

This is Wales.



It's our Year of the Sea

The sea is our theme for 2018. In Wales, we'll be celebrating our shores in many ways, with epic events, attractions and experiences we can all share.

It's a theme that fits Wales like a glove.

We're a nation shaped by the sea. Coastline – 870 miles/1,400km of it – wraps itself around most of the country. Uniquely, you can see it all from the Wales Coast Path, the first of its kind in the world.

There's more. We have 230 beaches (yes, someone has counted them all) and 50 islands.

Blue Flags – the ultimate international badge of quality – fly over 50 beaches and marinas, the highest concentration in Britain.

This is Wales.

04	Coast Stories
08	Our Inland Shores
10	Cities by the Sea
12	Splash About
14	Country Life
16	Green Ways
18	Past Masters
20	Wales in Bloom
22	In the Food Mood
24	Best Fests

Travel Itineraries.

26	The Wales Way
28	The Coastal Way/Ffordd Arfordirol
30	The Cambrian Way/Ffordd Cambria
32	The North Wales Way/Ffordd Gogledd Cymru
34	Shorelines
36	A Capital Idea
37	A Taste of Wales
38	Country File
40	Wildlife Trail
41	Gardens of South Wales
42	Time Travel
44	Activity Wales
46	Wales in a Week

Useful Information.

48	Meet our Holiday Areas
50	Getting to Wales
52	Getting around Wales
53	Welsh Language and FAQs
54	Map of Wales

This magazine is also available in Welsh, German, Dutch, French, Catalan and Spanish. Visit Wales cannot guarantee the accuracy or reliability of the information in this publication and hereby disclaim any responsibility for any error, omission or misrepresentation. To the fullest extent permitted by law all liability for loss, disappointment, negligence or other damage caused by reliance on the information contained in this guide is excluded. You are advised to check all details and information with the business concerned before confirming a reservation. All rights reserved. Material in this publication must not be reproduced in any form without permission from the copyright owners – please contact Visit Wales. Opinions expressed in *This is Wales* are not necessarily those of Visit Wales.

This is Wales is published by Visit Wales, the Tourism and Marketing division of the Welsh Government 2017. Visit Wales, Welsh Government, QED Centre, Main Avenue, Treforest Industrial Estate, Treforest, Pontypridd CF37 5YR.

Print ISBN: 978-1-78859-943-6
 Digital ISBN: 978-1-78859-949-9
 Copywriter: Writerog Ltd (Roger & Huw Thomas).
 Printed by: The Westdale Press Ltd.
 Photography: Crown copyright (2017) Visit Wales, Cadw, Welsh Government.
 Other photographic sources are credited throughout.

We want people to have amazing experiences in Wales. If you're heading for the hills, read up on local advice. If you're hitting the beach, check the tides. If you're clipping onto a 100mph (161km/h) zip wire, take advice from the instructors. They know their stuff. It's common sense, really. So come and enjoy, stay safe.

Front cover image: Conwy, North Wales

This publication is also available in Braille, large-format print, and / or audio from Visit Wales. info@visitwales.com

Gold coasts

We're home to Britain's only coastal-based National Park (Pembrokeshire) and the UK's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the Gower Peninsula). Our waters have been sailed by saints and smugglers, traders and fishermen. Their salty ports and harbours are still there, along with modern marinas and characterful seaside resorts (Tenby, a Georgian gem, and Victorian Llandudno are two shining examples).

What's more, the theme embraces all of our shores – our green-fringed lakesides and riverbanks as well as sandy bays and beaches. And since nowhere in Wales is more than an hour from the coast, it's easy to enjoy the best of both worlds in the mountains and beside the sea.

A taste of the sea

The waters around Wales yield superb seafood like Conwy oysters, Llŷn lobsters and Penclawdd cockles. It's a rich maritime bounty that plays a starring role in celebrations across Wales like the Gwledd Conwy Feast and seafood festivals on Cardigan Bay and the Isle of Anglesey.

The life aquatic

Here's a promise. We'll keep you busy (in the nicest possible way) during our Year of the Sea.

Spot porpoises, dolphins, seals and seabirds (wildlife loves Welsh waters). Jump off cliffs into the sea (it's called coasteering, a sport invented in Pembrokeshire). Go surfing in the sea (obviously) and deep in the country (really?) at the world's first inland surfing lagoon. And don't miss the epic special events we'll be staging – they don't come much bigger than the Volvo Ocean Race, which sails into Cardiff Bay in May/June.

See you there – beside the sea.

Coast Stories.

The Year of the Sea is your perfect excuse to dive into our coastline. With sea on three sides of our country, there's plenty to immerse yourself in. Here are just a few of our compelling coast stories.

Find your feet

It's the ultimate waterfront walk. Etching an unbroken 870 mile/1,400km trail around our entire shoreline, the Wales Coast Path is the world's first continuous national coastal walking route.

But don't let the mammoth length put you off. It's easy to dip in and out, whether you want to walk three miles or 30. We think it's one of the best ways to get to know our coast – and we aren't alone. Perhaps *Lonely Planet* said it best: 'What a wonderful thing: to walk the entire length of a country's coastline, to trace its every nook, cranny, cliff-face, indent and estuary. How better to truly appreciate the shape – and soul – of a nation?'
walescoastpath.gov.uk

Route plans

We're promoting a family of three unique national routes 'The Wales Way' – The Coastal Way/Ffordd Arfordirol, The Cambrian Way/Ffordd Cambria and The North Wales Way/Ffordd Gogledd Cymru. Based around major roads traversing the length and breadth of the country, they connect things to see and do with places to stay and great spots to grab a bite to eat. They're perfect for visitors on the hunt for authentic Welsh experiences – see our tour itineraries on pages 26/33.

Two routes stick largely to our shores, The Coastal Way runs from the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula all the way to Pembrokeshire.

Whichever direction you travel, you'll have stunning sea views at your shoulder for much of the journey. Tracking the A55 across North Wales' coast from the English border to the Isle of Anglesey, The North Wales Way takes in waterfront landmarks like the imposing medieval castles at Beaumaris and Conwy.
thewalesway.com

Island hopping

Fifty islands are dotted around our coastline, from well-populated centres like Anglesey to tiny Cardigan Island off South-west Wales, where the only permanent residents are colonies of seabirds. Sacred Caldey Island in Pembrokeshire is home to Cistercian monks, while Holy Island off Anglesey owes its name to its wealth of ancient standing stones, burial chambers and other religious sites.

If you fancy a taste of island life, why not spend the night? Stay on Flat Holm near Cardiff, where Marconi made the first successful radio broadcast in 1897, or stop off on Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire. You'll have plenty of company. The island abounds with wildlife, including about half the world's population of nesting Manx shearwaters.

Park life

Curled around the edge of South-west Wales, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is a true one of a kind. Designated a National Park in 1952, it's still the only

one in the UK that's totally coastal-based. Covering 240 square miles/620sq km of prime, pristine waterfront terrain, it's a must-visit for any coastal explorer. Don't take our word for it. *National Geographic* awarded it the number two spot in its list of the 10 best places to visit in the world.

We weren't surprised. Soft sandy beaches and rocky coves play host to a huge range of seaside activities, from wildlife watching and waterside walks to seriously splashy coasteering (the high-octane watersport that was born here in Pembrokeshire).
pembrokeshirecoast.wales

More than mountains

Skyscraping Snowdonia National Park is well known for its dramatic landscapes of towering peaks and steep valleys. But look a little closer and you'll discover an equally striking coastline. Hugging the shores of Cardigan Bay from the base of the Llŷn Peninsula all the way to Aberdyfi, the Park covers over 40 miles/64km of seashore and a huge variety of seaside experiences.

Spot dolphins and porpoises from Tywyn's 5 mile/8km span of golden sand, get lost in the dunes at Harlech's big, boundless beach or windsurf at bijou Aberdyfi. Find colourful wildflowers (and a kaleidoscope of shells) at – where else? – Shell Island.

01



02



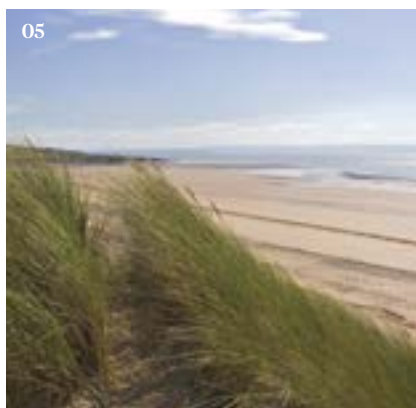
03



Coast Stories.



04



05



06

Looking good

The Pembrokeshire and Snowdonia National Parks (see the previous page) are just part of our seaside story. You'll also find three stunning Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) along our shores.

The Gower Peninsula blazed a trail to become the UK's first AONB back in 1956 and we're glad to report that it hasn't changed much since. Just minutes from the bustling waterfront city of Swansea, it still feels gloriously remote, with lush green countryside tumbling down to sheltered beaches and hidden coves. A major highlight is Rhossili, a 3 mile/5km sweep of sand that's a regular feature on lists of the UK's best beaches (*The Independent* calls it 'the supermodel of British beaches').

Projecting 30 miles/50km into the Irish Sea from the coast of North Wales, it's easy to see why the lovely Llŷn Peninsula is known as 'Snowdon's arm'. The AONB largely hugs Llŷn's coast, a beguiling blend of craggy cliffs and picture-perfect beaches. You'll find the full-on resort experience at fashionable Abersoch (popular for its seaside chic and sailing), see rainbow-coloured beach huts at Llanbedrog and drink in the views of Bardsey Island from Aberdaron, Llŷn's own savage 'land's end'.

It may only be a small island, but Anglesey packs in a world's worth of seaside sights. The AONB covers almost all of Anglesey's 125 mile/201km coastline, a shifting landscape of rocky coves and pebble beaches in the north, sheer limestone cliffs and sandy beaches in the east and a wild southern shore of seemingly endless sand dunes. It's connected to mainland Wales by two bridges. The oldest, the Menai Bridge, is a 19th century masterpiece and an island icon along with the dazzling white South Stack Lighthouse, a must-visit site perched on its own rocky islet.

IN BRIEF – GIVE US A WAVE

Blue is the colour.

Of the 230 beaches dotted along our coastline, 50 have the prestigious Blue Flag award (the seaside 'Oscar' given only to the cleanest sandy superstars). There are more Blue Flag beaches per mile in Wales than anywhere else in the UK.

What's that sound?

Set foot on the beach at Porth Oer on the Llŷn Peninsula and you'll hear why it's known as Whistling Sands. Thanks to an unusual geological quirk found in only a few places worldwide, the tiny grains squeak and whistle with every step.

Sail by rail.

Hop aboard the scenic Cambrian Coast Railway for a seaside ride along the Mid Wales shore between Machynlleth and Pwllheli. Tracking a spectacular route alongside the mountain-backed waters of Cardigan Bay, *The Guardian* named it one of the world's 'Top 10 Epic Rail Journeys'.

Liquid refreshment.

Drink in the sea views at Tŷ Coch Inn in the perfectly preserved National Trust village of Porthdinllaen on the Llŷn Peninsula. Set a pebble's throw from sand and waves, this 19th-century inn has been called 'the third best beach bar in the world'.

Desert in miniature.

Explore Merthyr Mawr near Ogmere on the South Wales coast, a Saharan expanse of sand that's home to some of the highest dunes in Europe. As well as being a Site of Special Scientific Interest, it's a bit of a movie star – scenes from the classic film *Lawrence of Arabia* were shot here in the 1960s.

- 01 Cambrian Coast Railway
- 02 Tenby Coastline, Pembrokeshire
- 03 Beach Huts, Abersoch
- 04 Tŷ Coch Inn, Llŷn Peninsula
- 05 Sand Dunes, Merthyr Mawr
- 06 Rhossili, Gower Peninsula

Our Inland Shores.



Even when you aren't on the coast, you're never far from water here in Wales.



IN BRIEF – TESTING THE WATERS

High altitude.

Cross the towering Pontcysyllte Aqueduct on foot or by boat. Carrying the Llangollen Canal 125ft/38m over the River Dee, a head for heights is a must for a trip over this dizzying World Heritage Site.

Sail away.

Take to the water at lofty Llyn Brenig in North Wales. Set 1,200ft/365m up on the Denbigh Moors, this blustery watersports venue is the highest sailing centre in the UK.

Legendary lakes.

Snowdonia's Llyn Dinas, Llyn Llydaw and Llyn Ogwen all claim associations with King Arthur's fabled sword Excalibur. Immerse yourself in Arthurian myth by combining a waterside walk with a treasure hunt for the enchanted weapon.

Surf's up.

See the surging Severn bore. Several times a year, a powerful tide pushes up the River Severn from the sea, creating a constantly rolling wave that can travel an astonishing 20 miles/32km inland.

Water, water everywhere

Around 600 rivers and 230 lakes fill our green landscapes. They come in all shapes and sizes, from raging torrents that test the best slalom canoeist to large bodies of water that make up our own 'lake district'. Our rivers range from the mighty Wye – all 134 miles/215km of it – flowing from central Wales into the Severn Estuary, to minnows like the Glaslyn in Snowdonia, which carves a stunning route through the rocky Aberglaslyn Pass.

Four mile/6.5km long Bala Lake – known in Welsh as Llyn Tegid, is our largest stretch of natural water. It's popular with sailors, kayakers and anglers (though they'll be lucky to catch the elusive gwyniad, a white fish reputedly unique to the lake). Landlubbers can enjoy a ride on the narrow-gauge Bala Lake Railway. bala.lake-railway.co.uk

In the Elan Valley in Mid Wales, elegant dams constructed over 100 years ago have created a wildlife-packed 72 square mile/186sq km of four scenic reservoirs that have settled beautifully within their Cambrian Mountains contours. There's more abundant wildlife in mountain-ringed Lake Vyrnwy's vast bird reserve. And for pure drama you can't beat inky Llyn y Fan Fach, gouged out by glaciers during the last Ice Age and shrouded in myth – and sometimes mist – in Carmarthenshire's Black Mountain. elanvalley.org.uk

Fall in

Countless cascades form watery staircases in our 'Waterfall Country', centred around the Vale of Neath on the southern edge of the Brecon Beacons. The most famous, perhaps, is Sgwd yr Eira, the 'Fall of the Snow' – not just due to its role in a Batman movie but also because you can take a splashy, spray-

soaked walk behind its tumbling waters. You should also seek out Pistyll Rhaeadr. Hidden deep in the Berwyn Mountains, this spectacular plume of water crashes 240ft/80m onto rocks, making it one of the highest in Wales (and one of the 'most beautiful in Britain' according to *The Daily Telegraph*).

breconbeacons.org

Source to sea

In North Wales, the River Conwy meets the coast in the shadow of the town's monumental medieval castle, a World Heritage Site. Down south, follow the Tywi as it flows from Llyn Brianne in the wild Cambrian Mountains through a green, fertile valley before merging with the clear blue waters of Carmarthen Bay.

At Barmouth on the Mid Wales coast, river becomes sea as the Mawddach flows into Cardigan Bay. The celebrated romantic poet William Wordsworth called it 'the sublime estuary' (and he knew a thing or two about places that stirred the soul). See if you agree by taking a stroll over the old railway bridge for suitably inspirational views.

Float your boat

They used to be busy trade routes packed with barges carrying coal, wool and steel, but our canals are much more relaxed these days. Whether you travel by narrowboat, on foot or by bike, our canal network is tailor-made for those who prefer exploring at a gentle pace. Take your pick from Llangollen, Brecon and Monmouthshire, Montgomery and Swansea canals for a tranquil taste of life in the slow lane.

canalrivertrust.org.uk/wales

An aerial photograph of Cardiff Bay, Wales. In the foreground, a white sailboat with a dark sail is on the water. The middle ground shows the bay's quays and various buildings, including a prominent white modern apartment block on the left. The background features the city skyline under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

Cities by the Sea.

Get to know our coastal communities and cities during the year of the sea.



Coastal capital

Cardiff, our capital, is a city shaped by the sea. At its industrial height in the 19th century it was one of the world's biggest and busiest ports, exporting millions of tonnes of Welsh coal and steel and employing people from over 50 countries. A lot of things have changed since then, but Cardiff's diverse, cosmopolitan and outward-facing personality isn't one of them.

Nowadays, coastal Cardiff trades business for pleasure. Cardiff Bay is a vibrant community of waterfront bars, shops, restaurants and apartments. On the water, small sailboats take the place of huge cargo ships (make the trip across the Cardiff Bay Barrage to Penarth Marina for a closer look). And it's a place to which nature is returning – as you'll see from the viewing area over the water at Cardiff Bay Wetlands Reserve, which supports a diverse wildlife. visitcardiff.com

Sail away

Cardiff is today known worldwide for sport, not trade. Its reputation as an international sporting hotspot is built on major events like Six Nations rugby, Ashes cricket and the 2017 UEFA Champions League Final. The Bay gets in on the action in 2018, when the Volvo Ocean Race, one of the world's longest, toughest sailing challenges and a flagship year of the sea event, drops anchor during its globe-spanning nautical journey. volvoceanrace.com

On the waterfront

Swansea also has saltwater in its veins (after all, the sea is right there in the name). Take a seaside stroll with a difference at the Maritime Quarter, where – like Cardiff – historic docklands are now an animated mix of cafés, marinas and museums (including the innovative slate and glass National Waterfront Museum, which cleverly guides you through Wales' maritime and industrial past).

Or get your feet wet along Swansea Bay, the broad sweep of sand and surf that skirts the city. Then hire a bike and cycle a few miles on the traffic-free bayside path to Mumbles, Swansea's fashionable seaside neighbour, where a traditional pier rubs shoulders with trendy bars and restaurants. visitswanseabay.com

Size isn't everything

With a population of around 2,000 people, intimate St Davids on the Pembrokeshire coast is the UK's smallest city. It's been one of Wales' holiest places since the 6th century, when our patron saint founded a monastery here, gaining city status in the 16th century thanks to the towering Norman cathedral that bears David's name.

As well as attracting pilgrims and history buffs, this magnetic miniature metropolis is a hotspot for coastal activities like walking, watersports, wildlife-watching and island-hopping. stdavids.co.uk
stdavidscathedral.org.uk

IN BRIEF – MORE SHORES

The write stuff.

Lovely Laugharne's 'heron priested shore' provided inspiration for its most famous resident, literary legend Dylan Thomas. Visit the boathouse where he wrote, preserved as if he had just popped out to the pub.

Opposites attract.

They may be neighbours, but picture-perfect Georgian Tenby and tranquil Caldey Island just offshore couldn't be more different. One's a popular seaside resort, the other a sleepy, sacred place where monks have lived for more than 1,000 years.

Sound of the sea.

There's music in the water at Aberdyfi on the Mid Wales coast, thanks to a huge brass bell rung by the incoming tide. This piece of immersive art is inspired by the legend of Cantre'r Gwaelod, a lost kingdom submerged beneath Cardigan Bay.

Shopping and birdwatching.

Unlikely companions, admittedly. But you can do both at Newport, another of our cities by the sea. Friars Walk is a brand-new shopping complex (with great places to eat too). Close by are the Newport Wetlands, an important RSPB and National Nature Reserve.

On the boardwalk.

A walk above the waves on its splendid Victorian pier is pretty much compulsory at the seaside resort of Llandudno, North Wales. Built in 1878, this mighty lattice of steel and wood stretches almost half a mile out to sea.

For more on our capital, check out the Cardiff travel itinerary on page 36.

Splash About.



Set sail

Whether you're a sea dog or a lake lover, it's a breeze to find sailing adventures on our waters. Hit the ocean at Pwllheli's Plas Heli National Sailing Academy on the Llŷn Peninsula, a prestigious venue for both recreational sailors and major maritime races. Or head inland to lovely Llangorse Lake where sailing comes with a side order of panoramic views over the Brecon Beacons National Park. plasheli.org

Sailing enthusiasts should also keep an eye out for the Volvo Ocean Race, which will be stopping off in Cardiff Bay this May and June. It's one of the world's longest and toughest sailing competitions and a centrepiece of our Year of the Sea.

Dive in

You'll find swimming pools everywhere in Wales. But if you want to make a bigger splash try wild swimming, the latest aquatic addiction. Our lakes and rivers offer an abundance of clean, fresh water and can often be found smack in the middle of Wales' most inviting and secluded landscapes. Dive into Snowdonia's Llyn Idwal or ride the currents at Horseshoe Falls on the River Neath for a truly immersive experience.

For information and safety advice on wild swimming visit wildswimming.co.uk/wales

Surf's up

Boarders will never be bored here. Lapped on three sides by crashing waves, Wales is a cool choice for beach boys (and girls). You'll find some of the UK's most highly rated spots on the Gower Peninsula, including legendary Llangennith in Rhossili Bay (a birthplace of Welsh surfing). Despite its long history as a must-visit for hardcore surf heads, it's also the perfect place for novices taking their first dip into the sport.

But the seaside doesn't have a monopoly on our surf scene. At revolutionary Surf Snowdonia, a former industrial site in the Conwy Valley has been transformed into a high-tech watersports wonderland.

By which we mean activities and adventures on (and in) the water. You'll find your fill in Wales most of the year, for our seas keep their warmth well into autumn.

A 984ft/300m lagoon combines with innovative wave-generating technology for a guaranteed perfect swell, whatever the weather.
surfsnowdonia.com

On board

Surfing isn't our only board game. Feel the wind in your hair (and sails) with some windsurfing at Cardigan Bay Watersports Centre. Or do the hard work yourself on a stand-up paddleboard, one of the world's fastest growing aquatic sports. Head to 360 Beach and Watersports in Swansea to try it and see what all the fuss is about.
cardiganbaywatersports.org.uk
360swansea.co.uk

Paddle power

Get a seal's eye view of our coastline in a sea kayak. There can be few better ways to explore our hidden bays, cliffs and coves than as captain and crew of your very own vessel. You'll find places to set sail all around our shores, but the craggy coasts of Anglesey and Gower are particular highlights. There's plenty of kayaking to be found on our lakes and rivers too, if tides and salt water aren't your thing.
visitwales.com/watersports

IN BRIEF – AQUATIC ADVENTURES

White water.

Get wet with a wild raft ride on the River Tryweryn in the Snowdonia National Park. Or take the urban alternative at Cardiff International White Water, a purpose-built rafting centre where raging rapids are guaranteed.

Splashdown.

Try your hand at coasteering, the exhilarating seaside activity born right here in Pembrokeshire. It's a hands-on exploration of our shoreline that sees you clambering over rocks and making daring leaps into the surf.

Gorge yourself.

Walk, swim and jump through Glynneath in the Brecon Beacons National Park with a spot of canyoning (coasteering's inland equivalent). It's one of the best wet and wild experiences in the world, according to *The Rough Guide*.

Wake up.

Head to Glasfryn Parc on the Llŷn Peninsula to try your hand at wakeboarding. An automated cable system means you'll never be waiting for a lift, giving both novices and experienced riders more time to ride the waves.

Country Life.



There's a lot of it. Our landscape of hills, mountains and valleys is one of the greenest, most abundant parts of Britain.

IN BRIEF – THE LAY OF THE LAND

Farm stays.

For an authentic, first-hand slice of country life, stay on a farm. Our farmhouse accommodation is warm and welcoming and usually located in stunning scenery. Some offer the opportunity to get your hands dirty, experiencing everything from traditional dry stone walling to planting, picking and shearing.

Lights out.

See stars in our National Parks. Both Snowdonia and the Brecon Beacons are International Dark Sky Reserves, while unspoilt Pembrokeshire also boasts deep, star-studded skies. Perfect for space explorers.

Eco-exploration.

It's not only our countryside that's green. At the Centre for Alternative Technology near Machynlleth you can go hands-on with a range of eye-opening energy-saving innovations, eco-friendly buildings and interactive displays on sustainable living.

All aboard.

Get a steam-powered view of our landscape with a ride on one of our historic narrow-gauge railways. Try a coast to country trip on the Vale of Rheidol Railway from Aberystwyth to Devil's Bridge in Mid Wales.

True colours.

It's all going green in the South Wales Valleys. At places like Bryn Bach Park in Tredegar and Aberdare's Dare Valley Country Park, industrial scars have been replaced by lush havens for walkers, watersports enthusiasts and wildlife spotters.

Size matters

Founded in 1951, covering 823 square miles/2,132sq km and home to 3,560ft/1,085m Snowdon (the highest peak in southern Britain), Snowdonia is our oldest, largest and tallest National Park. A trip to Snowdon's summit (either on foot or via the Snowdon Mountain Railway) is a must, but there's much more to Snowdonia than this mighty mountain. There's a host of other peaks to explore too, like mystical Cader Idris and primeval, boulder-strewn Tryfan, plus the rugged Rhinogydd (southern Britain's last true wilderness). Not to mention ancient oakwoods, glacial lakes and rushing rivers.

eryri-npa.gov.uk

Peak performer

Tumbling from the twin summits of Corn Du and Pen y Fan, the 520 square mile/1,346sq km Brecon Beacons National Park rolls across South and Mid Wales like a green sea. It didn't always look so inviting. The wide, open spaces of this polished landscape owe their existence to the grinding glaciers that shaped the Park's distinctive flat-topped peaks. In complete contrast, the Beacons' southern border is fringed with narrow gorges, waterfalls and deep caves.

breconbeacons.org

Just beautiful

Alongside our inland National Parks are two stunning Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Tracing the River Wye along the Wales/England border, the Wye Valley includes some of the UK's finest native woodlands, bountiful wildlife (everything from bats to peregrine falcons) and serene Tintern Abbey.

The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB provides a scenic gateway to North Wales. Heather-tinted peaks and dramatic mountain passes combine with thriving historic towns and strong agricultural traditions to create a truly living landscape.

landscapesforlife.org.uk

On track

For an in-depth exploration of our green heartlands, take a trip along The Cambrian Way, which links North and South Wales. It's one of three national routes criss-crossing our country, taking in things to see and do with places to eat and stay. Find out more about the three routes that make up The Wales Way on pages 26/33.

Border country

We used to squabble with the neighbours, but our borderlands are pretty peaceful nowadays. Avid readers need to visit Hay-on-Wye, the world-famous town of books and home of an annual Literary Festival dubbed the 'Woodstock of the mind' by former President Bill Clinton. Or take a walk along the Offa's Dyke Path, a route tracing the ancient 8th century earthwork that was the first official border between England and Wales.

Really wild

If you want to get away from it all, head to the Cambrian Mountains in Ceredigion, variously described as the 'green desert' or 'backbone of Wales'. It's one of the wildest places in Britain, a moody expanse of high moorland dotted with lakes and reservoirs that feels largely untouched by the 21st century. Well, not entirely untouched. This evocative place has become something of a TV star, providing a suitably atmospheric backdrop to the hit noir-thriller *Hinterland*.

Green Ways.

Brecon Mountain Railway

IN BRIEF – MORE COUNTRYSIDE ACTIVITIES

Rock on.

Once the heart of the North Wales slate industry, the mines and quarries at Blaenau Ffestiniog are now an epic adventure playground. Fly by wire on Europe's largest zip zone, bounce on subterranean trampolines and explore underground caverns.

Back to nature.

Get hands-on with a bushcraft experience in our wild countryside. Learn how to forage for food, build fires and construct your own forest shelters. Or indulge your creative side with courses in basket weaving, stone carving and woodcraft.

On track.

Ride the rails on the Heart of Wales line between Swansea and Shrewsbury, an impossibly pretty mainline train journey through our country's green core. Rail enthusiasts invariably fall in love with our many narrow-gauge railways. The 'Great Little Trains of Wales' include rural rides through the Brecon Beacons (on the Brecon Mountain Railway), border country (Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway) and along our largest natural lake (Bala Lake Railway).

Gone fishing.

Land the big one on lakes like Llandegfedd in South Wales, where the UK's largest ever pike was caught in 1992. Or head to the riverbank in search of salmon and sea trout (sewin as we call them here in Wales), which travel upstream in huge numbers to spawn during summer and early autumn.

01



Country walks and stimulating outdoor activities fill every corner of our countryside. Here are a few highlights to get you started.

02



Wickedly good walks

Boot up for a stroll through our hills, mountains and valleys. Start out from the romantic remains of Tintern Abbey in South Wales' Wye Valley before climbing through the lush woodlands of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to the jagged limestone outcrop with satanic associations known as Devil's Pulpit.

The Precipice Walk near Dolgellau is an amble with altitude. Start off along the shores of Llyn Cynwch with brooding Cader Idris looming in the background, before testing your head for heights on a narrow path that offers matchless vistas of mountains and the Mawddach Estuary.

Perched high on a rocky cliff overlooking the intimidating – and aptly named – Black Mountain near Llandeilo, Carreg Cennen is one of our most dramatic and atmospheric castles. Take a walk past its weatherbeaten walls to explore a landscape steeped in centuries of history. visitwales.com/walking
cadw.gov.wales

Pack a picnic

Food always tastes better eaten al fresco. Settle down for a sandwich in Cae Gel by the River Glaslyn in Beddgelert. Created as a memorial to local resident Alfred Bestall, illustrator of the beloved *Rupert the Bear* stories, this wildflower-sprinkled meadow is one of Wales' many perfect picnic spots. Once you've eaten your fill, take a stroll along the riverbank to see the bronze statue of Gelert (the legendary dog who gives the town its name).

Really wild

For an amazing animal encounter, head to Bwlch Nant yr Arian Visitor Centre near Aberystwyth. Its red kite feeding station is a big draw for wildlife enthusiasts – not to mention the iconic birds of prey themselves, who turn up in large numbers each day for their free meal. That's not all. Explore the centre's many waymarked trails on foot, by bike or on horseback, looking out for birds like buzzards, ravens and goshawks. visitwales.com/wildlife

Ride and seek

We lay on cycling adventures for every type of rider. Take it easy on quiet rural routes and waymarked traffic-free cyclepaths. Or go 'into the red' – as they say on the Tour de France – on lung-busting mountain road climbs. Follow in the wheeltracks of British cycling legend (and local lad) Sir Dave Brailsford by tackling some or all of the Brailsford Way. Two routes – 50 miles/80km and 75 miles/120km – take in the very best of Snowdonia, a mix of mountain passes and easier lakeside cycling.

There's exceptional off-road riding too in our hills and forests, with everything from gentle family trails to gnarly, testing long-distance tracks. visitwales.com/biking

For information on walking the Wales Coast Path, turn to page 4.



Past Masters.

- 01 Castell Coch, near Cardiff
- 02 Harlech Castle, Mid Wales
- 03 Conwy Castle, North Wales

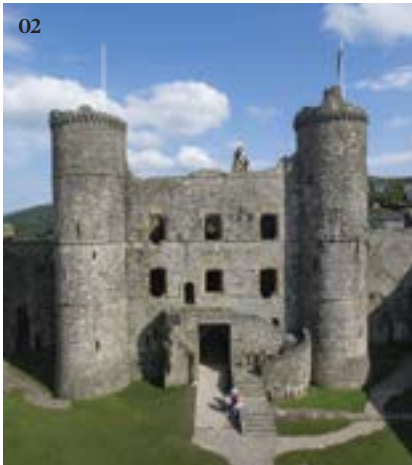
That's us. We have more than 600 castles – and still counting – dotted across the country, the world's highest concentration.



Sea power

Castles play a part in our year of the sea. The strategic importance of a coastal location means you'll find some of our mightiest fortresses beside the sea.

Perhaps the most impressive are the four North Wales castles built by English King Edward I in the 13th century, all UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Standing on a rocky outcrop overlooking the estuary, Conwy Castle's walls seem to emerge straight from the water. It cost £15,000 to build, a huge amount back in the day – money well spent, judging by its still impregnable battlements.



Caernarfon Castle also occupies prime waterfront real estate. This massive fortress-cum-royal palace, Edward's ultimate statement of power, was inspired by the fortified walls of Constantinople. Across the Menai Strait, Beaumaris Castle's concentric walls-within-walls layout is a cutting-edge piece of 13th century defensive design.

It's land locked today, but clifftop Harlech Castle originally had direct access to the sea. A 200ft/61m stairway to the base of the cliff brought in supplies landed by boat (very handy when you're under siege). It's not all ancient history though. The castle recently received a new 'floating' bridge and award-winning visitor centre.



Local heroes

Not all of our castles were built by English invaders. Venture off the beaten track and you'll find thoroughly Welsh fortresses constructed by our native rulers. Strung along a rocky outcrop deep in the Mid Wales hills, Castell y Bere was built by Llywelyn the Great, the 13th century Prince of Gwynedd. It's the classic atmospheric ruin.

Dolwyddelan, another of Llywelyn's castles, may be on a smaller scale, but

its setting among Snowdonia's craggy peaks, commanding a strategic mountain pass is every bit as theatrical – as are the views from its battlements. Llywelyn's Dolbadarn Castle overlooks land and water – in this case the lake of Llyn Padarn at Llanberis.

Its walls have crumbled, but successfully penetrating Castell Dinas Brân still throws down a challenge. Perched high on a hill above Llangollen, a lung-busting climb faces any would-be invader (or sightseer). You're rewarded with equally breathtaking 360 degree views of rolling border country.

Stones that speak

As you'd expect, our long-lived castles conjure up a host of unusual stories and fascinating facts. Take Laugharne Castle, a medieval fortress turned Tudor mansion with a strong literary association. Local boy Dylan Thomas used to write in the summerhouse and the castle, 'brown as owls', even gets a mention in his *Poem in October*.

Steel yourself for a visit to haunted Bodelwyddan Castle near St Asaph. Spooks are said to roam its halls, including ghostly Victorian children, a spectral soldier and the mischievous Cellar Man, who apparently likes pulling women's hair.

Fairytales replace ghost stories at Castell Coch near Cardiff, its needle-sharp Bavarian-style towers seemingly sourced from the fevered imagination of the Brothers Grimm. The interior is just as fantastical, a series of wildly colourful rooms decorated with intricate murals and carvings of mythological creatures, birds, animals, stars and scenes from *Aesop's Fables*.

For more on our castles and historic places, visit cadw.gov.wales and check out the travel itinerary on pages 42/43.

Wales in Bloom.

01



02



03



04



- 01 Aberglasney, photograph by Nigel McCall
- 02 Erddig, © National Trust Images/
John Miller
- 03 Bodnant Garden
- 04 National Botanic Garden of Wales
- 05 Llanerchaeron, ©National Trust Images/
Andrew Butler



IN BRIEF – NATURAL WONDERS

Power flower.

The hardy Snowdon lily has been growing on Snowdonia's slopes since the last Ice Age. These days, mountainous North Wales is the only place in the UK where you'll find this rare arctic-alpine plant.

Rock star.

It's now 6 miles/10km from the coast, but craggy Bird's Rock (Craig yr Aderyn) near Tywyn was once a sea cliff. The water may have gone, but the seabirds remain. Watch out for the nesting cormorants that call it home.

High flyers.

The unmistakable v-pointed tail of the red kite is a frequent sight in the skies of Mid Wales. Pretty good for a bird that was on the verge of extinction here not that long ago.

Red return.

They've been largely driven out of the UK by their big grey cousins, but red squirrels are making a comeback on the Isle of Anglesey, one of the few places outside Scotland where you can find them.

Find your perfect green scene amongst our gardens and wildlife.

Globe-trotting gardens

Go around the world in just a few hours at Carmarthenshire's National Botanic Garden of Wales. Its stunning centrepiece, the Great Glasshouse, is an epic 374ft/110m span of glass and steel, providing a climate-controlled habitat for exotic plants from the USA, Chile, the Canary Islands, South Africa, Australia and the Mediterranean.

Need to know. Nature doesn't get much more colourful than in the Butterfly House, the garden's newest attraction.
botanicgarden.wales

Blast from the past

With medieval origins, history is deeply rooted at timewarp Aberglasney, tucked away on a cosy 10 acre/4.5ha site in Carmarthenshire's Tywi Valley. Highlights include three walled gardens, a rare Elizabethan cloister garden, wildflower meadows and an atmospheric 18th century yew tunnel.

Need to know. Aberglasney is a garden reborn. Prior to its restoration a few decades ago it was an overgrown ruin.
aberglasney.org

The total package

One of Britain's finest gardens, beautiful Bodnant in Snowdonia is an intoxicating mix of styles. Elegant formal terraces overflowing with colourful exotic plants rub shoulders with tangled, wild woodland, tranquil ponds and flower-speckled meadows.

Need to know. Bodnant's signature sight is the spectacular Laburnum Arch. Plan your visit for late spring/early summer, when this 180ft/54m tunnel of vegetation blooms with thousands of golden flowers.
nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden

For more on gardens and nature, follow our travel itinerary on page 41.

A garden for all seasons

Wander the Italianate terraces of Powis Castle, Welshpool, on a sunny summer's day and you'll think you're in the Mediterranean, not Mid Wales. But Powis offers up surprises all year round. See bright spring bulbs, burnished autumn colours and towering yew hedges (300 years old and over 45ft/14m high) that take the breath away even in the chill of winter.

Need to know. Powis is green in more ways than one. Thanks to ground source heat pumps and other environmental technologies, it now generates more energy than it uses.
nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden

Down on the farm

Built in 1795 as a self-sufficient estate, little has changed at Llanerchaeron near Aberaeron over the last few hundred years. The walled kitchen gardens still produce bountiful quantities of fruit and vegetables (including 51 varieties of apple), while the farmyard is home to 11 types of livestock, including Welsh Black cattle and Llanwenog sheep.

Need to know. Llanerchaeron is a perfectly preserved time capsule and working farm. Pick up some produce from the onsite shop for the freshest possible taste of Wales.
nationaltrust.org.uk/llanerchaeron

Open house

The gardens at Erddig near Wrexham have been open to the public since 1779, when owner Philip Yorke invited neighbours in to admire his handiwork. See the elegant formal gardens, peaceful woodland walks and inventive water features for yourself to appreciate why he was so proud of the place.

Need to know. Erddig excites throughout the year. Its National Ivy Collection in the restored walled garden is a winter highlight.
nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig

In the Food Mood.

Bring a big shopping basket. And a healthy appetite. Welsh produce is famous for its freshness and provenance – not to mention the artisan skills that go into everything from sea salt to farmhouse cheeses, craft beers to baking. Buy direct at farm shops, food festivals and producers' markets. Dine out at Michelin-star restaurants, bistros and beach shacks where dishes are inspired by our bountiful local larder of seafood, Welsh lamb and beef.





01

Sealicious

Try mighty mussels from the Conwy Estuary, large, meaty and super tasty. With their salt and freshwater habitat, they're arguably the best flavoured in Britain, and – unlike the rope-grown variety – sustainably harvested from their natural seabed environment.

Lobsters and crabs from the Llŷn Peninsula and elsewhere along the coast are another speciality. They're renowned for their flavour and quality – so much so that many end up at top restaurants in France and Spain.

Sewin, our very own name for sea trout, is still fished the traditional way in coracles – tiny, wobbly, one-man boats – on the Tywi and Teifi rivers. The locals reckon that 'God practised on the salmon but with the sewin made perfect.'

Flavour first

Welsh lamb and Black beef are world-class. Enjoy lamb from flocks bred on our hills and mountains or the speciality saltmarsh variety. Prized Welsh saltmarsh lambs spend most of their time by the sea, snacking on wild samphire, sorrel, sea lavender and thrift, a recipe that adds up to melt-in-the-mouth meat with a flavour all of its own.

Cheese please

It might well have started with humble Welsh rarebit, our traditional take on cheese on toast. Nowadays, Welsh cheeses enjoy a stellar reputation for their variety and quality. Most are hand-crafted down on the farm – the complete opposite of bland mass production – so they're bursting with individual flavour and bite.

Traditional eats

The hearty broth we call cawl is a warming treat. Traditionally made with whatever seasonal ingredients are available, every cook has their own take on this classic dish, though you can generally expect to see some lamb and leek (this is Wales, after all).

visitwales.com/food

IN BRIEF – TASTY TREATS

Bread from heaven.

We have a long-standing love affair with baking. The Isle of Anglesey was once known as Môn, Mam Cymru (Anglesey, Mother of Wales) because of the corn it produced for the baking of bread. The tradition is brought bang up to date at places like Bara Menyn, an artisan bakehouse and café in Cardigan, where you can buy brilliant organic bread and tuck into locally sourced and homemade goodies.

New 'black gold'.

Historically, coal was our 'black gold'. It's now a good description of the speciality coffee created by Coaltown Coffee Roasters, a young, dynamic company based in the old mining town of Ammanford.

Salty waters.

'Seahorses are very picky about the water in which they live and breed so we had a feeling that these briny waters had the potential to produce the world's finest sea salt.' How right they were. Alison and David Lea-Wilson's Halen Môn Anglesey Sea Salt is served at political summits, royal weddings and glitzy restaurants the world over.

I'll drink to that.

'Nature's in charge,' says Dani Davies of Skyberry Cider and Perry in Welsh border country. Their locally harvested apples and pears are used in small batches for maximum quality and character. Skyberry is part of a thriving drinks scene that includes Penderyn Welsh Whisky, craft beers, premium artisan gins and Welsh wines. As we say, *iechyd da* (cheers).

For more on food follow our travel itinerary on page 37.

- 01 Coaltown Coffee, Ammanford
- 02 Mussels
- 03 Halen Môn Anglesey Sea Salt
- 04 Hawarden Estate Farm Shop



02



03



04

Best Fests.

There's always something happening here in Wales. Our packed calendar of festivals and events is too big to squeeze into these pages, but we've picked out a few highlights.

01



02



03



04



THE BIG FOUR

24 May–3 June

Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye

Our world-famous festival of arts and literature features hundreds of leading writers, thinkers and performers (everyone from astronauts to zoologists).
hayfestival.com

23–26 July

Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells

The UK's largest agricultural show isn't just for farmers. Alongside the livestock are craft stalls, great food, exhibitions and displays.
rwas.wales

3–11 August

National Eisteddfod of Wales, Cardiff

Our biggest and oldest arts festival. A vibrant celebration of Wales' culture and language that's both traditional and thoroughly modern.
eisteddfod.wales

16–19 August

Green Man Festival, Crickhowell

A four day feast of music, comedy, poetry, theatre and much, much more, with a magical Brecon Beacons backdrop thrown in for free.
greenman.net

BEST OF WELSH

28 May–2 June

Urdd National Eisteddfod, Builth Wells

A huge celebration of Welsh language and culture, featuring 15,000 children and young people competing in song, dance and performance.
urdd.cymru

9–10 June

Beyond the Border, Wales International Storytelling Festival, St Donats

In the gardens of a fairytale castle by the sea, a magnificent celebration of stories and music from Wales and the World.
beyondtheborder.com

22 June–1 July

Gŵyl Gregynog Festival, Gregynog

One of the best and longest-running classical music festivals in the UK, with performers from Wales and across the globe.
gwylgregynogfestival.org

3–8 July

Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod

It's truly international. Around 4,000 performers from around the world come together for this warm-hearted celebration of song and dance.
international-eisteddfod.co.uk

FOR FOODIES

27–28 May

Cowbridge Food and Drink Festival

A weekend of culinary excellence in the Vale of Glamorgan's most stylish and fashionable town.
cowbridgefoodanddrink.org

15–16 September

Abergavenny Food Festival

One of the biggest events on the UK foodie calendar. A packed menu of celebrity chefs, master classes, mouthwatering street stalls and entertainment.
abergavennyfoodfestival.com

15–16 September

Mold Food and Drink Festival

Showcasing outstanding local produce, celebrity chef expertise and live music to create a fabulous foodie weekend.
moldfoodfestival.co.uk

26–28 October

Gwledd Conwy Feast

Tuck in as the quay, castle and medieval streets of Conwy burst with fabulous flavours, sounds and sights. Don't miss the famous local mussels.
conwyfeast.co.uk

OUT OF THE ORDINARY

4–6 May

Machynlleth Comedy Festival

See the funny side of Mid Wales at one of the UK's best comedy festivals. 'A welcome break from the norm' says *The Guardian*.
machcomedyfest.co.uk

9 June

Man vs Horse, Llanwrtyd Wells

As the name suggests, this one-of-a-kind event pits humans against horses on a 22 mile/35km cross-country race. The horse usually wins.
green-events.co.uk

14–16 September

The Good Life Experience, Hawarden

Music, books and talks combine with campfire cooking sessions and hands-on craft lessons in a unique celebration of the great outdoors.
thegoodlifeexperience.co.uk

28–30 September

Elvis Festival, Porthcawl

Thousands of Elvis fans gather to commemorate the life and music of The King, with concerts, tribute shows and lookalike competitions. Don't forget to pack your white jumpsuit and black wig.
elvies.co.uk

BY THE SEA

22–29 May

Gŵyl Beaumaris Festival, Anglesey

This seaside town is the perfect setting for a week long arts festival. Expect classical music and jazz performances, theatre, poetry and art exhibitions.
beaumarisfestival.org

27 May–10 June

Volvo Ocean Race, Cardiff

Cardiff celebrates its maritime roots when one of the world's longest and toughest sailing races stops off in the capital as part of a thrilling 45,000 nautical mile, eight-month journey around the globe.
volvoceanracecardiff.com

30 June–1 July

Wales Airshow, Swansea Bay

Our largest aviation spectacular, set in the natural amphitheatre of Swansea Bay. Thrilling displays by state-of-the-art aircraft and vintage flying machines.
walesnationalairshow.com

6–9 September

Festival No.6, Portmeirion

An award-winning extravaganza of music, arts and culture. It's eclectic, even eccentric – just like its setting in the fairytale village of Portmeirion, perched idyllically on the Dwyryd Estuary.
festivalnumber6.com

For the full picture, head to
visitwales.com/event-search

01 Green Man Festival, Crickhowell

02 Festival No.6, Portmeirion

03 The Good Life Experience, Hawarden

04 Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod

The Wales Way.

The Wales Way is a new family of three national routes that lead you along the coast, across castle country, and through our mountainous heartland.



Ffordd Cymru The Wales Way



They're crossed by loops and links so that you can head off-piste and create your own custom-built Welsh road-trip. In Welsh we call it going *igam ogam* – 'step-to-step', or 'zig-zagging' – discovering your own secret places. Aren't they always the best ones?

The Coastal Way/Ffordd Arfordirol travels the west coast around Cardigan Bay, a 180 mile (290km) road-trip between the sea on one side and mountains on the other.

The Cambrian Way/Ffordd Cambria is a north-south journey along the mountainous spine of Wales, running for 185 miles (300km) between Llandudno and Cardiff, winding through National Parks and big green spaces.

The North Wales Way/Ffordd Gogledd Cymru follows the main trading route for 75 miles (120km) along the northern coast, taking in some of the mightiest castles, the mountains of Snowdonia, and the ancient history of Anglesey.

The three Ways intersect easily, so you can take one route or link them together. They're easy to follow – you'll find route maps at visitwales.com, and a guide to all the best experiences along the way.

They're also accessible by public transport, and criss-crossed by walking, cycling and horse riding trails.

This is The Wales Way.

thewalesway.com

Ffordd Arfordirol The Coastal Way

Starts: Aberdaron

Ends: St Davids

Distance: 180 miles (290km)

Driving time: 4 ½ hrs

The Coastal Way is the name we've given to a new national route that takes in much of Wales' coastline. For the full route go to thewalesway.com. For a taste of what to expect, here are two sections.



01



SAINTS AND SEA VIEWS – ST DAVIDS TO ABERYSTWYTH

Day one (about 42 miles/68km)

We're starting at St Davids Britain's smallest city. It's an arty place (painters and potters love it), home to a cathedral that's central to Wales' story. St David, our patron saint, founded a religious community here in the 6th century that evolved into a siren-like cathedral that draws pilgrims from far and wide.

You don't have to be spiritually inclined to fall under its spell. This soaring, purple-stoned medieval building, nestling in a grassy hollow, is full of treasures. It stands next to the Bishop's Place which, although in ruin, retains echoes of its former splendour in its arched parapets and decorative windows.

stdavidscathedral.org.uk
cadw.gov.wales

St Davids' quirky character is reinforced by the presence of Dr Beynon's Bug Farm, a research and visitor centre where you'll learn all about the insect world

and sustainable agriculture. Feeling hungry (and adventurous)? The Grub Kitchen Café is Britain's first edible insect restaurant.

drbeynonsbugfarm.com

Approaching Fishguard, Melin Tregwynt gives Wales' traditional woollen industry a contemporary twist. Dating from the 17th century, the mill now produces cool new designs and fabrics sold in shops worldwide.

melintregwynt.co.uk

After Newport, take a short detour to Pentre Ifan Cromlech, a skeletal burial chamber built around 3–4000BC. It is made of the same Pembrokeshire 'bluestones' that somehow found their way to Stonehenge, Britain's most famous prehistoric monument, almost 200miles/322km away.

cadw.gov.wales

Overnight: Cardigan

ROUTE NOTES

Porthmadog is heaven for railway enthusiasts. It has no less than three narrow-gauge lines, the Ffestiniog, Welsh Highland and Welsh Highland Heritage Railways.

Day two (about 48 miles/77km)

Cardigan Castle's recent makeover won the UK's 'Restoration of the Year'. It's not your typical castle: ancient walls enclose a handsome Georgian mansion and stylish '1176' restaurant, named after the date when Wales' first eisteddfod was held here.
cardigancastle.com

For Cardigan Bay at its most idyllic, take the side road to Mwnt, a perfect crescent of sand – and perfect picnic spot – topped by cliffs and a tiny church, dazzling in its coat of whitewash.

New Quay partly inspired Llareggub, the fabled village brought to life in Dylan Thomas' masterwork, *Under Milk Wood*. Cardigan Bay is not short of salty old ports like New Quay. Aberaeron is another. From here to Aberystwyth, the A487 hugs a cliff-backed coast with spectacular, far-reaching views along Cardigan Bay.
visitcardigan.com

Overnight: Aberystwyth



HERITAGE, ART AND ARCHITECTURE –
ABERDYFI TO ABERDARON

Day one (about 39 miles/63km)

Fashionable Aberdyfi has a big sandy beach perfect for windsurfing and wildlife watching. Head north on the cliff-hugging coast road to the Mawddach Estuary, where mountains tumble into the sea, taking the historic wooden toll bridge across the water at Penmaenpool.

Barmouth has a special place in Britain's heritage. A short, steep walk leads to Dinas Oleu, the headland perched dizzily above the town. In 1895, this airy 'place to breathe' became the National Trust's first acquisition.

The medieval ramparts of Harlech Castle, a World Heritage Site, seem to grow organically from the rock – once a sea-cliff – on which it stands. The waves have now retreated to leave dunes that today serve as one of Europe's finest links golf courses, Royal St David's.

cadw.gov.wales
royalstdavids.co.uk

Overnight: Harlech

Day two (about 31 miles/50km)

Portmeirion, the unique Italianate village created in the late 20th century, is a must-visit. You won't believe your eyes. Dazzled visitors sometimes lose themselves here for days. You won't have time for that so press on past Porthmadog to Criccieth, a charming Victorian resort with a landmark castle scarred by serious conflict (all is revealed at its new interactive visitor centre).

portmeirion-village.com
cadw.gov.wales

You're now on the Llŷn Peninsula, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It's hard to argue with that description from the grounds of Plas Glyn-y-Weddw, Llanbedrog. There's more on which to feast your eyes within this Victorian mansion, a leading gallery dedicated to contemporary Welsh art.

oriel.org.uk

Overnight: Abersoch

Day three (about 13 miles/21km)

Take a boat trip from Aberdaron across to Bardsey Island, the 'Isle of 20,000 Saints' at the stormy 'land's end' of North Wales. On Mynydd Enlli, the island's highest point, look out for puffins in the skies and seals resting on the rocks below. Back on the mainland, learn more about what makes Llŷn so special at Aberdaron's Porth y Swnt Visitor Centre.

bardsey.org
nationaltrust.org.uk/porth-y-swnt

- 01 Barmouth, Snowdonia
- 02 Pentre Ifan, Pembrokeshire
- 03 Aberaeron, Ceredigion
- 04 St Davids Cathedral, Pembrokeshire

Fford Cambria The Cambrian Way

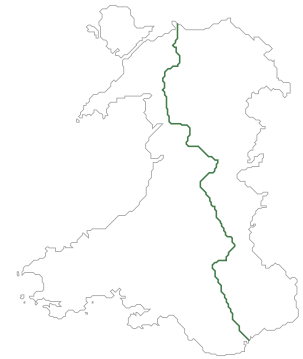
Starts: Llandudno

Ends: Cardiff

Distance: 185 miles (300km)

Driving time: 4 ½ hrs

This is the second of our new national routes that take you on different journeys through Wales. It runs through the heart of the country, mainly following the A470.



ROUTE NOTES

If you're here in late July don't miss the Royal Welsh Show at Builth Wells. It's Europe's biggest, most colourful countryside jamboree.

Day one (about 37 miles/60km)

Start in Cardiff (for more on our capital city see pages 10/11 and 36). Just 20 minutes away there's an unusual visitor attraction that's all about making money – in the hands-on literal sense. The Royal Mint at Llantrisant recently opened its doors to reveal all about coins, how they are made, and why they make the world go around (The Mint supplies coins to 100 countries worldwide).

royalmint.com

You're soon in the South Wales Valleys. The Rhondda Heritage Park's Black Gold Experience near Pontypridd recalls the days when the 'home of coal' fuelled the Industrial Revolution. Guided underground tours and interactive displays at the former Lewis Merthyr Colliery re-create the harsh, heroic world of the Welsh miner.

rctcbc.gov.uk/tourism

Iron, not coal, was the industry of choice at Merthyr Tydfil. Cyfarthfa Castle, a

19th century mansion built by an all-powerful ironmaster, is now a museum and art gallery with diverse collections that include a replica of the world's first steam locomotive and the work of two Merthyr-born fashion icons, Laura Ashley and Julien Mcdonald.

visitmerthyr.co.uk

Overnight: Merthyr Tydfil

Day two (about 56 miles/90km)

A day devoted to exploring the Brecon Beacons National Park and the huge tracts of land cared for by the National Trust (see also our Brecon Beacons tour on page 39).

Explore the Brecon Beacons the easy way on the narrow-gauge Brecon Mountain Railway. Restored steam locomotives run from Merthyr's northern outskirts to the foothills of South Wales' highest summits, a return journey of 9 miles/14km.

bmr.wales

Drive north, taking a short detour off the A470 at Libanus for the Brecon Beacons National Park Visitor Centre (panoramic views, exhilarating walks, local information and a tasty tea room). breconbeacons.org/national-park-visitor-centre

The Brecon Beacons' wide, open spaces are made for horse riding and pony trekking. Cantref Adventure Farm near Brecon offers a variety of treks, including a half-day Brecon Beacons Explorer. cantref.com

Overnight: Llandrindod Wells

Day three (about 66 miles/106km)

Welsh Royal Crystal at Rhayader is Wales' only hand-crafted crystal glass maker. See master craftsmen demonstrating their centuries-old skills on a workshop tour before visiting the shop, stocked with crystal pieces all individually mouth-blown and hand-cut.

welshroyalcrystal.co.uk



Rhyader is on the doorstep of the Elan Valley lakes, a string of reservoirs created over 100 years ago. Call in at the Elan Valley Visitor Centre before following the scenic mountain road that threads through these lovely lakelands. You don't have to drive to experience them. The centre provides bike hire and walking information.

elanvalley.org.uk

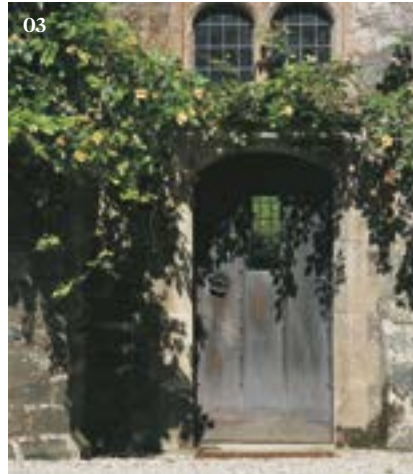
You're a little way off the A470 now, but it's worth the detour. The snaking Cwmystwyth mountain road takes you to Devil's Bridge. But where the devil is the bridge? The legendary medieval 'Bridge of the Evil Man' is hidden away in a deep, wooded gorge, accessible by a steep footpath.

devilsbridgefalls.co.uk

Overnight: Machynlleth

Day four (about 61 miles/98km)

Shopping is made easy at Corris Craft Centre on the A487 north of Machynlleth. Its nine craft studios specialise in everything from jewellery to pottery, handmade chocolates to exceptional artisan gin ('Best in the UK': Great British Food Awards 2017). corriscraftcentre.co.uk



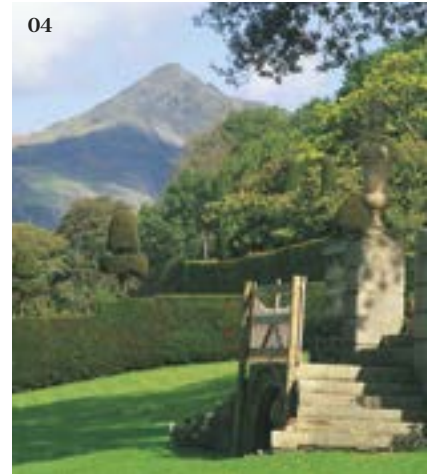
Rejoin the A470 at Cross Foxes (its welcoming bar and grill is a modern take on the traditional coaching inn). Beyond Dolgellau, forest gives way to open, rugged moorland and mountain. At Trawsfynydd, there's a poignant memorial to Wales' World War One poet, Hedd Wynn, who was killed in the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917. He died before knowing he'd won the greatest prize in Welsh literature, the National Eisteddfod Chair. You can see his 'Black Chair' at Yr Ysgwrn, his renovated farmstead, along with other memorabilia. yrysgwrn.com

Another detour off the A470 takes you to Plas Brondanw Gardens near the village of Garreg. Along with Italianate Portmeirion the gardens were the creation of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. His talent for working with landscape reached a high point here, 'drawing its beauties into the heart of the garden'. plasbrondanw.com

Overnight: Betws-y-Coed

Day five (about 21 miles/34km)

Llanrwst, the historic 'capital' of the Conwy Valley, was once the domain of the influential Wynn family. Their



ancestral home, Gwydir Castle, is a grand Tudor courtyard mansion with a palpable period atmosphere – and, apparently, quite a few ghosts. gwydircastle.co.uk

Looking for some more gifts from Wales to take home? Then stop off at Trefriw Woollen Mills, a long-established working mill that manufactures Welsh tapestries and tweeds. Visit the mill museum before browsing the well-stocked shop. t-w-m.co.uk

Next, an unlikely new arrival in the Conwy Valley: the world's first inland surfing lagoon. Surf Snowdonia is no novelty. It's a big lagoon (around 1,000ft/300m long) with big waves that – unlike sea surf – are guaranteed to arrive, and keep on coming. surfsnowdonia.com

Finish your tour at Llandudno, our largest resort (see overleaf for more details).

thewalesway.com

- 01 Nant Peris, Snowdonia
- 02 Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil
- 03 Gwydir Castle, North Wales
- 04 Plas Brondanw, North Wales

Ffordd Gogledd Cymru

The North Wales Way

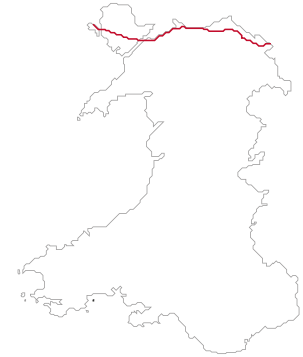
Starts: Chester

Ends: Holyhead

Distance: 75 miles (120km)

Driving time: 1 ½ hrs

Following on from the Cambrian Way, here's the third of our new national routes that take you on different journeys through Wales. For more inspiration go to thewalesway.com



01

Day one (about 58 miles/93km)

Start at the border town of Mold. Stay here the previous night to take in an evening performance at Clwyd Theatr Cymru, home to Wales' major drama producing theatre company. Music, comedy and film are also on the menu. theatrclwyd.com

If you're planning a picnic, call into the nearby Hawarden Estate Farm Shop for the freshest farm-grown food before driving over the smooth, green Clwydian Range of hills – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – to Ruthin, a town full of historical and cultural riches. It's a smörgåsbord of red-bricked and black-and-white half-timbered buildings from medieval, Tudor and Georgian times. In contrast, purpose-built Ruthin Craft Centre is filled with the best in contemporary art and crafts.

hawardenestate.co.uk
ruthincraftcentre.org.uk

Head up the pastoral Vale of Clwyd to Colwyn Bay. This traditional seaside resort is changing fast. The bay – a sandy crescent that goes on for miles – looks better than ever. There's a new beach with Saharan quantities of fresh sand, a revitalised promenade and sleek watersports centre, all close to Eirias Park, a lovely 50 acre/20ha 'park by the sea'.

colwynbaywatersports.co.uk

Overnight: Llandudno

Day two (about 5 miles/8km)

You'll need a full day to do justice to Llandudno and its surroundings. The 'Queen' of Welsh resorts really does have regal qualities. Perhaps it's the perfectly preserved Victorian and Edwardian seafront lined with candy-coloured hotels. Or those wide, well-planned shopping streets with their ornate canopies. Or possibly the pier, the longest in Wales. visitllandudno.org.uk

ROUTE NOTES

You'll visit three world-class castles on this route – Conwy, Caernarfon and Beaumaris, all World Heritage Sites.

The Great Orme headland, a nature reserve with rare flora and – would you believe? – wild Kashmir goats, rises dramatically above the promenade. Go to the top San Franciscan-style on the historic tramway, or alpine-style by cablecar. Back in town, Mostyn is making waves internationally as a cutting-edge contemporary art gallery. And Venue Cymru, North Wales' leading theatre and entertainments complex, stages performances by big-name players, including Welsh National Opera. mostyn.org
venuecymru.co.uk

The theme is medieval at nearby Conwy. Its narrow streets, enclosed within original town walls, are full of historic houses. But nothing can rival brooding, dark-stoned Conwy Castle, a World Heritage Site, for presence. cadw.gov.wales

Overnight: Conwy



Day three (about 36 miles/58km)

Penrhyn Castle, Bangor, is an outrageous, over-the-top 19th century mansion built by an immensely wealthy local slate baron. For pure showmanship, the cavernous Great Hall takes the breath away, though the other side of Penrhyn's story is revealed in the Victorian kitchen where servants sometimes worked 20 hours a day.

nationaltrust.org.uk/penrhyn-castle

North Wales is the UK's outdoor activity capital. It's not just because of the mountains, but also down to places like Zip World Velocity at Bethesda, the world's fastest zip line (can you handle 100mph/160kmh?).

zipworld.co.uk

Overnight: Caernarfon



Day four (about 43 miles/69km)

Caernarfon, like Bethesda, requires a short there-and-back detour from the main route. But you wouldn't want to miss it either. Caernarfon is home to our most famous castle, another soaring medieval monument that served as a royal palace for Edward I. For a different side to this much-visited town go to Galeri, a modern complex with art spaces, cinema and café/bar on the redeveloped waterfront.

cadw.gov.wales

galericaernarfon.com

Return to Bangor, crossing the Menai Strait that separates the Isle of Anglesey from mainland Wales either on the modern Britannia Bridge or historic Menai Suspension Bridge (a world's first), designed by 19th century genius Thomas Telford.

Beaumaris is a handsome sea-town with another outstanding castle. Of all the 13th century castles built by



Edward I in Wales, Beaumaris is the most accomplished. Any attack on this moated, 'rings-within-defensive-rings' fortress, must have been a daunting prospect.

cadw.gov.wales

You won't be able to see all of Anglesey on this tour. So head inland for Llangefni and the next best thing – Oriel Ynys Môn, an attractive museum and gallery that gives an instant tour of the island's history, heritage, wildlife, geology and art.

visitanglesey.co.uk

Anglesey's coastline is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It doesn't come much better than at South Stack sea-cliffs beyond the port of Holyhead, where colonies of guillemots, puffins and razorbills can be viewed from Ellin's Tower RSPB Seabird Centre.

rspb.org.uk/wales

- 01 Conwy Castle, North Wales
- 02 Penrhyn Castle, North Wales
- 03 Zip World, Snowdonia
- 04 Great Orme, Llandudno

Our themed itineraries ranging from a few days to a full week start here. You can follow them as we've suggested or create your own personal tour.

Wales' coastal beauty is pretty much continuous from north to south – here are two suggested tours.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE – FROM PENARTH TO KIDWELLY

Day one (about 37 miles/60km)

Start at Penarth, a short hop across Cardiff Bay. No wonder half of the city wants to live here. Penarth preserves its period charm as a small, bijou Edwardian seaside resort. Take a walk through the seafront gardens, along the promenade or restored art deco pier and you'll see what we mean.

Big brother Barry Island is a seaside resort in the traditional mould with a funfair, sandy beach and quieter side along the pebbly, cliff-backed Knap. Cheerful Porthcawl, 24 miles/39km further west, offers more of the same, but the two resorts bookend a stretch of coast that's very different.

The Glamorgan Heritage Coast is an unexpected 14 miles/23km of spectacular cliffs, coves and dunes. Take a walk along its breathtaking coast path before visiting riverside Ogmore Castle, overlooking an ancient fording place – you can still cross the shallow waters on stepping stones.

visitthevale.com
cadw.gov.wales

Overnight: Porthcawl

Day two (about 56 miles/90km)

The golfers amongst you won't want to miss the opportunity of playing at Royal Porthcawl, 'one of the finest links (courses) not just in Wales, but anywhere', according to *Golf Monthly*.

royalporthcawl.com

Swansea stands at the gateway to the Gower Peninsula, the first part of Britain to be declared an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Call into Patricks, a seafront restaurant in Mumbles, before visiting award-winning sandy beaches like Caswell Bay and Oxwich scooped into the cliffs on its sheltered southern side. Then explore Gower's alter ego, its moody, low-lying northern shores, salt marsh and cockle beds.

visitswanseabay.com/destinations/gower-peninsula

Overnight: Swansea

Day three (about 42 miles/68km)

Cefn Sidan's uninterrupted 8 miles/13km of sand make it the longest beach in Wales. You'll find it in Pembrey Country Park, an unusual mix of dunes, grassland, pine forest and sands guaranteed never to get crowded. A perfect picnic spot.

pembreycountrypark.wales

Close by is Kidwelly Castle, one of the unsung fortresses of Wales. That's strange, because it's remarkably well preserved and up there with all the great castles. It's the same story across the Tywi Estuary at Llansteffan Castle. Its mighty twin-towered gatehouse and ring of walls command stirring headland views across Carmarthen Bay to Gower.

cadw.gov.wales

- 01** Penarth Pier, by Naomi Llewellyn
- 02** Caswell Bay, Gower Peninsula
- 03** Llansteffan Castle, Carmarthenshire
- 04** Amlwch, Anglesey
- 05** Trearddur Bay, Anglesey
- 06** South Stack Lighthouse, Anglesey



04



05



06



ALL AROUND ANGLESEY

Day one (about 25 miles/40km to Amlwch)

The Isle of Anglesey's 125-mile/201km coastline is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Begin at Menai Bridge. There's history everywhere at Beaumaris – at its world-class medieval castle, plus courthouse and chilling Victorian gaol.

cadw.gov.wales
visitanglesey.co.uk

Traeth Coch (Red Wharf Bay) is one of the island's outstanding beaches and, like many, a haven for birdlife, with waders and wildfowl in residence all year. The island's stormy seafaring past is recalled at rocky Moelfre, where the Seawatch Centre contains shipwreck, lifeboat and maritime heritage displays.

moelfre.org

Overnight: Trearddur Bay

Day two (about 33 miles/53km from Amlwch)

Amlwch is a pretty north coast port with a remarkable history. It's difficult to believe that its snug little harbour used to be frantically busy, shipping vast quantities of ore from nearby Parys Mountain, once the world's most productive copper mine. All is revealed at the Copper Kingdom visitor centre.

copperkingdom.co.uk

Cemaes, Wales' most northerly point, is another of those coastal villages that Anglesey does so well. A perfect crescent of sand leads to an old stone quay, and nearby there's Cemlyn Bay with its lagoon-like lake and nature reserve, another major bird sanctuary.

Call into Holyhead, a busy Irish Sea port, then explore wild, windy Holyhead Mountain with its iconic South Stack lighthouse and teeming RSPB bird reserve.

southstack.co.uk
rspb.org.uk/wales

Overnight: Trearddur Bay

Day three (about 43 miles/69km)

Trearddur Bay is a charming little seaside resort with a low-key ambience and high-quality beach, popular for sailing, diving, kayaking, water-skiing and surfing. There's great golf too.

Further down the coast, Rhosneigr offers a similar mix of sand and sport – plus ancient history at Barclodiad y Gawres neolithic tomb, one of many prehistoric monuments scattered across the island.

cadw.gov.wales

Take the road westwards from Newborough to an enormous beach with views across to Snowdonia, and Llanddwyn Island, linked forever with St Dwynwen, Wales' patron saint of lovers. It's the most romantic spot in Wales, especially at sunset.

You're on the home stretch now, but don't miss the Anglesey Sea Zoo at Brynsiencyn or the magnificent Plas Newydd historic house on the banks of the Menai Strait.

angleseyseazoo.co.uk
nationaltrust.org.uk/plas-newydd-country-house-and-gardens



SHORELINES

ROUTE NOTES

Walk the 2¾ miles/4.5km from Holyhead's Breakwater Country Park to cliff-backed South Stack. Waves crash onto the rocky coastline, a noted spring and summer habitat for puffins.

Give yourself two days to get to know Cardiff, Wales' cosmopolitan capital. It's a city for shoppers and sports fans, art aficionados and history lovers, culture vultures and foodies.



A CAPITAL IDEA



01

Day one

Start at the castle, smack in the city centre. It's a unique three-in-one look into the past, an amazing combination of Roman fort, medieval castle and – most of all – extravagant Victorian fantasy palace that reflects the incredible wealth created in Cardiff's historic docklands, riches that made the city what it is today.

cardiffcastle.com

There's more evidence of that wealth in Cardiff's generous green spaces and its neoclassical, white-stoned Civic Centre, which has been compared to Washington's. Take a stroll in Bute Park then head across to one of those gleaming civic buildings, the National Museum. Its scope extends way beyond the Welsh borders, taking in the origins of the universe (plus some scary dinosaurs) and a world-class collection of Impressionist art (starring all the big names, including Van Gogh, Renoir, Monet and Cézanne).

museum.wales/cardiff

01 Cardiff Castle
02 Wales Millennium Centre



02

Return to the 21st century for a spot of shopping. No ordinary shopping, mind. As well as its modern malls, the city is latticed with delightful Victorian and Edwardian canopied arcades – the most of any British city – lined with speciality shops. Grab a veggie lunch at Crumbs Kitchen in Morgan Arcade, or a tasty, cheesy Welsh rarebit at Madame Fromage in Castle Arcade.

crumbskitchencardiff.co.uk
madamefromage.co.uk

Round off the day with a trip to the nearby village of St Fagans and the National Museum of History, where landmark buildings from all over the country have been re-erected to showcase Wales' history.

museum.wales/stfagans

Day two

The Principality Stadium is famous worldwide, not just as the undisputed shrine of rugby – our national game – but also as a venue for all kinds of other blockbuster sports and entertainment. Take a backstage tour of the place that hosted last year's UEFA Champions League Final between Real Madrid and Juventus.

principalitystadium.wales

Jump on a waterbus to see the city's other half – its reborn Cardiff Bay, where those old docklands have been transformed into a buzzing contemporary waterfront (see pages 10/11 for more information).

Head to Cardiff International White Water, a water sports centre that offers white-water rafting, canoeing, and kayaking on its purpose-built course. Or try the adrenaline-fuelled, indoor FlowRider® machine and enjoy riding the jets of water on a bodyboard.

ciww.com

Round off your Cardiff experience with an evening at the Wales Millennium Centre, an iconic centre for the performing arts.

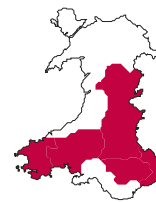
cardiffboat.com
wmc.org.uk
visitcardiff.com

ROUTE NOTES

Foot (and visitor) friendly – that's Cardiff. Its compact centre with everything to hand – shops, castle, museum and other attractions – makes it one of the easiest capital cities to explore.

Small country, big flavour. That pretty much sums up the food in Wales. It's a foodies' feast – as you'll discover on this tasty three-day tour.

01 Foraging, Pembrokeshire
02 Dà Mhile Distillery, Llandysul



Day one (about 57 miles/92km)

Let's start on an unexpected note – Welsh wine. The Romans enjoyed quaffing it 2,000 years ago – and it's back in fashion. Parva Farm Vineyard at Tintern has won a cellarful of awards for its whites, reds and sparkling wines. Its Dathliad Sparkling was awarded 'Best Welsh Wine' in 2016.

parvafarm.com

This corner of Wales is a magnet for all things foodie. The 'golden triangle' – an area roughly bounded by Brecon, Chepstow and Usk – attracts chefs and producers passionate about food, its provenance and preparation.

It's all under one roof at the Beacons Farm Shop, Bwlch, which sells locally bred venison, beef and lamb along with Welsh cheeses, bread, homeware and gifts. Then call into Blaenafon Cheddar Company's shop or the town's Big Pit National Coal Museum, where Pwll Mawr, one of its cheeses, is matured 300ft/91m below ground.

beaconsfarmshop.co.uk
chunkofcheese.co.uk

The Ritz London isn't the only hotel that serves deluxe afternoon

tea. Pop into The Angel Hotel, Abergavenny, for finely cut sandwiches, dainty pastries and a fragrant cuppa.

angelabergavenny.com/afternoon-tea

Overnight: Abergavenny

Day two (about 77 miles/124km)

In 2011 the people of Talgarth came together to rescue the town's old watermill. See what an inspiring job they made of it, and taste the result at the Bakers' Table Café, where bread, homemade cakes and pizzas are on the menu.

talgarthmill.com

Drive on to Brecon, where Brecon Tap serves a range of beers from Brecon Brewery together with tasty locally sourced food – famous Brecon Pies are a house favourite.

breconinns.co.uk

Next on to Llanarthne and Wright's Food Emporium, a beacon of the good food movement in Wales. The brainchild of all-round gastro-guru Simon Wright, it's a clever combination of café/bistro, shop and wine cellar.

wrightsfood.co.uk

Overnight: Carmarthen

Day three (about 70 miles/113km)

Gin is back in fashion, big time. Dà Mhile Distillery is a leading light in its revival with its range of artisan organic spirits, which includes whisky. It's based at Glynhynod Farm, Llandysul, also home of the excellent Caws Teifi Cheese. Caws Cenarth near Newcastle Emlyn produces Welsh Farmhouse Caerffili along with other varieties including creamy blue, brie-like Perl Wen. Call into the shop to see – and taste why our artisan cheesemakers win so many awards.

damhile.co.uk
cawscenarth.co.uk

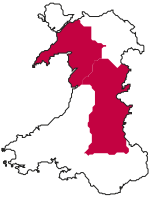
Then follow in the footsteps of today's chefs and go foraging in St Davids, where 'Wild About Pembrokeshire' runs foraging walks for plants and seaweeds.

wildaboutpembrokeshire.co.uk

ROUTE NOTES

As you'd expect from such a foodie country, food festivals come thick and fast in Wales. *Crème de la crème* is the Abergavenny Food Festival, a delicious mix of chefs, masterclasses, producers, foragers and stallholders held every September.

A TASTE OF WALES



COUNTRY FILE



Here are taster tours into the rural heartlands of two of Wales' three National Parks, Snowdonia and Brecon Beacons.

MOUNTAIN HIGH

Day one (about 24 miles/37km – overnight option Caernarfon)

Betws-y-Coed is the perfect Snowdonia gateway. This leafy Victorian resort is flanked by the Gwydyr Forest, a lovely woodland latticed with walks and cycle trails short and long. Nearby there's Swallow Falls, one of Wales' most famous beauty spots – follow the short path to this spectacular cascade, set amongst woodland.

eryri-npa.gov.uk
visitbetwsycoed.co.uk

Snowdonia's rocky, rugged peaks fill the skyline around the village of Capel Curig, a legendary climbing centre. The views are legendary too, so you'll want a quick photo stop – especially at the twin lakes of Llynau Mymbyr set beneath the classic 'Snowdon Horseshoe' ridge walk.

You'll soon get up close to this volcanic, boulder-strewn landscape from the Llanberis Pass, a 'must-do' driving route through the mountains. Watch rock climbers on the sheer walls of the pass before descending to Llanberis, a busy little town with lots of attractions.

Weather permitting, now's your chance to get to grips with Snowdonia the easy way. Take the Snowdon Mountain Railway, the UK's ultimate rail ride, to the highest peak in Southern Britain (3,560ft/1,085m), with sensational views from Hafod Eryri, its summit visitor centre. You may also have time to visit the local slate museum and amazing 'Electric Mountain', a massive underground hydro-electric installation that's like a James Bond movie set.

snowdonrailway.co.uk
museum.wales/slate
electricmountain.co.uk

Overnight: Llanberis or Caernarfon

- 01 Capel Curig, Snowdonia
- 02 Betws-y-Coed, Snowdonia
- 03 Brecon Beacons

Day two (about 40 miles/64km)

Head back into the hills on the A4085, stopping off at Beddgelert, Snowdonia's prettiest village with a riverside walk to the legendary burial place of Gelert, a dog tragically killed in a case of mistaken identity. Blaenau Ffestiniog, your next destination, isn't 'pretty' in the conventional sense. But the former 'slate capital of the world' is an unmissable part of Snowdonia, with a personality that's as dramatic as its cocooning ring of dark-stoned peaks. For homemade goodies call in at Isallt Coffee Shop.

Explore Blaenau's rich heritage on an underground tour of Llechwedd Slate Caverns. Today's Blaenau has reinvented itself as an adventure centre, with adrenaline attractions aplenty including Zip World Titan (Europe's largest zip zone), mountain biking and – would you believe? – giant 'Bounce Below' underground nets.

llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk
zipworld.co.uk
anturstiniog.com

The A496 takes you over the Crimea Pass – another Snowdonia classic to Dolwyddelan (the lonely castle on the ridge was home to 13th century Welsh royalty, Llywelyn the Great) before returning to Betws-y-Coed.

cadw.gov.wales

GREEN PARK

Day one (about 20 miles/32km)

Abergavenny, on the eastern edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park, is a prosperous market town and home to the famous food festival each September. Unlike rugged Snowdonia, the Brecon Beacons are green and grassy, their smooth flanks rising to distinctive, flattish summits. It's an area very popular with cyclists, mountain bikers, horse riders (there's an excellent choice of equestrian centres) and all kinds of walkers, whatever your level.

breconbeacons.org

You can't miss two prominent local peaks as you leave Abergavenny on the A40. The Sugar Loaf rises to almost 2,000ft/610m – call into the Sugar Loaf Vineyard and Café on the way up for refreshments before walking to the top. The second is at Crickhowell, a small, perfectly formed riverside town renowned for its classy independent shops and inns. Walk to the top (it takes about 1½ hours) for inspiring views of the Beacons and borderland Black Mountains.
sugarloafvineyard.co.uk

Next stop is Brecon. There's plenty to see and do here – riverside walks, museums, handsome Georgian buildings, cathedral, a covered market hall and boat trips on the lovely Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, 'Britain's prettiest', which runs for 35 miles/56km through the National Park to Pontypool.

mbact.org.uk

Overnight: Brecon

Day two (about 29 miles/47km)

It's time to explore the heart of the Brecon Beacons. Go first to the National Park Visitor Centre on Mynydd Illtud with cinemascope views across to table-top Pen y Fan, at 2,907ft/886m the highest summit in South Wales. If you're in the walking mood, take the A470 to Storey Arms and set off from here to the top.

Now for something unexpected. There's a secretive little corner of the National Park quite unlike its big skies and spacious mountains. 'Waterfall Country' consists of deep, shady gorges, cascades and caves. To get there, take the minor road south from the visitor centre to a staircase of falls on the River Mellte near Ystradfellte, set amongst thick woods and gnarled limestone rocks.

ROUTE NOTES

Snowdonia National Park, covering 823 square miles/2,132sq km, is the third largest of Britain's 15 National Parks. The grassy Brecon Beacons National Park has to be the greenest.

Nature and wildlife thrive in Wales – hardly surprising, considering the fact that we're blessed with three National Parks, five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, miles and miles of protected Heritage Coast and countless nature reserves.



WILDLIFE TRAIL



Day one (about 50 miles/80km)

Start on a natural high at the Dyfi Osprey Project in a wonderful little nature reserve near Machynlleth. There's a good chance of seeing these extremely rare birds (April-September), thanks to live webcam streaming from nest to visitor centre – and there are lovely walks too. The Dyfi Valley's green credentials are impeccable. It's a UNESCO Biosphere – the only one in Wales – because of the quality of its surroundings.

dyfiospreyproject.com
dyfibiosphere.wales

Head into the remote Cambrian Mountains, the wild heartland of Wales, and the Elan Valley lakelands. This string of scenic, beautifully engineered reservoirs blend into a landscape that's one of Wales' most important wildlife refuges. Activities at the Elan Valley Visitor Centre include themed nature walks and sheep shearing demonstrations.

elanvalley.org.uk

Look out for red kites. These large, fork-tailed birds of prey, once almost extinct in Wales, have made a spectacular comeback. Get up close to the birds at Gigrin Farm near Rhayader where hundreds of kites feed 365 days of the year.

gigrin.co.uk

Overnight: Rhayader

01 New Quay, Ceredigion
02 Atlantic Grey Seal
03 Puffin

Day two (about 77 miles/124km)

The red kite, an icon of rural Wales, has an aquatic equivalent in the bottlenosed dolphin. Drive westwards to Cardigan Bay, hop on a dolphin-watching cruise from New Quay, or scan the bay with binoculars from harbours and cliffs.

Near Cardigan, the Welsh Wildlife Centre and its panoramic treetop Glasshouse Café reveal what nature is up to in the Teifi Marshes. Quite a lot, as it turns out. Follow paths to secluded corners of this nature reserve, or go canoeing or cycling (hire facilities available).

welshwildlife.org

Overnight: Cardigan

Day three (about 40 miles/64km)

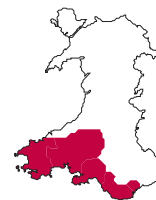
Complete your journey in Pembrokeshire, where the Coast National Park teems with wildlife. You'll be amongst seals and seabirds, including Manx shearwaters, razorbills, guillemots and puffins, on a boat trip to Skomer Island from Martin's Haven. Back on terra firma, follow the coast path across headlands carpeted in wildflowers and watch skies, cliffs and sea-stacks alive with colonies of seabirds.

pembrokeshirecoast.wales
pembrokeshire-islands.co.uk

ROUTE NOTES

Around 300 to 400 bottlenose dolphins live in Cardigan Bay, Europe's largest population.

South Wales is our most populated region. But it's also full of talented people with the greenest of green fingers. There are gorgeous gardens, big and small, everywhere. Here's a glimpse into our green scene.



GARDENS OF SOUTH WALES



01

Day one (about 52 miles/84km)

One minute you're in Cardiff, the buzzing Welsh capital. The next, you're stepping into the lush Vale of Glamorgan, a peaceful landscape dotted with picturesque villages. The National Museum of History at St Fagans recreates village life from bygone times with rural buildings brought from all over Wales (entry is free). The gardens include Italianate terraces, a Victorian rosary, fish pools, ponds and fountains, all set in 100 acres/40ha of parkland. museum.wales/stfagans

walking and cycling trails. Walk to the café in the woods and you won't believe you're minutes from the busy M4 motorway. bryngarwcountrypark.co.uk

Overnight: Swansea

Day two (about 70 miles/113km)

Fans of writer Dylan Thomas will want to make a pilgrimage to Swansea's Cwmdonkin Park, the subject of an early poem. Enjoy a walk here amongst its exotic trees. Then take the M4 to Carmarthenshire, the verdant 'garden of Wales'. It's covered earlier in the guide (see pages 20/21) but we make no apologies for reminding you about the innovative National Botanic Garden of Wales and its intimate little neighbour, Aberglasney. botanicgarden.wales aberglasney.org

Next stop is Pembrokeshire's Picton Castle near Haverfordwest. The castle's 40-acre/16ha grounds boast one of the finest plant collections in Wales – rare conifers and roses alongside several species of rhododendron unique to Picton, plus an exotic jungle garden, shady woodlands and willow dens. pictoncastle.co.uk

Take a look at pages 20/21 for more on gardens in Wales.



02

Nearby Dyffryn Gardens has recently been reborn following a multi-million-pound makeover. Covering over 55 acres/22ha, it's an extravagant example of early 20th century design with formal lawns, intimate garden rooms and seasonal beds. Trees from all over the world can be seen in its arboretum, one of the National Trust's best woodland collections. nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens



03

South Wales is known for its Country Parks. Bryngarw, near Bridgend, is one of the finest. This 113-acre/46ha estate based around 18th century Bryngarw House on the River Garw is an inviting spread of formal gardens, woodlands, pastures and a delightful Oriental Garden, with

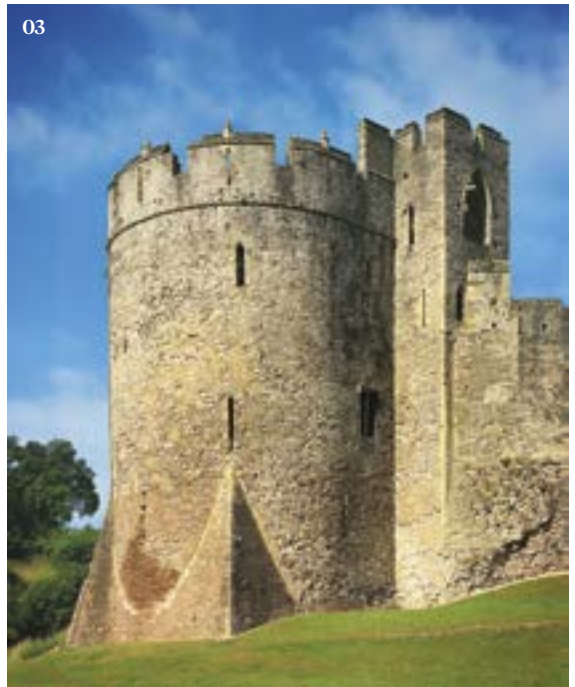
- 01 St Fagans National Museum of History
- 02 Dyffryn Gardens, © National Trust Images/Andrew Butler
- 03 Picton Castle, The Picton Castle Trust

ROUTE NOTES

Bryngarw Country Park's seasonal highlights include its springtime bluebells and fiery reds, golds and oranges of its maple trees in autumn.



TIME TRAVEL



- 01 Tintern Abbey, South Wales
- 02 Powis Castle, Mid Wales
- 03 Chepstow Castle, South Wales
- 04 Grosmont Castle, South Wales
- 05 Caerphilly Castle, South Wales
- 06 Raglan Castle, South Wales

Doctor Who is Welsh – by which we mean that the globally popular TV series is made in Wales. So we have form when it comes to time travel. Add the fact that Wales has more castles per square mile than anywhere else in the world and you have the makings of a tour of the Welsh borderlands that’s both time- and mind-bending.

Day one (about 74 miles/119km)

Castle-building started in Wales, so where better to kick off than at Chepstow Castle, Britain’s first fortress constructed of stone. They laid its foundations way back in 1067, the castle continued to grow for the next 500 years, leaving us with a text-book example of the evolution of castle-building. Its stirring location on a cliff above the River Wye adds to its stature as one of Britain’s most significant historic sites.

Tintern Abbey, a few miles upstream, also benefits from an idyllic riverside setting. Centuries ago, early visitors would stop off here on boat trips along the Wye. It’s still one of Wales’ most revered spots. The abbey, a soaring, roofless ruin that retains many fine features, dates from 1131. This ancient monument to the Age of Faith has inspired many, including poet William Wordsworth and the great landscape painter JMW Turner. If you have the time, take a walk in the woods – you’re in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty after all – from Tintern’s Old Station visitor centre and café.

tintern.org.uk

We don’t do things by halves in Wales. Chepstow was the first, while Caerphilly is off the scale. Caerphilly Castle is massive, rivalling Windsor Castle in size. This 13th century fortress, once an off-the-radar ‘sleeping giant’, now attracts the attention it deserves as one of Europe’s great castles. Put yourself in the boots of a would-be attacker, gaze across the moat to Caerphilly’s impregnable walls within walls... then run the other way.

Overnight: Abergavenny

Day two (about 55 miles/89km)

Handsome Raglan is an intriguing crossover. It dates largely from later medieval times when trouble and strife were in decline, so castles could be comfy and homely as well as strong and secure. Raglan is more palace than fortress, with state apartments, huge fireplaces, ornate windows and a multitude of decorative touches... a des res of its time.

The same can’t be said for its functional, no-nonsense neighbours, the ‘Three Castles of Gwent’. The early medieval Welsh borders were bloody and violent, presided over by ruthless barons. The triangle of ‘Three Castles’ – Grosmont, Skenfrith and White Castle – controlled strategic routes into Wales.

You must call into Hay-on-Wye, the small border town with a huge international reputation. Visitors flock to this charming ‘town of books’ (not to mention antiques, art, crafts, fashion and food – its cafés and inns are exceptional) from all corners of the globe.

Books are sold everywhere, from the old fire station, cinema, butcher’s shop and somewhat dishevelled but much-loved castle, currently the subject of a restoration programme. It has the weathered look of a properly lived-in castle, with an endearing mish-mash of features ranging from medieval to Victorian.

haycastletrust.org

Overnight: Hay-on-Wye

Day three (about 68 miles/109km)

To truly understand the Welsh borders go to Knighton, in Welsh Tref-y-Clawdd (The Town of the Dyke). The dyke in question is Offa’s, the 8th century King of Mercia who built the first earthwork border separating England from Wales. Call in first at the Offa’s Dyke Centre to get your bearings and learn more about this monumental endeavour before seeing it for yourself in its full, original glory on Llanfair Hill, about 5 miles/8km north-west of the town.

offadyke.org.uk

Complete your border tour at Powis Castle, Welshpool. It’s difficult to believe that this sumptuous mansion, one of the National Trust’s finest, began life as a rough-and-ready border fort. For a glimpse into how the other half lived, take a peek at the gilded state bedchamber of 1688. Powis is also famous for its Clive of India Museum (the largest private collection of its type in Britain) and beautiful gardens and grounds, overlooked by Italianate terraces.

nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden

Unless otherwise stated, the castles featured here are in the care of

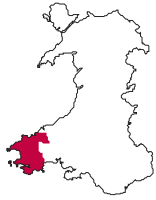
cadw.gov.wales

For more on castles and historic places see pages 18/19.

ROUTE NOTES

All-powerful Caerphilly Castle has one chink in its armour – a tipsy tower that out-leans Pisa’s.

We've a bit of a reputation when it comes to outdoor activities of all kinds, relaxing and adrenaline-pumping. Here's a heavenly half-day walk to get you started.



ACTIVITY WALES



01



02



03

WALKING IN SAINTLY FOOTSTEPS

Travel west until you run out of land at the tiny city of St Davids, named after Wales' patron saint. St Davids Peninsula is Pembrokeshire in miniature – a saw-toothed coastline where stormy seas, weather and wildlife still dominate, all imbued with a Celtic spirit you can almost touch.

10am

You'll be following in the footsteps of Celtic saints on this 6 mile/9.5km walk – a pilgrimage, if you like – starting at St Justinian's Lifeboat Station 2 miles/3km west of St Davids. Catch the regular Celtic Coaster bus service from St Davids to get there. Justinian was a 6th century hermit, reputedly David's colleague, who is buried at ruined St Justinian's Chapel, visible from the road.

Follow the Wales Coast Path south for fabulous views across Ramsey Sound and 'The Bitches', a notorious reef of rocks, to cliff-backed Ramsey Island, now a bird reserve accessible to day visitors by boat.

- 01 St Justinian's, Pembrokeshire
- 02 Ramsey Island, Pembrokeshire
- 03 Porthlysgi, Pembrokeshire

11am

The stunning panoramas keep on coming, this time southwards across St Bride's Bay all the way to southern Pembrokeshire. Around the windy headland things become a little calmer. Porthlysgi Bay, snug and sheltered amongst the cliffs, leads to Porthclais where St David was reputedly baptised. At the end of a narrow inlet, sleepy Porthclais was once the busy main port for St Davids (abandoned limekilns still line the quayside).

12noon

Beyond Porthclais is St Non's Bay, a location that is, for some, supercharged with spiritual significance. A chapel dedicated to Non, mother of David, overlooks the bay, along with a holy well that was – and still is – much visited by pilgrims to St Davids.

Suitably refreshed in mind, body and spirit, head inland for the short walk back to St Davids. For lunch, go to the café in Oriel y Parc Visitor Centre or the refectory at St David's Cathedral.

visitwales.com/walking-pembrokeshirecoast.wales
stdavidsrefectory.co.uk

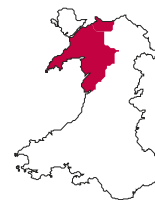
For more on walking see pages 16/17.

ROUTE NOTES

In Welsh, Pembrokeshire is sometimes known as Gwlad Hud a Lledrith (The Land of Magic and Enchantment).

North Wales is a 'stunning area with a vast array of activities' says leading travel publisher *Lonely Planet*. This short tour introduces you to just a few.

- 01 Coed y Brenin, Snowdonia
- 02 Surf Snowdonia
- 03 North Wales Golf Club, Llandudno
- 04 Bounce Below, Blaenau Ffestiniog



ACTIVITY WALES



01

ACTIVITY CENTRAL

Day one
(about 22 miles/35km)

Llandudno gives you a choice of two top golf courses. Links golf is a Welsh speciality, and at the North Wales Golf Club there's one of the best. It's a true championship links course, with far-reaching views across the Conwy Estuary. For the best of both worlds – links and parkland – go to nearby Maesdu Golf Club, a gently undulating championship course with more of those fabulous views.

northwalesgolfclub.org.uk
maesdugolfclub.co.uk

Call in for lunch at Bodnant Welsh Food Centre in the beautiful Vale of Conwy. Fancy surfing without salty seawater? No problem. Nearby Surf Snowdonia is the world's first inland surfing lagoon. It gets wetter and better. As well as riding perfect waves that arrive like clockwork, there's a 'Crash and Splash' watery assault course, glamping and a cool café overlooking all the action.

bodnant-welshfood.co.uk
surfsnowdonia.com

Overnight: Betws-y-Coed

Day two
(about 30 miles/48km)

Go Below, based at Conwy Falls near Betws-y-Coed, offers guided tours of a spectacular subterranean world where you'll

scramble, sail, traverse, climb, abseil and ride a zip line through an abandoned slate cavern. Already been to the top of Snowdon (you don't have to climb – there's a train all the way to the summit)? If so, now it's time to head the opposite way down to the deepest point in the UK – over 1,300ft/396m – accessible to the public.

go-below.co.uk

Blaenau Ffestiniog's mountains and old slate caverns are home to Zip World Titan, Europe's largest zip zone, and Bounce Below where giant nets are suspended in a cavern the size of a cathedral. For something a little less frantic, sit back and explore the extraordinary Llechwedd Slate Caverns, where three tours reveal the story of an industry that once roofed the world.

zipworld.co.uk
llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk

Drive south on the A470 to Coed y Brenin Forest Park near Dolgellau. Everything is laid on for a gentle few hours in the saddle. Bike hire is available, and there are two easy trails – the popular 2½ mile/4.8km Minor Taur trail and picturesque 6 mile/10.8km Yr Afon forest road trail (along with tougher stuff for the more experienced).

naturalresources.wales
beicsbrenin.co.uk



02



03



04

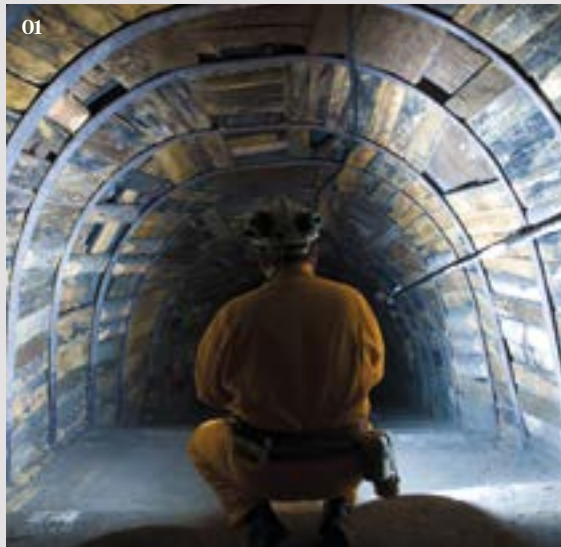
ROUTE NOTES

Modern mountain biking in the UK was born in the Coed y Brenin Forest Park in the 1990s.

You'll be surprised by what you come across on this whistle-stop touring itinerary. Yet it's only the tip of the iceberg. For its size, Wales packs a mighty big punch.



WALES IN A WEEK



01



02



03

ROUTE NOTES

We're a small country only in the sense of our size – just 155 miles/241km from north to south. But as you'll see from this tour, every mile brings something new and exciting.

Day one (about 52 miles/84km)

Start at Monmouth, an historic town on the River Wye with good shopping, a rare fortified medieval bridge, ruined castle where Henry V was born, and statue to famous son Charles Rolls, co-founder of Rolls-Royce.

The scene couldn't be more different in the South Wales Valleys, where iron and coal poured out of local furnaces and mines during the Industrial Revolution. At Blaenavon, a World Heritage Site, you'll see how the workers lived and toiled at the preserved Ironworks, and go underground at Big Pit National Coal Museum.

cadw.gov.wales

museum.wales/bigpit

Overnight: Cardiff

Day two (about 41 miles/66km)

This morning, get to know Cardiff (see pages 10/11 and 36 for more on Wales' capital).

visitcardiff.com

Then take the M4 motorway to Swansea, a breezy mix of traditional and modern. Its covered market – one of the best in Wales – sells all manner of local delicacies, including crumbly welshcakes, cockles and laverbread (a puréed seaweed that tastes much better than it looks). For more on Swansea see pages 10/11.

visitswanseabay.com

Overnight: Swansea

Day three (about 86 miles/138km)

Drive on to the Gower Peninsula, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Go to Rhossili, its dramatic 'land's end' where cliffs (and hang-gliders and paragliders) soar above the vast beach.

visitswanseabay.com/destinations/gower-peninsula

The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park comes next. Pembrokeshire, like Gower, is brimming with water-based activities, including sailing, swimming, kayaking and surfing. The characterful resort of Tenby on the south coast is a delicious mix of pastel-shaded Georgian houses, picturesque harbour, two outstanding beaches and medieval town walls.

pembrokeshirecoast.wales

visitpembrokeshire.com

Overnight: Tenby

Day four (about 64 miles/103km)

Colby Woodland Garden, perched above the sea at Amroth, is a natural haven of wildflower meadows and woodland walks, with abundant wildlife.

nationaltrust.org.uk/colby-woodland-garden

Not long ago, Narberth was a sleepy country town. It's now a busy shopping and dining destination, with classy speciality shops, cafés and restaurants. Try Ultracomida deli and restaurant for lunch.

ultracomida.co.uk

Drive via Cardigan to New Quay. Cardigan Bay's seafaring days are flagged up along the quay, where a list of 19th century tolls payable for landing goods is still displayed (two pence for French plums, no less). Take a boat trip to see bottlenose dolphins – the clear waters of Cardigan Bay are one of the best places in the UK to see them.

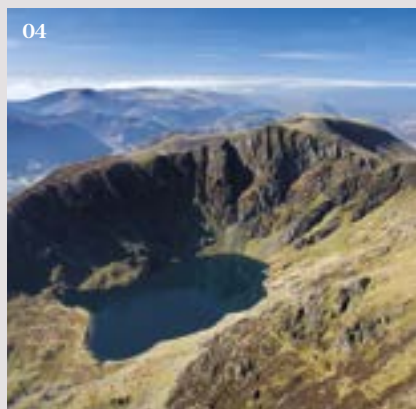
discoverceredigion.co.uk

Overnight: Aberaeron

Day five (about 73 miles/117km)

Aberystwyth, the 'capital' of Mid Wales, is a resort-cum-university town with a youthful vibe and some seriously traditional attractions. These include Ceredigion Museum, Cliff Railway, narrow-gauge Vale of Rheidol Railway to Devil's Bridge and National Library of Wales, a must-visit for bibliophiles and genealogists.

ceredigionmuseum.wales
aberystwythcliff railway.co.uk
rheidolrailway.co.uk
llgc.org.uk



Dolgellau is a dark-stoned market town set beneath the massive bulk of Cader Idris – wonderful walking country and one of a dizzying 90 summits in the Snowdonia National Park.

eryri-npa.gov.uk

Continue on to Portmeirion, a true one-off. Is it Wales? Or Italy? Make up your own mind at this unique village, an intoxicating mix of medieval England, the Far East and the Italian Riviera.

portmeirion-village.com

Overnight: Portmeirion or Porthmadog

Day six (about 45 miles/72km)

A few options today. Take the narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway that climbs from Porthmadog to the former 'slate capital' of Blaenau Ffestiniog. Or, for Snowdonia at its most mountainous, drive via pretty Beddgelert to the spectacular Llanberis Pass.

festrail.co.uk
blaenauffestiniog.org

Whatever you do, don't miss Caernarfon's world-famous castle before crossing one of the road bridges that spans the Menai Strait to the Isle of Anglesey, another of Wales' Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

cadw.gov.wales
visitanglesey.co.uk

Overnight: Beaumaris



Day seven (about 92 miles/148km)

Call into Halen Môn Anglesey Sea Salt's visitor centre at Brynsciencyn to see – and taste – why this premium quality salt is a must-have ingredient with top chefs worldwide, before returning to mainland Wales.

halenmon.com

Llandudno, our largest seaside resort, has a wealth of well-preserved features, including Wales' longest pier. Its many cafés and restaurants include the highly rated Lawton's Café Grill, Dylan's and The Cottage Loaf.

visitlandudno.org.uk

From here, the lush Vale of Clwyd leads southwards alongside the Clwydian Range (again, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to castle-crowned Denbigh and medieval Ruthin. Then it's over the lofty Horseshoe Pass to Llangollen, home to a famous International Musical Eisteddfod and idyllic canal (boat trips available).

clwydianrangeanddeevallyaonb.org.uk

Those canal boats float eastwards to the 'stream in the sky', Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. Completed in 1805, it's an amazing sight, over 1,000ft/305m long and 126ft/38m high. If you have a head for heights, walk across it before leaving Wales.

pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk

- 01 Big Pit, © Big Pit National Coal Museum
- 02 Tenby, Pembrokeshire
- 03 Aberystwyth, Ceredigion
- 04 Llyn Cau, Snowdonia
- 05 Llandudno Pier
- 06 Caernarfon Castle, North Wales



Meet our holiday areas.

Wales is divided into 13 distinct areas, each with its own individual character.



01—The Isle of Anglesey/Ynys Môn

Anglesey is many things to many people. It is a place that inspires, a place that appeals to all the senses – a place to see, hear, taste, smell and feel. It is a place to get away from it all. But most of all, Anglesey is a place to get out and do, so what are you waiting for, start your adventure today?

tourism@anglesey.gov.uk
visitanglesey.co.uk
[facebook.com/visitanglesey](https://www.facebook.com/visitanglesey)
twitter.com/visitanglesey

02—Llandudno & Colwyn Bay

Vibrant Llandudno, the Victorian seaside gem with a history that goes back to the Bronze Age. World Heritage Conwy with its rich maritime past. Waterfront adventure in Colwyn Bay. Epic experiences in the stunning landscape of the Conwy Valley and Snowdonia. Year-round breaks, filled with family fun, good food, great walking and world-class theatre. And look out for news of some exciting events to celebrate the year of the sea.

llandudnotic@conwy.gov.uk
visitllandudno.org.uk
[facebook.com/VisitingLlandudno](https://www.facebook.com/VisitingLlandudno)
twitter.com/visit_llandudno

03—North East Wales

Less than 20 minutes from Chester, we're just a short journey from the North West and the West Midlands. From the bustling shops and cultural events of Wrexham, to the culinary delights of the Mold Food and Drink Festival and the world-famous Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod. The area includes Rhyl, one of the best recognized British seaside resorts and the Clwydian Range & Dee Valley an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Highlights include the 11 mile long Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site and the ancient Offa's Dyke path offering great walking.

tourism@wrexham.gov.uk
rhyl.tic@denbighshire.gov.uk
llangollen.tic@denbighshire.gov.uk
northeastwales.wales
[facebook.com/NthEastWales](https://www.facebook.com/NthEastWales)
[facebook.com/GogleddDdwyrainCymru](https://www.facebook.com/GogleddDdwyrainCymru)
twitter.com/NthEastWales
twitter.com/GogleddDCymru

04—Snowdonia Mountains & Coast

The outdoor adventure capital of North Wales that includes the Snowdonia National Park, Llŷn Peninsula and Cambrian Coastline. Snowdonia offers a wide choice of quality accommodation, attractions and activities; castles, narrow-gauge railways, golf, cycling, walking, award-winning beaches, Wales Coast Path, World Heritage Site, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coast.

tourism@gwynedd.llyw.cymru
visitsnowdonia.info
[facebook.com/visitingsnowdonia](https://www.facebook.com/visitingsnowdonia)
twitter.com/visit_snowdonia

05—Mid Wales My Way

A huge outdoor playground with national trails, waterfall walks and riverside rambles. Family friendly rides to extreme mountain biking. Our packed events calendar includes the Royal Welsh Show, Hay Literary, Machynlleth Comedy, Green Man and Gregynog Festivals. Choose to camp or 'glamp', stay in a cosy cottage or indulge in pampered luxury. With views to take your breath away, castles to conquer, gardens to delight

and wide open spaces to discover. Add independent stores, galleries and locally sourced mouth-watering cuisine to the mix to get a real flavour of 'Mid Wales My Way'.

tourism@powys.gov.uk
midwalesmyway.com
facebook.com/midwalesmyway
twitter.com/MidWalesMyWay

06—Ceredigion – Cardigan Bay & the Cambrian Mountains

Fresh air, freedom and adventure: smugglers' caves, sandy coves, a sunken forest and seafood fresh from Cardigan Bay make Ceredigion the perfect destination for a get away from it all break or full-on family holiday. Take a dolphin spotting boat trip, walk the coast path, catch a wave (and maybe a mackerel) or simply enjoy some family fun at our Blue Flag beaches. Head inland for mountain lakes and waterfalls, market towns and romantic wilderness.

brochure@ceredigion.gov.uk
discoverceredigion.wales
facebook.com/discoverceredigion
twitter.com/visitceredigion

07—Pembrokeshire – Britain's Only Coastal National Park

Rated by *National Geographic* magazine experts as the second best coastline in the World. With 186 miles of magnificent and varied coastline and over 50 beaches, there's plenty of space for everyone. Choose between lively Tenby and Saundersfoot or peaceful St Davids and Newport. Perfect for outdoor activities or just relaxing.

tourism@pembrokeshire.gov.uk
visitpembrokeshire.com
facebook.com/VisitPembrokeshire
twitter.com/VisitPemb

08—Carmarthenshire – Carmarthen Bay

Stretching from Carmarthen Bay in the south to the western Beacons and Cambrian Mountains in the north, with wondrous gardens, awe-inspiring castles, Wales's longest beaches, and market towns brimming with local produce and chic shopping.

marketing@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
discovercarmarthenshire.com
www.facebook.com/discovercarmarthenshire
twitter.com/Discovercarms

09—Swansea Bay – Swansea, Mumbles, & Gower

A city by the sea and rural seaside retreat in one holiday destination. Experience Wales' Cultural City and the UK's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Gower Peninsula. Unwind on award-winning beaches, walk the Gower Coast Path or go wild for our watersports. Explore our coast, castles and caves and discover how the sea has shaped our heritage. #SeaSwanseaBay
visitswanseabay.com
facebook.com/visitswanseabay
twitter.com/visitswanseabay

10—The Valleys – Heart and Soul of Wales

The Valleys are packed with things to see and do and we do events particularly well. This year Man Engine is coming to the valleys so make sure you visit us too. We are proud of our heritage, and love to receive visitors who come for history, adventures and a warm Welsh welcome. Visit The Valleys this year and enjoy the Heart and Soul of Wales.

contactus@thevalleys.co.uk
thevalleys.co.uk
facebook.com/LoveTheValleys
twitter.com/LoveTheValleys

11—Cardiff, Capital of Wales

The capital of Wales has unique attractions, top-class entertainment, a wide range of accommodation to suit all needs and quality shopping with a difference. Cardiff Castle, the Principality Stadium, National Museum Cardiff and the Wales Millennium Centre combined with Cardiff Bay offer indoor and outdoor entertainment for everyone all year round.

visitor@cardiff.gov.uk
visitcardiff.com
facebook.com/VisitCardiff
twitter.com/visitcardiff

12—The Glamorgan Heritage Coast and Countryside

This area boasts the 14 mile stretch of the dramatic Glamorgan Heritage Coastline. Inland is an idyllic mix of rolling hills, country lanes, bustling market towns, and fascinating churches and castles. You'll also find the popular seaside resorts of Barry Island and Porthcawl and Bridgend's three picturesque valleys – the Llynfi, the Garw and Ogmore.

You can stroll among some of Europe's tallest sand dunes, Surf some of the UK's best waves and play world class golf. Discover the special character of an area steeped in history – and it's close to Cardiff, Wales' cosmopolitan capital. The area is the perfect backdrop for outdoor activities, exploring local legends and enjoying great food and drink.

tourism@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
tourism@bridgend.gov.uk
visitthevale.com
bridgendbites.com
facebook.com/visitthevale
twitter.com/visitthevale
facebook.com/BridgendTourism
twitter.com/BridgendBites

13—Newport & Monmouthshire

Famously the city with the highest tidal range of any in the world, Newport is more than 70% rural with a world-class RSPB wetland habitat for migrating birds and the glorious Wales Coast Path on the doorstep. Steeped in heritage – you can be a gladiator in the Roman fortress town of Caerleon; climb over the impressive and rare Transporter Bridge and discover the National Trust's Tredegar House. Monmouthshire provides fantastic scenery and high-quality food and drink from the Brecon Beacons National Park to the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Take a trip on the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal, explore castles, abbeys and gardens, then take in award-winning vineyards, bustling market towns and great local pubs. With renowned food festivals, celebrated restaurants and artisan producers, discover why we're the food capital of Wales.

tourism@newport.gov.uk
tourism@monmouthshire.gov.uk
newport.gov.uk/visiting
visitmonmouthshire.com
facebook.com/NewportCityCouncil
facebook.com/visitmonmouthshire
twitter.com/NewportCouncil
twitter.com/visit_mon

Getting to Wales.

Wales is easy to get to. It's a big plus point. We're just a few hours by road and rail from most of the UK's main centres. And if you're visiting us from Ireland, you have the choice of direct ferries to both North and South Wales and direct flights to Cardiff Airport.



By Road

Mileage and journey times by car supplied by AA: theaa.com

Birmingham – Aberystwyth

123 miles, 2hrs 44mins

Bath – Newport

42 miles, 52mins

Canterbury – Cardiff

214 miles, 3hrs 51mins

Coventry – Barmouth

138 miles, 2hrs 56mins

Exeter – Swansea

144 miles, 2hrs 35mins

Leeds – Llandudno

126 miles, 2hrs 31mins

London – Cardiff

151 miles, 2hrs 53mins

London – Tenby

238 miles, 4hrs 29mins

Manchester – Caernarfon

105 miles, 2hrs 19mins

Nottingham – Swansea

204 miles, 3hrs 41mins

Newcastle-upon-Tyne – Llandudno

221 miles, 4hrs 20mins

Reading – Carmarthen

172 miles, 3hrs 2mins

York – Welshpool

152 miles, 3hrs 7mins

Edinburgh – Cardiff

393 miles, 7hrs 3mins

Glasgow – Aberystwyth

331 miles, 6hrs 4mins

National Express provides a nationwide network of express coach services linking major towns and cities in Wales as well as the UK's principal destinations. Check out their website for special offers.

nationalexpress.com

Megabus provides low cost intercity travel in the UK, with buses running from a number of major UK cities to locations in Wales.

uk.megabus.com



By Air



Cardiff airport is situated in Rhoose, 12 miles south-west of Cardiff. Buses, trains and taxis link the airport to the city centre. The Cardiff Airport Express bus service (T9) runs regularly from the front of the terminal building. Taxis cost approximately £30.00 a booking office is located outside the arrivals hall. A regular rail link connects the airport station to Cardiff Central and Bridgend. A complimentary shuttle bus service is available between the terminal building and the station for passengers with a valid train ticket. Car hire is also available. cardiff-airport.com

A number of airlines offer direct flights to Cardiff Airport from other parts of the UK and Ireland. Check out their websites for details:

Aer Lingus

Serving: Dublin
aerlingus.com

Flybe

Serving: Aberdeen, Anglesey, Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Jersey and Newcastle
flybe.com

KLM

Serving: Dublin
klm.com

Ryanair

Serving: Dublin
ryanair.com



By Rail

In the UK, fast and frequent rail services run between London Paddington and Cardiff, taking just over two hours. There is a half-hourly departure to Cardiff Central, with an hourly continuation to Swansea and onward connections to West Wales.

There are also services from London Euston and Manchester to Llandudno, Bangor and Holyhead; from Birmingham, Shrewsbury and Crewe to the North Wales coast and the Llŷn Peninsula; from Manchester and Shrewsbury to Newport; and from Portsmouth, Southampton and Salisbury to Cardiff. For general rail enquiries visit: nationalrail.co.uk



By Sea

Ferry crossings from Ireland to Wales:
Irish Ferries: irishferries.com
Dublin Port to Holyhead
Journey time: 1hr 49mins (Fast ferry)
Journey time: 3hrs 15mins (Cruise ferry)
Rosslare to Pembroke
Journey time: 4hrs (Cruise ferry)

Stena Line: stenaline.co.uk

Dublin Port to Holyhead
Journey time: 3hrs 15mins (Superferry)
Rosslare to Fishguard
Journey time: 3hrs 15mins (Superferry)

By cruise ship

Cruise ships call at Welsh ports between May and September. Our cruise ports are Holyhead, Cardiff, Swansea & Newport, Milford Haven, Pembroke & Fishguard. Cruise lines calling to Wales include RCCL, Princess, Crystal, Hapag Lloyd, Oceania, P&O, Silversea, Swan Hellenic, Thomson, Tui, Voyages of Discovery and Windstar. Cruise & Maritime Voyages have cruise holiday departures to the Mediterranean from Cardiff Port.

For more information on getting to Wales go to visitwales.com/explore/travel-maps/international-travel



Holyhead, Anglesey

Getting around Wales.

It's easy to get around Wales by train, bus, car or even domestic flight. And if you're keen to explore, you'll find plenty of journeys that are wonderful experiences in their own right. We have some of the most scenic roads, railways and pathways in Britain.



By Road

The most scenic drives in Wales count among the best in Britain. Visit Wales are promoting a family of three unique national routes known as 'The Wales Way' – The Coastal Way/Ffordd Arfordirol, The Cambrian Way/Ffordd Cambria and The North Wales Way/Ffordd Gogledd Cymru. Based around major roads traversing the length and breadth of the country, they connect things to see and do with places to stay and great spots to grab a bite to eat. They're perfect for visitors on the hunt for authentic Welsh experiences – see our tour itineraries on pages 26/33.

When you're out and about in the National Parks, use the convenient park and ride bus services designed to cut down on traffic:

pembrokeshirecoast.wales
eryri-npa.gov.uk/visiting/local-information/travel-snowdonia



Faibourne Railway, Mid Wales



By Rail

Rail services run through the regions of Wales – usually on highly scenic routes such as the Cambrian Coast, Conwy Valley and Heart of Wales lines.

walesonrails.com
scenicwales.co.uk
heart-of-wales.co.uk
nationalrail.co.uk
arrivatrainswales.co.uk

For pure pleasure why not take a ride on some of Wales' narrow gauge and steam railways? Many are members of the Great Little Trains of Wales.

greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk



Discounted rail travel

The Explore Wales Pass offers unlimited travel on all mainline rail services in Wales. The Explore Wales Pass (£99 each) The Explore South Wales, North Wales and Mid Wales Passes (£69 each) all allow four-day train travel. There are also a number of Rover and Ranger tickets available, which all offer unlimited train travel for one day on specific areas of the Arriva Trains Wales network. They can be purchased from the station booking office or on board the train.

arrivatrainswales.co.uk/explorewalespass

Additional travel information:

For up-to-date and reliable public transport information
traveline.cymru

For a handy route planner:

theaa.com
rac.co.uk

Welsh Language

Language ... With A Double 'LL'

The double 'll' is an integral part of the Welsh language, which is spoken by around 20% of the population. We're a fully bilingual country, so English is spoken everywhere.

But to return to that infamous double 'll' – it crops up everywhere, in places like Llangollen, Llanberis, Llandoverly and Llanidloes, and also within words like llyn (lake) and llwybr (path). To pronounce it, raise the tongue to the roof of the mouth then hiss past the teeth. Or ask a local for lessons.

One of the really useful facets of the language when applied to placenames is the way it reflects geographical and other features. Take a look at the listing below. Abergavenny, for example, means the 'Mouth of the River Gavenny', while Llandudno means the 'Parish of St Tudno'. It's much better than a Sat Nav in describing the lay of the land (the land in question being Cymru in Welsh).

aber	mouth or confluence of river
afon	river
bryn	hill
bwlch	pass or gap
coed	wood
glyn	valley or glen
llan	church or parish
llyn	lake
mynydd	mountain
pen	top or end
pont	bridge
tre	homestead or town

And here are a few greetings:

croeso	welcome (as in Croeso i Gymru, Welcome to Wales)
diolch	thanks
iechyd da!	cheers!
nos da	good night
shwmae	hello (no problems with double 'll' here)



Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrob-wlllantysiliogogoch, the tongue-twisting village on the Isle of Anglesey, boasts the world's second-longest placename. In case you are wondering, it means: 'St Mary's (Church) by the white aspen over the whirlpool, and St Tysilio's (Church) by the red cave'.

Learning the language

To find out more about one of Europe's oldest living languages go to bbc.co.uk/wales/learning/learnwelsh

Or you can learn more at Nant Gwrtheyrn Welsh Language and Heritage Centre on the Llŷn Peninsula in North Wales. nantgwrtheyrn.org

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrob-wlllantysiliogogoch

FAQs

Choosing accommodation

When choosing your holiday accommodation, look for the Cymru/ Wales quality mark of Wales' official, nationwide quality assessment scheme. Then you can be confident that it has been checked out before you check in. All the national assessing bodies now assess holiday accommodation to the same criteria and award one to five stars. The stars reflect the facilities and overall quality of the experience. visitwales.com/grading

Information for visitors with disabilities

OpenBritain offers comprehensive information on accessible tourism in Wales. It offers specialist information on travel planning, transport, accommodation and booking. openbritain.net/wales

Further information on Wales

If you have any specific information enquiries before you depart, email the Visit Wales information centre on walesinfo@visitbritain.org

Travel Agents and Tour Operators in the UK and Ireland

To make it easy to book your holiday or short break in Wales you could use a tour operator. There are a number of UK and Irish companies who offer Wales based holidays. They often have specialist knowledge of particular products and will be happy to help you find the right holiday to suit your needs. traveltrade.visitwales.com/en/touropersors

Free brochures

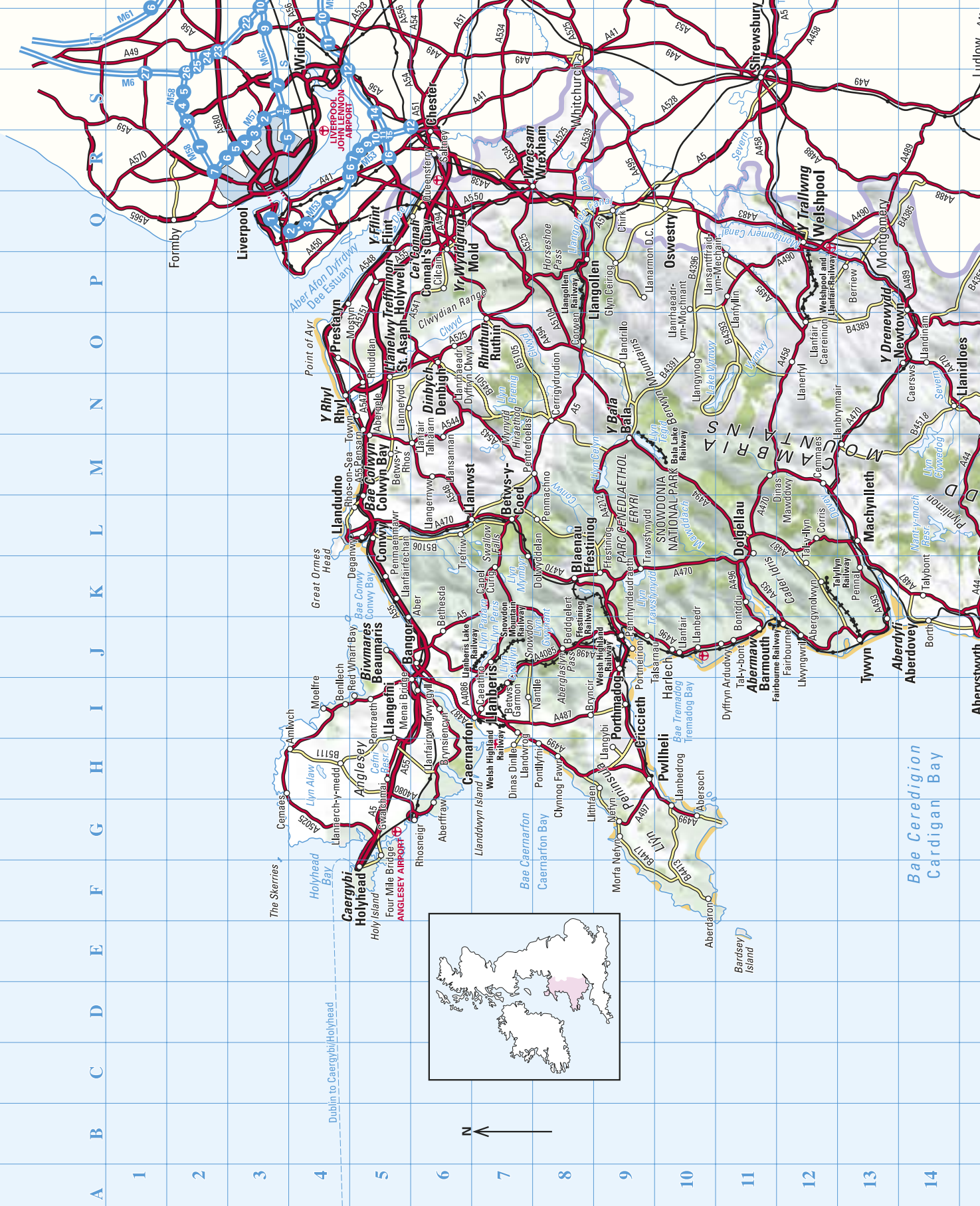
You can also download a variety of free brochures and regional guides on our website. Some are also available to order. visitwales.com/brochures

Wales for your clients

If you work in the leisure travel trade or business events sectors, we have dedicated websites to help you develop programmes for your clients. You can introduce Wales into your UK programmes for the first time or enhance existing tours and events to Wales.

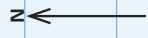
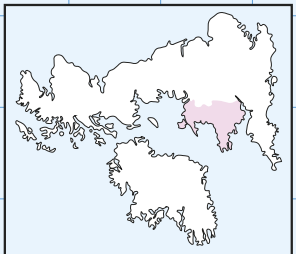
There's everything from great places to visit, how to get here, inspiring itinerary ideas, operator and venue searches, and the latest product news where you can sign up to receive regular product updates. traveltrade.visitwales.com and visitwales.com/businessevents





A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14



Liverpool
Wigan
Chester
Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London
Birmingham
Nottingham
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Y Rhyl
Rhos-on-Sea
Prestatyn
Aberystwyth
Aberdeen
Dumfries
Glasgow
Edinburgh
London
Birmingham
Nottingham
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Caerwyn
Bangor
Barmouth
Aberystwyth
Aberdeen
Dumfries
Glasgow
Edinburgh
London
Birmingham
Nottingham
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Caerwyn
Bangor
Barmouth
Aberystwyth
Aberdeen
Dumfries
Glasgow
Edinburgh
London
Birmingham
Nottingham
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Caerwyn
Bangor
Barmouth
Aberystwyth
Aberdeen
Dumfries
Glasgow
Edinburgh
London
Birmingham
Nottingham
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

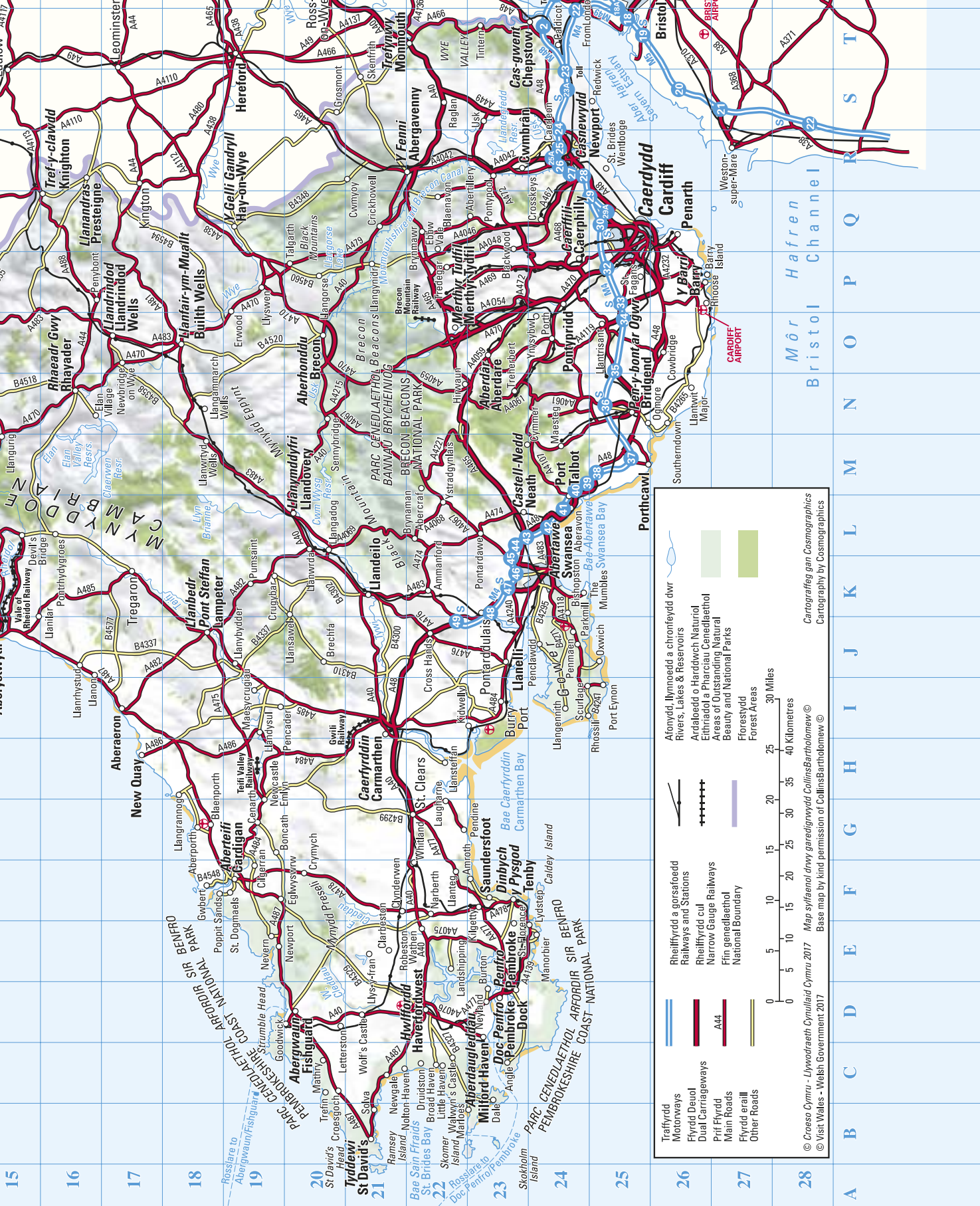
Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London

Wrexham
Warrington
Macclesfield
Crewe
Nantwich
Lichfield
Stafford
Birmingham
Coventry
Leeds
Sheffield
Manchester
Cardiff
Bristol
London



	Traffwrdd
	Motoways
	Rheilffyrdd a gorsafod
	Railways and Stations
	Ffyrdd Deuol
	Dual Carriageways
	Prif Ffyrdd
	Main Roads
	Ffin genedlaethol
	National Boundary
	Ffyrdd eraill
	Other Roads
	Afonydd, Hymnoedd a chronffyrdd dwr
	Rivers, Lakes & Reservoirs
	Ardaloddeo o Harddwch Naturiol
	Eithradol a Pharciau Cenedlaethol
	Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks
	Floresydd
	Forest Areas

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 Miles
 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 Kilometres

© Croeso Cymru - Llywodraeth Cymru 2017 Map sylfaenol draw garedigrwydd CollinsBartholomew ©
 Base map by kind permission of CollinsBartholomew ©
 Cartograffig gan Cosmographics
 Cartography by Cosmographics

Year of the Sea 2018

In 2018 Wales celebrates its coastline, with new epic experiences all around its shores. This is the Year of the Sea. Discover beaches, harbours and islands along the Wales Coast Path, and explore the rivers and inland shores of Wales' lakes. Add a warm Welsh welcome and culture for the greatest coastal experience of 2018. Welcome to our epic shores.
#Findyourepic