

Understand Wales

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With their language and economy under pressure, what draws the Welsh together?

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An epic tale of conflict and stubborn survival against the odds.

CULTURE 311

The cultural life of Wales has never been in ruder health or more celebrated.

FOOD & DRINK 318

The food revolution in Wales continues apace. Tickle your tastebuds with all the nation has to offer.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT 321

For a small country, Wales is hugely diverse. Brush up on its geology, fauna and flora and its burgeoning green awareness.

Wales Today

Wales stormed into the new millennium with a renewed sense of optimism, buoyed by its freshly minted National Assembly, with its devolved powers, and the rejuvenation of its capital city. Since then, a global financial crisis has served to remind Wales of its position at the bottom of the UK heap economically, while Brexit has raised many questions about the future. The optimism hasn't completely disappeared, but it has taken a few knocks.

Best on Film

How Green Was My Valley (1941)

Acclaimed adaptation of Richard Llewellyn's novel.

Human Traffic (1999) An edgy romp through Cardiff's clubland.

Edge of Love (2008) Dylan Thomas biopic starring Sienna Miller, Keira Knightley and Matthew Rhys.

Under Milk Wood (1972) Thomas' play about life in a fictional Welsh fishing village, adapted into a film starring Wales' most iconic actor, Richard Burton.

Best in Print

On the Black Hill (Bruce Chatwin; 1982) Traces 20th-century Welsh rural life through the lens of an oddball pair of twins.

How Green Was My Valley (Richard Llewellyn; 1939) Life in a Welsh mining community laid bare.

Collected Poems 1934–1953 (Dylan Thomas; 2003) Worth it for *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night* alone.

Rape of the Fair Country (Alexander Cordell; 1959) Powerful family tale.

A History of Wales (John Davies; revised 2007) Comprehensive and fascinating.

Wales: Epic Views of a Small

Country (Jan Morris; 1998) Lovingly written travelogue.

Brexit

In June 2016, a slim majority of the British public voted in a referendum to leave the European Union (EU). While Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to stay by a comfortable margin, the Wales result was almost identical to England's, with 53% wanting to leave versus 47% to remain.

Before the vote, Wales' First Minister Carwyn Jones warned that the Welsh economy would 'tank' in the event of a British exit from the EU. Wales has been a net benefactor from EU funding, receiving an estimated £70 per head of population. As well as direct grants, it has benefited from farming subsidies. Indeed, the area that voted the most strongly to leave – the economically depressed Ebbw Vale in South Wales – has been one of the UK's biggest recipients of EU funds.

The anti-EU result reflects concerns about the threat of immigration on jobs and a distrust of European bureaucracy, as well as a general rejection of a status quo, which has failed to improve the lot of people living in Wales' more marginalised communities.

Interestingly, aside from cosmopolitan Cardiff, the counties voting with the highest majority to remain were two of the most strong Welsh-speaking areas: Ceredigion and Gwynedd.

The United Kingdom?

Following the Brexit vote, the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, signalled that if it is forced to leave the EU, Scotland would push for a second independence referendum. A previous referendum held in 2014 saw Scotland voting 55% to 45% in favour of staying within the UK. It's speculated that with the EU referendum going against the wishes of the majority of the Scottish people, support for independence will be strengthened.