



St Davids & Pembrokeshire

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Why Go?

The Pembrokeshire coast is what you imagine the world would look like if God were a geology teacher. Knobbly hills of volcanic rock, long thin inlets scoured by glacial meltwaters, stratified limestone eroded into arches, blowholes and sea stacks, and towering red and grey cliffs that scatter the shore. While in between lie perfect sandy beaches. This wild and incredibly beautiful landscape is the region's greatest asset and in summer people flock here to enjoy the spectacular walking, surfing, coasteering and sea kayaking, as well as the glorious beaches and abundant marine life. On top of its natural assets, Pembrokeshire offers a wealth of Celtic and pre-Celtic sites, forbidding castles, fascinating islands and little St Davids – the magical mini-city with its chilled vibe, spectacular cathedral and abiding association with Wales' patron saint.

When to Go

A good time to be in St Davids is 1 March, when the whole country celebrates its patron saint. Fishguard serenades summer with some serious sessions at its Folk Festival in late May/early June. It's peak season with hordes of holidaymakers from June to August, but also the best time for walking the coast path and hitting the beach.

The kids go back to school but Tenby bursts into life all over again for its annual arts festival in September. Surfers will catch the best swells between September and February on Pembrokeshire's rugged beaches.

SOUTH PEMBROKESHIRE

South Pembrokeshire boasts some of Wales' best sandy beaches and most spectacular limestone formations and makes an impressive starting point for the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (PCP). Once known as Little England Beyond Wales, it was divided from the north by the Landsker Line – a physical and then a linguistic barrier roughly following the old Norman frontier. The divide is less pronounced now, but there's a noticeable English feel to places like Tenby, especially in summer, when the masses descend with their buckets and spades, building miniature replicas of the castles their ancestors once used to keep the Welsh at bay. Those sturdy fortifications are still visible in Tenby, Manorbier, Carew and Haverfordwest, reaching their apotheosis at Pembroke Castle.

Tenby (Dinbych Y Pysgod)

POP 4700

Perched on a headland with sandy beaches either side, Tenby is a postcard-maker's dream. Houses are painted from the pastel palette of a classic fishing village, interspersed with the white elegance of Georgian mansions. The main part of town is still constrained by its Norman-built walls, funnelling holidaymakers through medieval streets lined with pubs, ice-cream parlours and gift shops. In the low season, without the tackiness of the promenade-and-pier beach towns, it tastefully returns to being a sleepy little place. In summer it has a boisterous, boozy holiday-resort feel, with packed pubs seemingly all blasting out Status Quo simultaneously.

Tenby flourished in the 15th century as a centre for the textile trade, exporting cloth in exchange for salt and wine. Clothmaking declined in the 18th century, but the town soon reinvented itself as a fashionable watering place. The arrival of the railway in the 19th century sealed its future as a resort, and William Paxton (owner of the Middleton estate in Carmarthenshire, now home to the National Botanic Garden of Wales) developed a saltwater spa here. Anxiety over a possible French invasion of the Milford Haven waterway led to the construction in 1869 of a fort on St Catherine's Island.

Among those who have taken inspiration or rest here are Horatio Nelson, Jane Austen, George Eliot, JMW Turner, Beatrix Potter and Roald Dahl. The artist Augustus

John was born here, and he and his sister Gwen lived here during their early life.

Sights

St Mary's Church

CHURCH

(High St) The graceful arched roof of 13th-century St Mary's Church is studded with fascinating wooden bosses, mainly dating from the 15th century and carved into flowers, cheeky faces, mythical beasts, fish, and even a mermaid holding a comb and mirror. The young Henry Tudor was hidden here before fleeing to Brittany. It's thought he left via a tunnel into the cellars under Mayor Thomas White's house across the road (where Boots is now). There's also a memorial here to Robert Recorde, the 16th-century writer and mathematician who invented the 'equals' sign, and an eerie cadaver-topped tomb intended to remind the viewer of their own mortality.

Tudor Merchant's House

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Quay Hill; adult/child £3.40/1.70; ☺ 11am-5pm Easter-Oct, closed Tue) Tenby's oldest buildings are found on steep Quay Hill. This handsome townhouse was once the dwelling of a late-15th-century merchant and has been restored as it would have been in 1500. Period furnishings and the remains of early frescoes can be seen on the interior walls. The merchant's shop, kitchen, bedchamber and the latrine tower can all be explored.

Tenby Museum & Art Gallery

MUSEUM

(www.tenbymuseum.org.uk; Castle Hill; adult/child £4/2; ☺ 10am-5pm) Housed within the ruins of a Norman castle, this museum covers the town's development from a fishing village into a 19th-century seaside resort bigger than Blackpool, with interesting exhibits ranging from delicate Roman vases to a Victorian antiquarian's study. There's also a recreated pirate's cell and a gallery including paintings by Augustus and Gwen John.

Castle Hill

HILL

This hilly headland separates North Beach from Castle Beach and the scanty remains of Tenby's Norman castle adorn its summit. Walk along the path from the harbour past **Laston House** (1 Castle Sq), the site of William Paxton's late 18th-century saltwater baths. The Greek writing on the pediment translates as the optimistic 'The sea will wash away all the evils of man'. Beyond here, a path leads out past the old and new Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)