



# Brecon Beacons & Southeast Wales

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## Why Go?

Wales' southeast corner, where the misty River Wye meanders along the border with England, is the birthplace of British tourism. For over 200 years travellers have visited this tranquil waterway and its winding, wooded vale, where the romantic ruins of Tintern Abbey have inspired poets and artists such as Wordsworth and Turner.

But there's more to the region than the market towns and rural byways of the Lower Wye. To the west, the dramatically serried South Wales valleys tell the story of the Industrial Revolution through heritage sites and still close-knit communities. Move north and the landscape opens out to the magnificent upland scenery of Brecon Beacons National Park, where high mountain roads dip down to remote hamlets and whitewashed ancient churches. The hiking and mountain-biking terrain here is superb.

## When to Go

- ➔ Outdoor types should consider heading to Brecon Beacons National Park in late spring, early summer or early autumn to take advantage of what should be reasonable weather (though there's no guarantee). The narrow country roads may be impassable in winter, and become congested during school summer holidays (mid-July to August). Many hostels and campgrounds don't open till after Easter.
- ➔ The literary extravaganza of the Hay Festival runs from late May until early June, the Green Man music festival is in August, while foodies should focus a trip around Abergavenny's food festival in September.

## NEWPORT (CASNEWYDD)

POP 146,000

Sitting at the muddy mouth of the River Usk and flanked by the detritus of heavy industry, Newport is never going to win any awards for beauty. However, Wales' third-largest city is in the process of smartening itself up, with the shiny new Friars Walk shopping complex opening up the historic city centre to a redeveloped riverside promenade. A handful of interesting sights more than justify a day trip to the city, but you're unlikely to be tempted to stay over.

### History

Newport takes its name from the fact that it was built after the 'old port' at Caerleon, further upstream, following the construction of Newport Castle in Norman times. The Welsh name, Casnewydd, actually means 'new castle' for much the same reason. Like many harbour towns in South Wales, it grew rich on the back of the iron and coal industries in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The legacy of these boom times can be glimpsed in the historic facades of Commercial St.

In the second half of the 20th century, Newport's shipbuilding industry disappeared, and the docks declined in importance as coal exports shifted to Barry and iron-ore imports to Port Talbot. In 2001 the huge Llanwern steelworks closed down.



### Sights

#### Tredegar House

HISTORIC BUILDING

(NT; ☎ 01633-815880; [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk); house adult/child £7.20/3.60, parking £2; ☀ park dawn-dusk year-round, house 11am-5pm Feb-Oct; 📍) The seat of the Morgan family for more than 500 years, Tredegar House is a stone and red-brick 17th-century building set amid extensive gardens, 2 miles west of Newport city centre. It is one of the finest examples of a Restoration mansion in Britain, the oldest parts dating to the 1670s. The National Trust took over management of the property in late 2011 and has done a great job bringing the fascinating stories of its owners to life.

The Morgans, once one of the richest families in Wales, were an interesting lot. Sir Henry was a 17th-century pirate (Captain Morgan's Rum is named after him); Godfrey, the second Lord Tredegar, survived the Charge of the Light Brigade; and Viscount Evan was an occultist, a Catholic convert

and a twice-married homosexual who kept a boxing kangaroo.

On the ground floor, the entrance hall opens into the sumptuous grand dining room. The adjoining 'gilt room' is blanketed in goldleaf and paintings of bare-breasted mythological figures; you're invited to recline on the day bed in order to get a better look. In another parlour there are period costumes to try on and board games to play.

The decor of the upstairs bedrooms jumps forward in time to the 1930s, when Evan Morgan was hosting his fabulous parties at Tredegar. For the full *Downton Abbey* experience, head 'below stairs' to explore the preserve of the Morgan's numerous servants.

#### St Woolos Cathedral

CHURCH

(☎ 07933 627594; [www.newportcathedral.org.uk](http://www.newportcathedral.org.uk); Stow Hill; ☀ 7.45am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, to 8pm Sun) A steep 10-minute walk uphill from the main shopping strip leads to Newport's ancient cathedral. The building provides a fascinating journey through history via a succession of distinct architectural styles.

The main door leads into the oldest part of the building, a 9th-century stone chapel constructed to replace a wooden church built here in 500 on the burial site of Welsh king-turned-monk St Gwynllyw (Woolos is an English corruption of his name). The Normans came next, represented by the magnificent Romanesque arch leading into their grand nave (look up to the curved timbers of the medieval 'wagon roof'). You can see the transition from the Romanesque to the Gothic style in the pointy windows of the outside aisles, which were grafted on later. Newport's prosperous Victorian period is evident in the chancel, while the very end of the building is pure 1960s, including the painted marble effect behind the altar.

#### Newport Museum & Art Gallery

MUSEUM

(☎ 01633-656656; [www.newport.gov.uk/museum](http://www.newport.gov.uk/museum); John Frost Sq; ☀ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat) **FREE** In the same building as the tourist office and library, Newport Museum covers the town's history from the prehistoric to the 20th century, via the Romans and the Industrial Revolution.

#### Riverfront

ARTS CENTRE

(☎ 01633-656757; [www.newport.gov.uk/riverfront](http://www.newport.gov.uk/riverfront); Kingsway; ☀ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Opened in 2004, the city's swish cultural centre takes