charm-infused villages (p218)

ROAD DISTANCES (miles)

Note: Distances are approximate

Caernarfon	28	74	101	128	155	170	187	32
Aberystwyth	101	74	128	155	170	187	32	
Fishguard	155	128	55	70	85	100	115	42
Swansea	170	143	70	85	100	115	130	48
Abergavenny	161	134	76	106	136	166	196	48
Cardiff	187	160	104	105	106	107	108	42
Holyhead								
Caernarfon								
Aberystwyth								
Fishguard								
Swansea								
Abergavenny								



Pembrokeshire
Inviting sands and coastal drama (p142)

St Davids
Spiritual hub in a magical setting (p161)

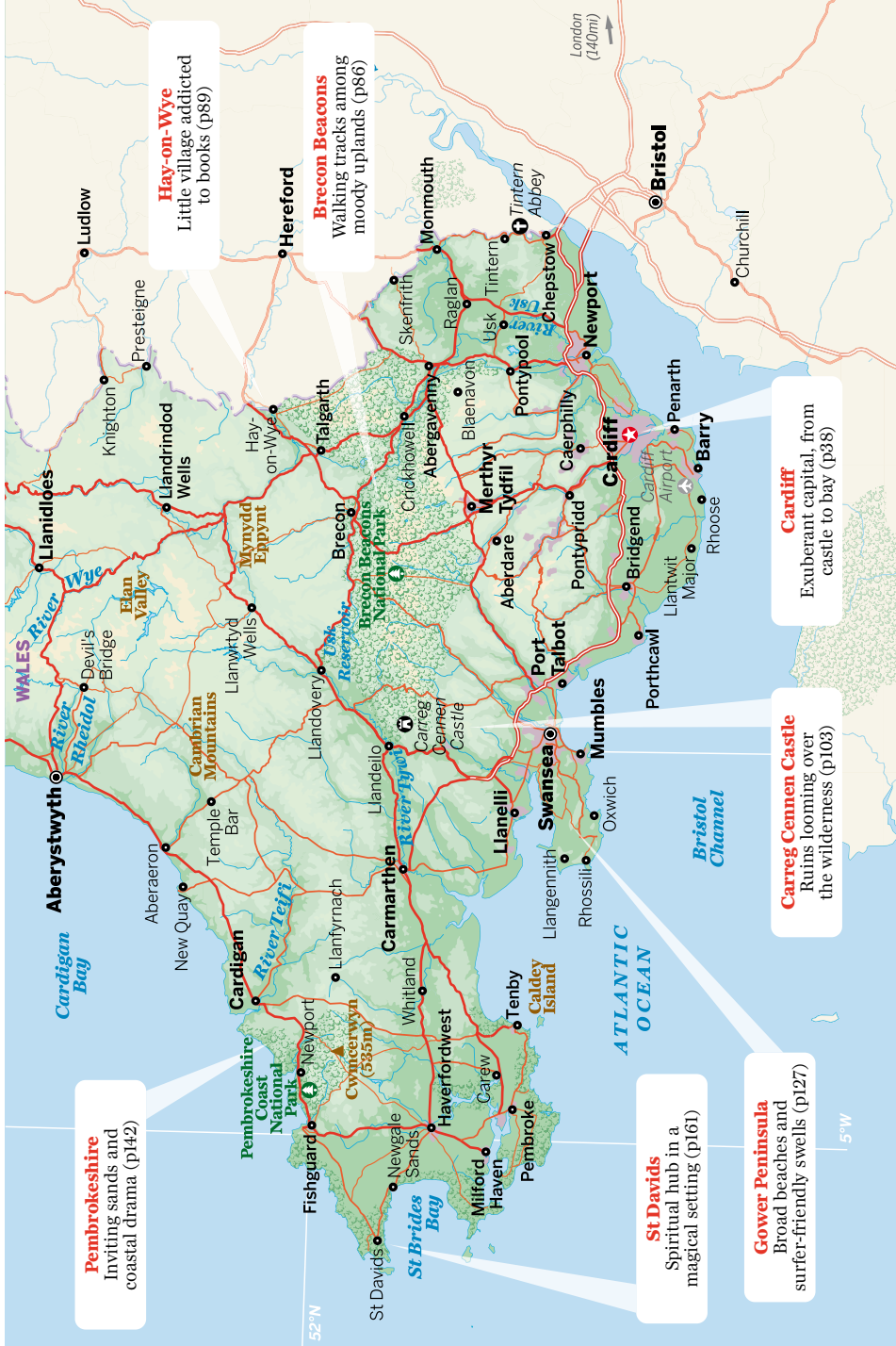
Gower Peninsula
Broad beaches and surfer-friendly swells (p127)

Carreg Cennen Castle
Ruins looming over the wilderness (p103)

Cardiff
Exuberant capital, from castle to bay (p38)

Hay-on-Wye
Little village addicted to books (p89)

Brecon Beacons
Walking tracks among moody uplands (p86)



Itineraries



The Southeastern Marches

This short itinerary explores the historic borderlands between Wales and England, which were once ruled by the Marcher lords, powerful French Norman families who pushed into Wales in the wake of their conquest of England. It's a particularly lush and picturesque landscape, well suited to walkers. Medieval history and architecture buffs will find the numerous castles and ruined abbeys fascinating. In fact, every single place we mention in this itinerary has its own castle.

Start in **Chepstow**, where there's a particularly hefty castle, and head north up the gorgeous Wye Valley to the famous ruins of **Tintern Abbey**. Continue following the river to **Monmouth**, the ancient county town and birthplace of both Henry V and one half of Rolls-Royce. From here, head west along the A40 to the magnificent ruins of **Raglan Castle** before continuing on to **Abergavenny**, Wales' foodie capital. The A40 then leaves Monmouthshire and crosses into Powys and the eastern fringes of Brecon Beacons National Park. Stop for the night in quiet little **Crickhowell** and then head to the sturdy stone town of **Brecon**. From here, cut northeast towards the English border to **Hay-on-Wye**, the most book-loving place on the planet.

9
DAYS

South Wales Circuit

Taking in the capital, two national parks, numerous castles, many beautiful beaches, industrial sites, and cities associated with Dylan Thomas, St David and Merlin the Magician, this South Welsh circuit ticks off many of the icons of Wales. Make sure you allow time for coastal walks and lazy beach days on the Gower Peninsula and Pembrokeshire (weather dependent, of course), as well as hiking in the Brecon Beacons.

Start by thoroughly exploring **Cardiff** and its surrounds before heading west to **Swansea** for a Dylan Thomas fix. Spend a day on the beach-lined **Gower Peninsula** before proceeding to ancient **Carmarthen**, Merlin's town. Settle in to the seaside vibe at candy-striped **Tenby**, Wales' most appealing resort town and the gateway to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Check out the mighty castle at **Pembroke** and head on through **Haverfordwest** and the pretty port of **Solva** to beguiling **St Davids**, a sweet little city in a magical setting. Visit **Fishguard** on your way to food and beach loving **Newport**, where Neolithic and Iron Age sites await discovery in the surrounding hills.

From **Cardigan**, follow the lush Teifi Valley along the border of Ceredigion, stopping at the cute village of Cenarth and the National Woollen Museum. The Cambrian Mountains stand between here and lovely **Llandeilo**, so cut south towards Carmarthen before heading east. Do your homework first, as there are gardens, manor houses and castles to explore in this part of the Carmarthenshire countryside. Head on to the market town of **Llandovery**, with its fine Georgian buildings, and then skirt the northern edge of Brecon Beacons National Park on your way to **Brecon**. The Beacons spread south from here, offering ample opportunities for walking, horse riding and canal trips. Peaceful **Crickhowell** is another good walking base. Cross the River Usk and cut down towards **Blaenavon**, a small town that wears the legacy of its coal-mining and iron-smelting history on its sleeve, and has been inscribed on the World Heritage list as a result. Backtrack towards **Abergavenny**, home to some of Wales' best country restaurants and gastropubs. Finish with a saunter down the Wye Valley, past romantic Tintern Abbey, to **Chepstow**.

ANDREW HOLT / GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: River Usk, Powys
(p191)

Bottom: Pembroke
Castle (p152)

JORGE DUARTE ESTEVAO / GETTY IMAGES ©





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DAYS

North & Mid-Wales

The scenic highlights of North and Mid-Wales include river valleys, spectacular mountains and a widely varied coastline. This itinerary cuts a broad arc through the Welsh-speaking heartland, taking in still more castles, industrial sites and beaches – these things are clichés of Wales for a reason.

Start in **Ruthin** and take the beautiful back road which cuts through the bottom of the Clwydian Range to **Llangollen**, a small riverside town famous for outdoor pursuits and its World Heritage-listed canal and aqueduct. From here head west on the A5, swapping Denbighshire for the eastern reaches of Snowdonia National Park. **Betws-y-Coed** makes a pretty base for forest and river walks and mountain biking.

Put Snowdonia behind you for a few days as you head north on the A470, shadowing the River Conwy. Stop along the way at Bodnant Estate before heading north to the beach at **Llandudno**. Hop down to **Conwy** to immerse yourself in the medieval world between its town walls and tick off castle number one of the Castles of Edward I in Gwynedd World Heritage Site. The A55 hugs the coast as it heads southwest towards **Bangor**. Stop for a quick look at the pier and the cathedral before crossing the Menai Strait to the Isle of Anglesey. Base yourself at **Beaumaris** (where you'll find castle number two) and circle the sacred island of the druids.

Cross the Menai Strait again and head to **Llanberis**, where you can plan your assault on Snowdon, either on foot or by train. Circle the mighty mountain, stopping at **Bedgelert**, before heading back to the coast at **Caernarfon** for castle number three. Circle the remote Llŷn Peninsula, stopping at the beaches and pubs of **Aberdaron** and **Abersoch**. Continue through **Porthmadog**, **Harlech** (castle number four) and beachy **Barmouth** before following the Mawddach Estuary to stony faced, heritage-filled **Dolgellau**. Head south to visit the greenies at **Machynlleth** before rejoining the coast at the buzzy student town of **Aberystwyth**. Stop at the **Devil's Bridge** waterfalls and the gallery at **Newtown**, before finishing at **Welshpool** with a visit to sumptuous Powis Castle.



Full Welsh Circuit

This itinerary has been designed for travellers who have got the time and inclination to pack in as many of Wales' highlights as possible into one big loop.

Start at **Cardiff** and head north to see the fairy-tale castle at **Caerphilly**, before cutting west to **Swansea**. Head out along the Gower Peninsula to spectacular **Rhossili Bay**, and then continue north to remote **Carreg Cennen** in Brecon Beacons National Park. Base yourself in **Llandeilo** for a day of gardens and manor houses.

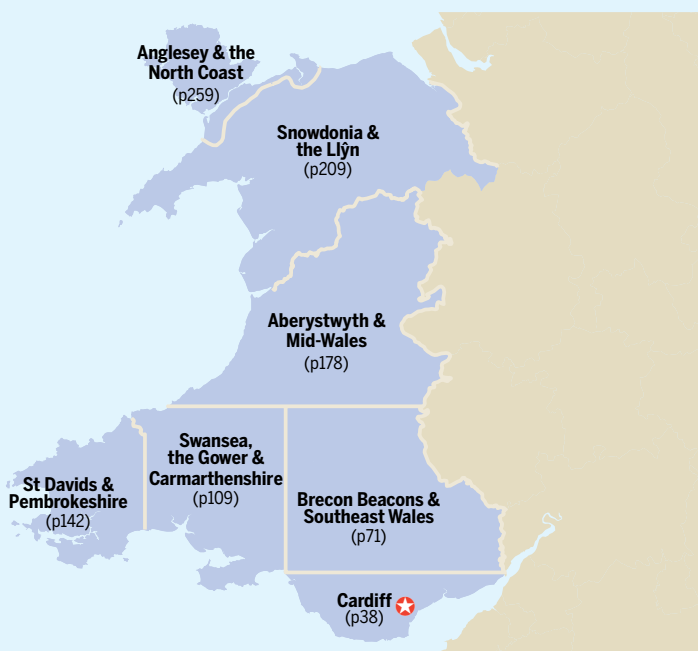
Head west to the seaside resort town of **Tenby**, within Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, before continuing on to the ancient city of **St Davids**. Head up the coast to **Newport** for a day at the beach and a night of good food. Stop at Pentre Ifan and Castell Henllys on the long, leisurely drive up the coast to studenty **Aberystwyth**.

Continue on through ecofriendly **Machynlleth** and historic **Dolgellau** to **Harlech** and its World Heritage castle. At **Porthmadog**, take a steam train ride on the narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway to **Blaenau Ffestiniog** and stop to tour the slate caverns. Head along the Llŷn Peninsula to **Aberdaron** for surf-battered views over Bardsey Island from Braich-y-Pwll.

Follow the coast to Caernarfon, and then continue on to **Llanberis**, when you can visit the National Slate Museum and base yourself to tackle Snowdon. Double back to the Menai Strait and cross over to Anglesey to visit **Beaumaris**, **Rhosneigr** and **Plas Newydd**.

Proceed along the north coast to walled **Conwy** and beachy **Llandudno** before turning south to forest-dwelling **Betws-y-Coed**. Head to genteel **Llangollen**, stop at Powis Castle in **Welshpool**, then continue down through Powys to kooky **Llanwrtyd Wells** and on to the market town of **Llandovery**. Head east to **Brecon**, which is a good base for tackling Pen-y-Fan, and then cut down through **Crickhowell** to food-focussed **Abergavenny**. Visit **Blaenavon**, then skirt Monmouth and follow the peaceful Wye Valley to **Tintern Abbey**.

On the Road





OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Peter Dragicovich

Coordinating Author: Cardiff; Anglesey & the North Coast; Snowdonia & the Llŷn Wales has held a fascination for Peter ever since he was sent to write about Welsh castles for one of his first ever newspaper travel features. Since then he's co-authored dozens of Lonely Planet titles, including the previous edition of this book, three editions of *Great Britain*, and *Walking in Britain*, where he got to trek around the entirety of the beautiful Pembrokeshire coast. By researching

and writing the Anglesey & the North Coast chapter of this book, he's now covered every corner of Wales for Lonely Planet. And while his name may not be Welsh, it does at least have over half a dragon in it! Peter also contributed to the Plan Your Trip section, and wrote the Wales Today and History chapters.

Read more about Peter at:

lonelyplanet.com/members/peterdragicevich



Etain O'Carroll

St Davids & Pembrokeshire; Aberystwyth & Mid-Wales Cherished childhood memories of summer holidays spent clambering over castle walls, slipping down rocky waterfalls and digging siblings into the sand have given Etain a lifelong love of Wales. Regular return visits to explore the same winding roads and mountain passes, her own children in tow, have led to the delight in discovering how much the hotels, restaurants and roads have improved. Etain works as a freelance

travel writer and photographer (www.etaino.co.uk) and now lives in Oxford. Etain also wrote the Travel with Children, Culture, The Natural Environment and Transport chapters.

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lonelyplanet.com/members/etainocarroll



Helena Smith

Brecon Beacons & Southeast Wales; Swansea, Gower & Carmarthenshire Helena Smith was born in Swansea, and she was very happy to go back to explore the city, the Gower and the Brecon Beacons. She is a travel writer, photographer and editor and blogs about food and community at eathackney.com. Helena also wrote the Outdoor Activities, Food & Drink and Directory chapters.

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