

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

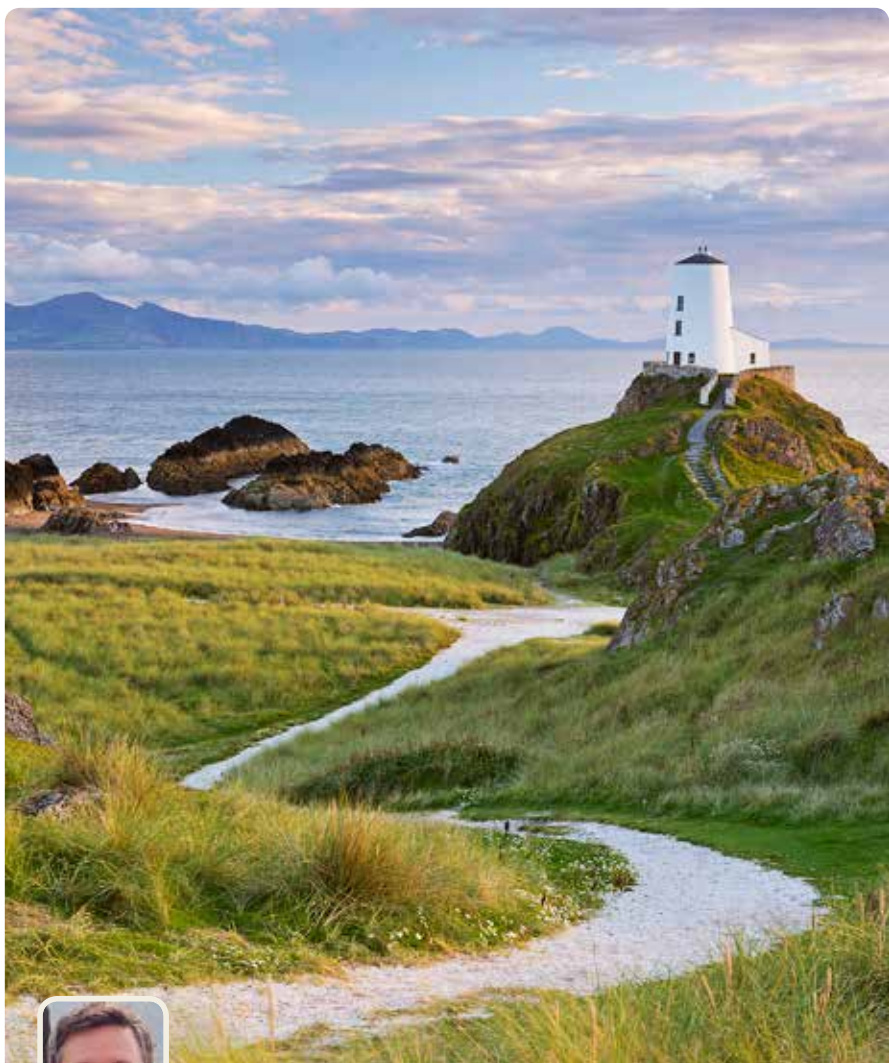
Castles are an inescapable part of the Welsh landscape. They’re absolutely everywhere. You could visit a different one every day for a year and still not see them all. Some watch over mountain passes, while others keep an eye on the city traffic whizzing by; some lie in enigmatic ruins, while others 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

Sure, the climate’s not exactly tropical, but regardless of the weather’s vagaries, Wales is a superb beach-holiday destination. 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? The Wales Coast Path traces the country’s entire length, so you’re unlikely to run out of track.

Hospitality & Hiraeth

Beyond the scenery, it’s the interactions with Welsh people that will remain in your memory the longest. Perhaps you’ll recall sitting in a Caernarfon café, listening to the locals chatter in the ancient British tongue. Or that time 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, Writer

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 I've been back numerous times since and explored most corners of the country. Yet on every visit there's always been another beautiful beach, rugged mountain path or kooky village pub to discover. And, of course, there's always another castle.

For more about our writers, see p352

Above: Mawr Lighthouse, Isle of Anglesey (p286)