



Content Guide.

Wales Year of Discovery 2019.





Bodnant Garden, Conwy

Contents

2	Year of Discovery 2019	42	Storm the castle
4	Something to write home about	48	Chain reaction
10	Doing it the Wales Way	54	Park life
16	Island hopping	62	Do you want to hear a story?
20	Best foot forward	68	Adventures for everyone
24	Get a taste of Wales	72	Let's talk Welsh
30	Be our guest	78	Map of Wales
36	Join the party – events in Wales	80	Notes

Many of the images featured in this publication are downloadable from the Wales on View (www.walesonview.com) website. These images are free to use, but are subject to Crown Copyright (see download folder for full T&Cs), therefore please let Visit Wales know when and where you will be using them.

The third party images used include the relevant image credits, so please contact these contributors directly to enquire about image use.

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.

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

Wales Year of Discovery Content Guide 2019 is published by Visit Wales, the Tourism and Marketing division of the Welsh Government © 2018. Visit Wales, Welsh Government, QED Centre, Main Avenue, Treforest Industrial Estate, Treforest, Pontypridd CF37 5YR.

Photography: Crown copyright (2018)
Visit Wales

Print ISBN 978-1-78964-379-4
Digital ISBN 978-1-78964-377-0

WG35956





Year of Discovery 2019

2019 is the Year of Discovery. So dive in and let your own unique experience of Wales wash over you. Because this is a country overflowing with wonder.

For the thrill seekers there's everything from coasteering on the Atlantic-battered rocks of Pembrokeshire to 100 mph madness on the world's fastest zip line in Bethesda. And for the more sedate in mood, there are over 600 castles to explore. A more concentrated collection of turrets, baileys and moats cannot be found anywhere in the world.

Cycling fans can follow in the tracks of Tour de France winner, Geraint Thomas, along some seriously epic road climbs, while the annual challenge of Ironman Wales represents a major draw to the town of magnificent views, Tenby. Artistic souls can invoke the poetry of Dylan Thomas with a gentle stroll into that good night in Laugharne, or choose from seven National Museums, including the capital's collection of Impressionist painting – which is right on the Monet. Lovers of music, meanwhile, can enjoy gigs, concerts and events at an array of live venues. Summer spectaculairs include Green Man, set in the evocative Brecon Beacons, and the Cerys Matthews-curated Good Life Experience held at the Hawarden Estate in Flintshire.

If that has worked up your appetite, you may be curious about Welsh cuisine. Characterful enclaves like Ynyshir and Narberth are on hand to serve up some exquisite flavours to satisfy your palate.

And if you're feeling even more adventurous, you could even try and pick up a couple of words or phrases in Welsh to feel an ancient but thriving language on the tip of your tongue.

Go high across the Cambrian Mountains and elevated fortresses of Harlech and Carreg Cennen, or low beside the seals and dolphins that pop up for a breather along the coastal cliff walks way out west.

Helping you chart your path through these wonders is The Wales Way. This exhilarating trio of national touring routes is all about contrast. Experience each of them and you'll be enriched by the diverse geography of a mesmerizing land. The rugged route of The North Wales Way begins on the awe-inspiring island of Anglesey. Here you will walk through history and witness a UNESCO World Heritage Site featuring 13th century town walls and castles built by Edward I. Alternatively, trek along The Cambrian Way which follows the spine of Wales between Llandudno and Cardiff. Or reach and enjoy The Coastal Way, which offers views that will refresh your soul. While varied, each of these routes is intersected by rail, bus and cycle paths, so you can truly do it your way.

Yet if you just want to just stop, stand still and soak it all in – there's no more peaceful place to do it.

A photograph of a large industrial space, likely a former mine, converted into an adventure park. The space is filled with multiple levels of safety nets suspended from the ceiling by a complex network of cables. Several workers in high-visibility vests are visible, some standing on platforms and others working on the nets. The walls are made of large, textured rock formations. The lighting is dramatic, with bright spotlights illuminating the nets and the workers.

Something to write home about

Bounce Below, Blaenau Ffestiniog

Wales is full of epic stories and unusual adventures. Feel like bouncing through a cavernous former slate mine, or camping on the side of a cliff? Maybe you prefer getting lost in a good book, or exploring a music festival nestled amid rolling green hills? One-of-a-kind experiences of all shapes and sizes are on offer in Wales. Here's a few to get you started.

Bounce Below, Blaenau Ffestiniog, North Wales

Situated inside caverns the size of a cathedral, Bounce Below is the first subterranean playground of its kind in the world. Feel utterly liberated sliding, rolling, jumping and bouncing from net to net. With six levels of cargo nets and four industrial slides the height of two double decker buses, it's a high adrenaline adventure deep beneath the ground. Bounce Below is suitable from age seven and up, but attracts plenty of adults who come child-free – can't have the young ones stealing all the fun! www.zipworld.co.uk/adventure/detail/bounce-below

The A4069, Mid and West Wales

The A4069 road is the stuff of driving enthusiasts' dreams. Twisting and turning its way through the Brecon Beacons (*Bannau Brycheiniog*) National Park, it's where race-car enthusiasts often come to test out their wheels. This western part of the National Park is home to the brooding Black Mountain (*Y Mynydd Du*) range and the road is close to Llyn y Fan Fach, should you wish to have a bracing wild swim after your invigorating drive – check out beautiful pics of the lake on Instagram.

Skomer Island (*Ynys Sgomer*), West Wales

The islands off the coast of Pembrokeshire attract plenty of seals and seabirds, including hundreds of puffins – surely the cutest creature to grace land, sea and sky – who nest in burrows on the islands in early summer. See hundreds of the brightly-beaked birds on Skomer Island, where you can also witness Manx shearwaters returning home after their night's hunting (Skomer is home to a third of the world's population of the species). The eerie wail they emit on their moonlight flight will send shivers down your spine! <https://www.welshwildlife.org/skomer-skokholm/skomer/>

Cliff camping, North Wales

Have you ever wanted to sleep suspended on the side of a cliff? Of course you have! Cliff camping will see you abseil to a 'portaledge', which is basically a (very sturdy) shelf partway down a cliff, secured in place by ropes – where you tuck into a tasty hot meal before spending the night surrounded by the elements, and wake up to a hot bacon butty and coffee in the morning! Gaia Adventures organise cliff camping in coastal and mountain locations, including on the Isle of Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*). No climbing experience is required, and there's a staff member on an accompanying ledge at all times. www.gaiaadventures.co.uk



The Wales Coast Path, pan Wales

Wales is the only country to boast a walking path around its entire coastline. Several people have walked the entire circumference of the nation, with the Offa's Dyke trail along the Wales-England border to close the loop. You don't have to walk it all at once though – just look for the Wales Coast Path symbol anywhere along the route and enjoy! You can also cycle and horse-ride along much of the path, and there are many sections accessible to buggies and wheelchairs. www.walescoastpath.gov.uk

Hay Festival, Mid Wales

Literature lovers from around the world unite to enjoy ten days of stimulating, fascinating, entertaining and thought-provoking lectures, talks and debates. The world-renowned Hay Festival is not just about books and writers – though its venue in the town of Hay-on-Wye (*Y Gelli Gandryll*) is the second-hand bookshop capital of the world – there's also music, comedy and delicious food. www.hayfestival.com/wales

Welsh Three Peaks Challenge, North Wales, Mid Wales & South Wales

Offering different climbing experiences and equally lush but varied views, Snowdon (*Yr Wyddfa*), Cader Idris and Pen y Fan make up the Three Peaks Challenge. Snowdon (3,559 ft/ 1,085 m) was used as the training ground for Sir Edmund Hillary, Tenzing Norgay and team before they ascended Everest, while Cader Idris (2,930 ft/ 893 m) and Pen y Fan (2,907 ft/ 886 m) are not as tall, but offer equally thigh-busting climbs and stunning panoramas. The total walking distance for those wishing to take the Three Peaks Challenge is 17 miles (27.4 km) and sees you ascend 4,921 ft (1,500 metres) in total; it's usually completed over 24 hours. www.threepeakschallenge.uk/welsh-three-peaks-challenge

Coasteering, West Wales and North Wales

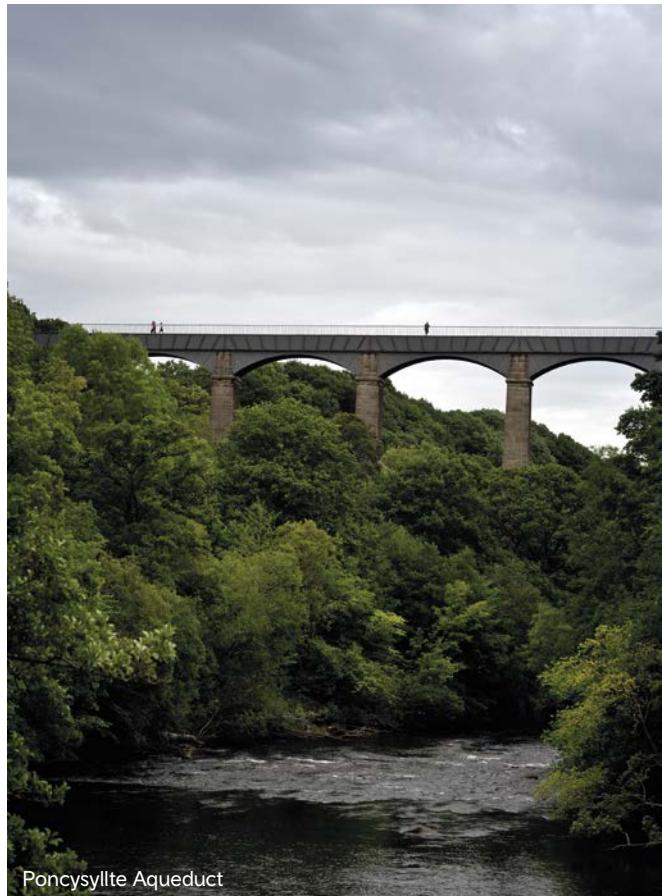
Of course you can *walk* around the Welsh coast (see Wales Coast Path), but how about getting a closer look at what it's made of? Throw yourself off a cliff and then scramble around the edges of the coastline, swimming and exploring caves with a band of fellow adventurers. Coasteering was pioneered in Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*), West Wales, which remains a very popular place to practise the activity. Adrenaline-pumping hotspot Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*) is another great place to try it out.

Sleeping in a castle, West Wales

Channel your inner King or Queen and lay your head in a sumptuous bed at your very own castle. Well, it might not be yours, but you can pretend. Roch Castle in Pembrokeshire began life as a Norman fortress in the 12th century and now provides plush guest accommodation. The amenities and interior décor have been fully updated to the 21st century, while the exterior and setting evoke medieval intrigue and romance. Don't forget to pack your crown. www.rochcastle.com



Green Man festival



Pontcysyllte Aqueduct

Green Man festival, Crickhowell (Crucywel), Mid Wales

Once a tiny folk event attended by just a few hundred people, Green Man has grown to be one of the can't-miss fixtures of the summer festival season. Now welcoming more than 15,000 festival-goers every year, the line-up reflects the attendees' varied tastes, and there's an endless variety of spoken word, walkabouts, stage performances and secret art installations to enjoy. Whether you're a fan of twinkly indie, traditional folk, pulsating garage rock or ear-melting electronica, there's something on the bill for you. www.greenman.net

Principality Stadium, Cardiff (Caerdydd), South Wales

Rugby is a passion that seems to run through the veins of the Welsh, and has captured the nation's imagination. The best place to catch a match is at the home of the game, Cardiff's 74,500-capacity Principality Stadium. But it's not just about the rugby. The stadium hosts a range of sporting events (like the

2017 Champions League Final between Juventus and Real Madrid), speedway grand prix and massive concerts from the likes of The Rolling Stones and Ed Sheeran. www.principalitystadium.wales

Pontcysyllte Aqueduct, North Wales

The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is a marvel of engineering, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and makes the Llangollen Canal the envy of canals the world over. Located near Wrexham (Wrecsam), North Wales, the Thomas Telford-designed structure carries the Llangollen Canal over the River Dee (Afon Dyfrdwy) for eleven glorious miles (18 km). You can walk over or take a leisurely boat ride, either hiring your own vessel or taking one of the daily boat trips. Add on an unparalleled equine experience at Llangollen Wharf – part of the World Heritage Site – where you can enjoy a horse-drawn boat trip through the beautiful Welsh mountains along the feeder for the main canal. www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk



Dylan Thomas' favourite pub, Laugharne (*Talacharn*), West Wales

One of the best-known literary figures in Wales, poet and playwright Dylan Thomas, conjured up a colourful and quirky Welsh seaside village in his masterpiece *Under Milk Wood*, and wrote poetry that's been lauded and loved in Wales and far beyond. Much of this he composed from his Writing Shed, which you can now peer into on your way to visit The Boathouse in Laugharne, where he and his family lived. The village is home to Browns Hotel, where Thomas drank many a pint – he was such a regular, he even used to give out their phone number as his own. www.browns.wales

Worms Head (*Pen Pyrod*), Gower Peninsula (*Penrhyn Gŵyr*), West Wales

The tidal island Worms Head (the reason for the name becomes obvious when you see it) is only accessible for approximately five hours each day, at the lowest point of the tide. If your timing is right, you can crunch over sand, scramble over rocks and bounce over cushion-

soft grass to reach the proverbial head. Then sit back, eat your picnic, and listen to the seal-song drift up from the gaggle of marine mammals that gather in the waters below the worm. Just make sure you check the tide times so you don't get caught out at sea. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/rhossili-and-south-gower-coast

Zip World Velocity, Bethesda, North Wales

The world's fastest zip wire, which is also Europe's longest, runs through the heart of North Wales' adventure playground. Zip World Velocity is a thrill-ride that will see you reach speeds of up to 100 mph (160 kmph) as you zoom through a former quarry. Build your flying confidence with a ride on the Little Zipper first, before taking on the Big Zipper. Happy travels! www.zipworld.co.uk



Principality Stadium, Cardiff



Doing it the Wales Way

Great Orme, Llandudno (The North Wales Way)

For a street-level journey of discovery, hit the road for a trip on The Wales Way. This family of three new national routes is designed to guide you through some of our most spectacular landscapes. As you journey you'll find ancient castles, towering mountains and deep hidden valleys, plus plenty of reasons to go and venture off the beaten track and explore some roads less travelled.

There's something so eternally romantic about hitting the road, isn't there? Here in Wales, there's so much incredible detail to uncover that we've put together a family of three routes rather than focusing on just one. Each route is traversed and intersected by enticing tributaries and delicious tangents – picked precisely so that you can head off-piste from it and create your very own custom-built Welsh road-trip. In Welsh we call this going *igam ogam* – zig-zagging – perfect for discovering your own secret places.

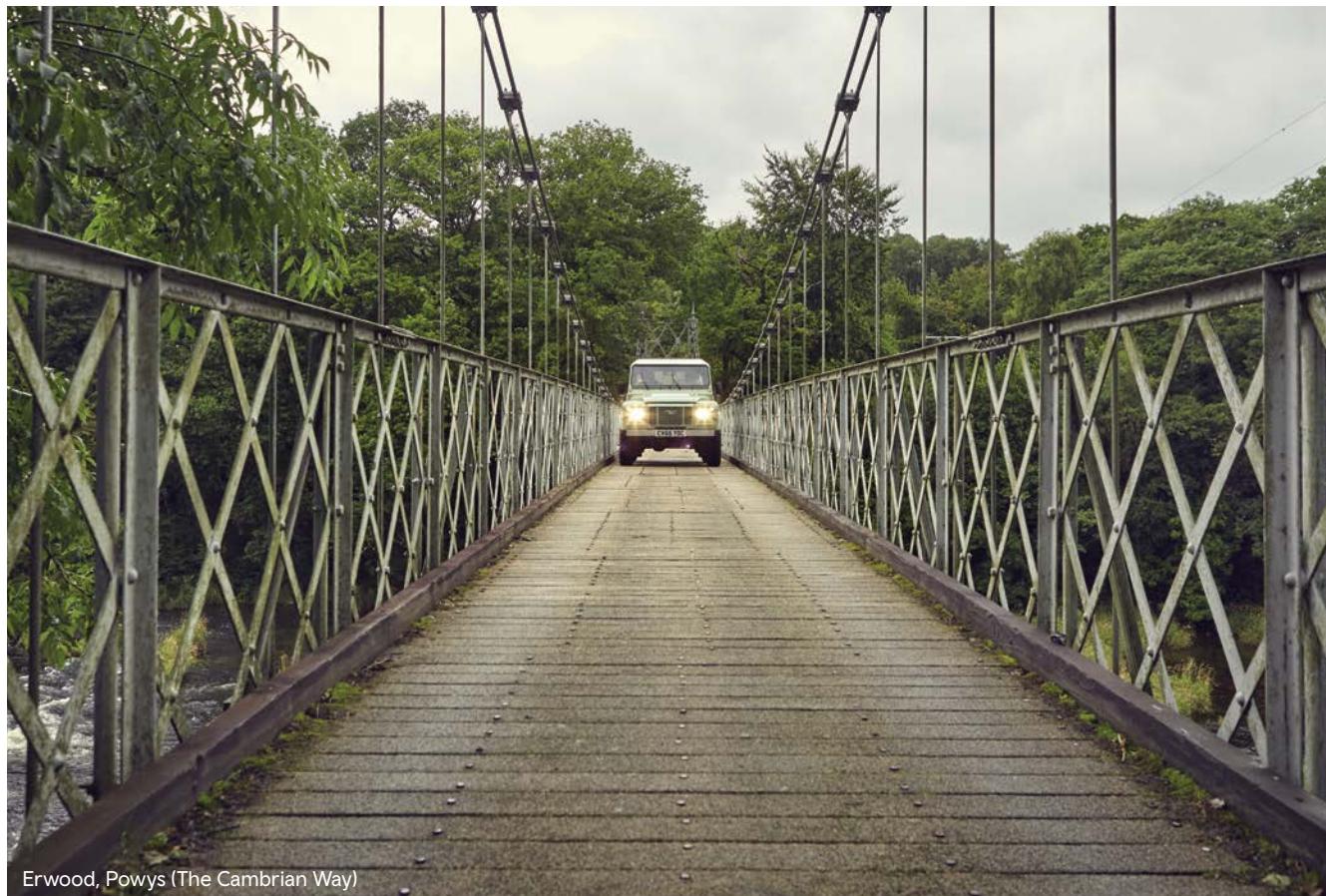
The Cambrian Way

The Cambrian Way is your complete north-south journey, running along the mountainous spine of Wales, 185 miles (300 km) from coast to coast. It winds its way through two National Parks – **Snowdonia** (*Eryri*) and the **Brecon Beacons** (*Bannau Brycheiniog*) – and endless green expanses in between. At the northern tip, you'll find the Victorian splendour of seaside town **Llandudno**, while in the south is our cosmopolitan capital **Cardiff** (*Caerdydd*). Many first timers come to the city for sport at the **Principality Stadium** or **Cardiff City Stadium**, but there's a whole host of cultural charms to enjoy once the game is over. Cardiff is a perfect city-break destination: compact, simple to navigate, and easy to enjoy. Start at **Cardiff Castle**, whose Roman walls, Norman keep and sumptuous Victorian mansion stand at the edge of **Bute Park**. Across the road, **National Museum**

Cardiff has natural history and world-class art – the biggest collection of Impressionist art outside of Paris. Down in **Cardiff Bay**, the old coal port has been transformed into a shiny new waterfront, dominated by the copper roof of the performance arts hub, **Wales Millennium Centre**.

You might feel peckish after all your city activities, so it's a good thing there are endless recommended stop offs for foodies. To the north of the city, you'll find the superb **Felin Fach Griffin** (*The Good Pub Guide's* Dining Pub of the Year for Wales) in Mid Wales – it's the taste of things to come. Cut east to **Abergavenny** (*Y Fenni*) and you've reached the food capital of Wales. There's a huge **Food Festival** here in September, and you'll find a cluster of first-rate restaurants-with-rooms nearby in Monmouthshire (*Sir Fynwy*) and the Wye Valley (*Dyffryn Gwy*). **The Walnut Tree**, **The Whitebrook** (both Michelin-starred), **The Hardwick**, **The Bell at Skenfrith**, and **The Bear** are all pit-stops *par excellence*.

The A470 cuts through a dramatic pass in the **Brecon Beacons** mountains in the centre of the National Park. Drive through **Waterfall Country** (*Gwlad y Sgydau*), which has the best concentration of cascades and gorges in Britain. Explore the Beacons' sister ranges for jaw-drop views. To the west, the **Black Mountain** (singular – *Y Mynydd Du*) falls away into **Camarthenshire** (*Sir Gaerfyrddin*), stopping just shy of **Llandeilo**. To the east, the **Black Mountains** (*Y Mynyddoedd Duon*, plural



Erwood, Powys (The Cambrian Way)

– confusing, isn’t it?) stretch to the English border (the fabulous **Green Man** Festival takes place here, in **Crickhowell** (Crucywell)).

Further north, you’ll reach the country’s heartlands. Victorian travellers called this the ‘green desert of Wales’: big space, few people. It’s still our most thinly-populated (by humans, at least) quarter. Wildlife rules the roost in this vast landscape, and it’s perfect for star gazing – the Elan Valley has Dark Sky Park status. Head to the **Elan Valley Visitor Centre**, where you can get recommendations for driving, walking and cycling routes around the network of dams and reservoirs, and the moorland and woodland that surround them.

Thrill seekers will find endless pleasures hidden along this route, particularly in North Wales: like **Surf Snowdonia**, where you can ride head-high waves that peel perfectly along a 300 m lagoon in the middle of the **Conwy Valley** (Dyffryn Conwy) countryside. There’s also a watery assault course, the Crash and Splash Lagoon, on-site glamping, and regular left-field events.

Over in **Blaenau Ffestiniog** they still work the quarries at the old ‘slate capital of the world’, but the town has reinvented itself as an all action adventure centre. Mountain bikers hurtle down the scree at **Antur Stiniog**, while **Zip World** zip wires soar overhead. In the vast caverns below ground, there are yet more zip zones and the surreal, trippy **Bounce Below**: layers of bouncy cargo nets connected by slides and ladders. To get it all into historical perspective, start with an underground tour of a Victorian slate mine.

At its northern limit, the Cambrian Way brings you to **Llandudno**: the ‘queen of Welsh resorts’. This immaculate Victorian/Edwardian resort, complete with pier-and-prom, is a great starting or end point for any journey. The best views are from **Great Orme** (Y Gogarth), a mighty limestone crag that you can ascend by tram or cable car. On top, there’s a visitor centre, nature reserve and ancient copper mine, while in the east you can find a ski centre and the manicured **Happy Valley** (Y Fach). It’s from this latter location you can pick up the town’s wonderful **Alice Town Trails**, inspired by Alice in Wonderland.

The Coastal Way

The Coastal Way runs the entire length of beautiful **Cardigan Bay** (*Bae Ceredigion*). It's a 180-mile (290 km) odyssey that threads between the blue sea on one side and big mountains on the other. From **Aberdaron** to **St Davids** (*Tyddewi*), the coast is dotted with harbour towns and resorts, fishing villages and secret coves. There are vast stretches of sand, towering cliffs and beaches of all kinds in between.

Before heading off from **Abersoch**, you could easily spend a few hours (or days) driving around the tip of **Llyn** to explore the peninsula's wilder north coast. Head past **Porth Neigwl's (Hell's Mouth)** four-mile beach to Aberdaron, then up the coast. You'll pass the 'whistling sands' of **Porth Oer** (they squeak when you walk on them), **Nefyn & District's** peninsular golf course (it's like playing off the deck of an aircraft carrier), a cracking beach pub at **Porthdinllaen**, and a quarrying village that's become a major Welsh language centre at **Nant Gwrtheyrn**.

Skirting around the mouth of the **Dyfi Estuary**, stop off for a bite to eat at Michelin-starred **Ynyshir**, the best restaurant in Wales (according to the Good Food Guide's 2018 awards). It's quickly become a gastronomic pilgrimage that no foodie should miss, and also offers accommodation that's every bit as impressive as the food. The noir TV drama **Hinterland/Y Gwyll** is filmed around **Aberystwyth**, and takes full advantage of the remote and quiet valleys just inland – the kind of places that you'd never find without a little local knowledge. The pilot episode used **Devil's Bridge** (*Pontarfynach*) as its crime scene (actually, it's a lovely spot which you can reach by steam train). While you're in the area, there's excellent walking, cycling and red kite-spotting at the **Nant yr Arian** forest reserve.

The **Gwaun Valley** still celebrates New Year on January 13 – it refused to join the new-fangled Gregorian calendar in 1752 – with a pint at the **Dyffryn Arms**. It's known locally as **Bessie's**, after its estimable landlady who's been

serving jugs of Bass from the barrel for 60-plus years. The surrounding **Preseli Mountains** (*Mynyddoedd y Preseli*) are littered with prehistoric monuments like **Pentre Ifan** and the hillfort on **Carningli** (it means 'mountain of angels'). Stonehenge's **bluestones** were hewn from these hills. Nobody knows quite how they got to Wiltshire (that's one to ponder while drinking locally brewed **Bluestone ale**).

This journey ends at **St Davids** (*Tyddewi*), but it's well worth crossing the historic **Landsker Line** that is said to divide Welsh-speaking North Pembrokeshire from the Anglophones in South Pembrokeshire. You can't actually see the line, and of course it's a largely symbolic notion these days, but it's a whimsical (if archaic) idea to bear in mind as you head along **St Brides Bay** (*Bae Sain Ffraid*). It's a fabulous piece of coastline, so don't ask us to pick favourites. **Druidston, Marloes, Skomer Island** (*Ynys Sgomer*), **Barafundle, Manorbier** (*Maenorbyr*) ... and we haven't even reached the perfect harbour town of **Tenby** (*Dinbych-y-pysgod*) yet. Make sure you do.

The North Wales Way

If castles, culture, and history are your scene, **The North Wales Way** is very much a journey for you. It follows an old trading route for 75 miles (120 km) along our northern coast into **Anglesey** (*Ynys Môn*). A trio of huge castles that immediately grab your attention: **Beaumaris** (*Biwmares*), **Caernarfon** and the walled citadel of **Conwy**. Together with Harlech, this cluster of immense 13th century fortresses (and Conwy's town walls) forms a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** that's so expansive it takes days to properly explore and take it all in.

There are plenty of tangents for enjoyable exploring. The mountains of **Snowdonia** (*Eryri*), the **Menai Strait** (*Afon Menai*), and our largest island, **Anglesey**: all of these are easily accessible and worth a detour. **The North Wales Way** is also the gateway to the **Vale of Conwy** and the **Vale of Clwyd** (*Dyffryn Clwyd*), where you can follow a string of handsome market towns down to historic **Llangollen**.



Boncath, Pembrokeshire (The Coastal Way)

There's plenty that's unmissable along this route, but one of our top picks is the **Pontcysyllte Aqueduct**. Opened in 1805, this masterpiece of Georgian engineering carries the **Llangollen Canal** high over the **Dee River** (*Afon Dyfrdwy*) valley. You can walk or (better still) hire a canal boat or kayak to cross the world's highest aqueduct. Llangollen's other draws include its steam railway, white-water rafting on the Dee and the superb annual **International Musical Eisteddfod**.

Seaside locations have always drawn colonies of artists, and galleries have followed. There are many galleries on the North Wales coast, including **MOSTYN** in **Llandudno** – one of our best public visual arts centres. Then there's the **Royal Cambrian Academy** in **Conwy**, founded in 1882 as a centre for artistic excellence. Finally, **Oriel Ynys Môn** has the largest collection of works by Sir Kyffin Williams in the world, alongside contemporary exhibitions and a museum of **Anglesey's** history and culture.

If you like your journeys circular, then head to **Snowdonia's** highest peaks. There's a spectacular circuit from **Bangor** to **Capel Curig**, across to **Beddgelert**, up to **Caernarfon** and back to **Bangor**. This forms a 50 mile (80 km) square that's bisected by the **Llanberis Pass** (*Bwlch Llanberis*), where the Pen-y-Pass car park is the most popular starting-point for a walk up **Snowdon** (*Yr Wyddfa*).

And definitely don't forget a tour of the island of **Anglesey** (*Ynys Môn*), where a round-trip weighs in at around 75 miles (120 km) on the main roads – that's a pleasant half-day excursion. If you walk on the **Wales Coast Path**, you're looking at 12 days to cover the full 130 miles (210 km). Highlights include **South Stack** (*Ynys Lawd*) **lighthouse** and cliffs, sea arches at **Rhoscolyn**, dunes at **Aberffraw**, the **Cemlyn Bay Nature Reserve**, and dozens of beaches.

Aberystwyth, Ceredigion (The Coastal Way)



Island hopping



Caldey Island, Pembrokeshire

Take your exploration offshore to one of the 50 islands that sit around our coastline. You'll discover a range of unique landscapes packed with stunning scenery, abundant wildlife and centuries of history and heritage.

Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*), North Wales

The largest of Wales' islands, and a county in itself, Anglesey offers visitors a wealth of experiences. The north of the island is very much dramatic cliffs and industrial history, while from the flatter southwestern part you can marvel at the silhouettes of Snowdonia's (*Eryri*) mountains across the narrow Menai Strait (*Afon Menai*) that separates the island from the mainland. Anglesey Adventures (www.angleseyadventures.com) offers a wide range of activities for the adventurous, including full and half day courses in coasteering, sea kayaking, gorge scrambling, rock climbing, raft building and abseiling.

Alternatively, make your way across the causeway to romantic Llanddwyn Island (*Ynys Llanddwyn*), separated from Anglesey at high tide, venture out by boat to nearby Puffin Island (*Ynys Seiriol*) or cross the bridge to explore Holy Island (*Ynys Gybi*). On Holy Island, bask in the sun at popular beaches at Rhoscolyn and Trearddur and climb the lighthouse at South Stack (*Ynys Lawd*) with a guided tour. Puffin Island is at the end of the Menai Strait, which divides Anglesey from mainland North Wales. It's worth a day trip from Beaumaris (*Biwmares*) to see the wildlife, the views of the Strait, and to fish in the rich waters surrounding the island.

Getting there: Anglesey (along with Holy Island and Llanddwyn Island) can be reached by road from Bangor, three miles (5 km) away over the Menai Bridge; or Anglesey has a rail station

in Holyhead. Book yourself on a cruise in order to visit Puffin Island – try Sea Coast Safaris (www.seacoastsafaris.co.uk).

Bardsey (*Ynys Enlli*), North Wales

Bardsey is reached by travelling to the very end of the Llŷn Peninsula (*Penrhyn Llŷn*) and taking a boat, getting close to puffins on the water as you do so (in the right season). Watch the mist fall away from the sea from Mynydd Enlli, its highest point, and look down on the working farm, abbey ruins, and the seals resting on rocks.

Getting there: Book a boat trip from Aberdaron with Bardsey Boat Trips (www.bardseyboattrips.com) in order to visit the island.

The Pembrokeshire islands, West Wales

Skomer (*Ynys Sgomer*), Skokholm (*Ynys Sgogwm*) and Grassholm (*Ynys Gwales*) are a trio of neighbouring islands named by ancient Viking visitors. They're located off the coast of southern Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*), and are celebrated for their exceptional wildlife. The islands are grouped together as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and are included within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Skomer, the largest island, has a thriving puffin colony, and these quirky birds with their iconic black and orange beaks are the big draw for visitors. A circular walk of the high plateau of



Llanddwyn Island, Anglesey



Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire



Bardsey Island, Gwynedd



Caldey Island, Pembrokeshire

the island will lead you to its abandoned farm, views of its towering cliffs and seas bustling with seabirds. You can stay overnight on Skomer in self-catering accommodation – a treat when the Manx shearwaters are around, as the birds return from hunting at night amid a cacophony of eerie sounds.

Nearby Skokholm is more rugged. Its cliffs slant into the Irish Sea, which crashes around its edges, creating a wild and dramatic landscape for photographers. Skokholm is famous for its bird watching observatory and attracts wildlife enthusiasts from around the world.

Tiny, isolated Grassholm is the westernmost point of Wales, situated 11 miles (18 km) from the Pembrokeshire mainland. An open sea adventure cruise will give you the opportunity to view the island's famous gannet colony and also spy dolphins, porpoises and grey seals.

For a completely contrasting experience, try the charms of Caldey (*Ynys Bŷr*) (www.caldeyislandwales.com), just off the coast from the seaside resort of Tenby (*Dinbych-y-pysgod*). Tour its Cistercian Monastery and laze

on its pristine beach, and don't leave without a trip to the gift shop and Post Office: the monks make and sell their own lavender perfume and shortbread, issue their own postage stamps, and have their own currency.

Getting there: Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm can be reached by day trip or boat cruise from St. Martin's Haven, near Dale. Caldey can be reached by boat from Tenby.

Worm's Head (*Pen Pyrod*), West Wales

Worm's Head is a picture postcard icon, its island jutting out from the headland at Rhossili (*Rhosili*) at the very end of the Gower Peninsula (*Penrhyn Gŵyr*). For a six-hour window when the tide is out, you can scramble across the rocks before climbing its ridge and – if you're lucky – spot seals lolling about in the waters below. It's a great vantage point to look back and admire the long beach at Rhossili, a favourite with surfers, family day trippers and courting couples alike. See the National Trust Visitor Centre at Rhossili for crossing times, or check ahead online.



Worm's Head, Gower Peninsula

Getting there: Worm's Head can be visited as a day trip from Swansea (Abertawe), 20 miles (32 km) away.

Flat Holm (*Ynys Echnil*), South Wales

From the Cardiff Bay (*Bae Caerdydd*) Barrage, Flat Holm can be seen in the middle distance, seemingly at the centre of the Bristol Channel. The cliffs of English-owned Steep Holm tower over the lower level plateau of Welsh-owned Flat Holm at its side. Join a guided tour of the island and learn about its smuggling past and working lighthouse. It was from here that, in 1897, the first wireless signals were transmitted across open sea by Italian physicist Guglielmo Marconi. As Marconi's first message asked: "Are you ready?"

Getting there: Flat Holm can be visited as a day trip from Cardiff as part of a five-mile (8 km) boat trip.

You can reach the island by boat (www.mwmarine.org). Caldey can be reached by boat from Tenby.

Best foot forward

Get to know Wales at ground level with a jaunt along our Wales Coast Path.

Coast Path. Stretching for an unbroken 870 miles (1,400 km) around our entire shoreline, it's the first national walking route of its kind in the world. Don't worry, you don't have to tackle it all at once. Dip in and out where you like to create your own bespoke walks packed with uniquely Welsh experiences – and an endless supply of stunning sea views. Here are few ideas to get you started.

South Wales Coast and Severn Estuary (Aber Hafren)

Of course, it all begins with a castle. **Chepstow** (Cas-gwent) (www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/chepstowcastle) is home to a beautifully-preserved fortress and is where the Wales Coast Path begins (or ends, depending on where you start), and where it connects to **Offa's Dyke** (Clawdd Offa), the path that runs along the Anglo-Welsh border. Heading west, the path takes an exciting urban turn, passing through Wales' buzzing capital city. At **Cardiff Bay** (Bae Caerdydd), take a tour around the Senedd (www.assembly.wales) – home to the **National Assembly for Wales**. Then take in a show at iconic international performance venue, **Wales Millennium Centre** (www.wmc.org.uk), before finishing up in one of the area's lively restaurants or bars. If you're feeling more energetic, head for the rapids at **Cardiff International White Water Centre** (www.ciww.com). Find beautiful beaches and more along the **Glamorgan Heritage Coast** between **Aberthaw** (Aberddawan) and **Porthcawl**, where you can stop in at Wales' longest continually inhabited castle, **St Donats**, home to contemporary cultural gem **St Donats Arts Centre** (www.stdonats.com).

Gower and Swansea Bay (Gŵyr a Bae Abertawe)

Gower was the UK's first designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and it's not hard

to see why. The three-mile sweep of **Rhossili Bay** (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/rhossili-and-south-gower-coast) is a regular fixture on lists of the world's best beaches. Nearby **Three Cliffs Bay** (Bae'r Tri Chlogwyn) can easily claim to have the best campsite views anywhere in Britain, with majestic vistas across sand dunes, limestone cliffs and salt marshes. From Rhossili, check tide times before venturing onto **Worm's Head** (Pen Pyrod), a lush tidal island where author Dylan Thomas once got stranded! Surf-lovers can catch waves at **Caswell** and **Langland** beaches.

The path then winds through the city of **Swansea** (Abertawe) to **Swansea Marina**, an attractive pocket of al fresco cafés, bars and the free **National Waterfront Museum** (www.museum.wales/swansea). Don't miss **The Mumbles** (Y Mwmbwls), a charming combination of fishing village and seaside resort, just along the coast from Swansea. You'll find some outstanding ice-cream parlours and cafés, plus a great choice of restaurants in the new **Oyster Wharf** (oysterwharf>mumbles.com) – which also boasts beautiful bay views.

Carmarthenshire (Sir Gaerfyrddin)

Run free on **Cefn Sidan** and **Pendine Sands** (*Traeth Pentywyn*), two of Wales' longest beaches. World land speed records were set and broken at Pendine in the early 20th century, and you can find out all about it at the **Museum of Speed** (www.pendinesands.org/



Cardiff Bay

museum-of-speed), which overlooks the beach. Today, adrenaline seekers can get their thrills kite-buggying, land-yachting and Blokarting, while families will love the activities on offer at **Pembrey Country Park** (*Parc Gwledig Pen-bre*) (www.pembreycountrypark.wales). The park backs onto Cefn Sidan and offers plenty of things to do for little ones, plus a riding centre if galloping on the beach is a must. Grab an ice cream at the striking and contemporary **Millennium Coastal Park Discovery Centre** in **Llanelli** (www.discovercarmarthenshire.com/places/llanelli-the-millennium-coastal-park). And don't miss **Laugharne** (*Talacharn*), the coastal town that charmed Dylan Thomas. Visit the **Boathouse** (www.dylanthomasboathouse.com), where he lived and loved, and stop in **Browns** (www.browns.wales), his favourite pub and watering hole.

Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*)

The Wales Coast Path here follows the stunning **Pembrokeshire Coast Path** – the world's second-best long-distance path, according to *National Geographic*. Along its 186 miles

(299 km) you'll encounter 58 beaches, 14 harbours the UK's smallest city, **St Davids** (*Tyddewi*), home to the splendid **Cathedral** (www.stdavids cathedral.org.uk) and brooding **Bishop's Palace** (www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/stdavidsbishopspalace). Of the many beaches, **Freshwater West** and **Marloes Sands** caught the eye of film-makers and have featured in dramatic scenes in *Harry Potter*, *Robin Hood* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*. If you're hungry, **Coast** (www.coastsaunderfoot.co.uk) in **Saunderfoot** offers a blissful sea-inspired menu located right on the shoreline.

Pembrokeshire is also a fantastic place to fling yourself off the coast path and into the water, literally. The addictive adrenalin sport coasteering was pioneered here, and the **Blue Lagoon** has hosted Red Bull's Cliff Diving World Series multiple times.

Ceredigion

Pick any west-facing beach on the Ceredigion stretch of the Wales Coast Path at sunset and

settle in for a spectacular sight as the sea lights up with the day's last rays. Spot dolphins and seals from **Mwnt's** (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mwnt) spiritual and secluded beach, or head on a dedicated boat trip with **A Bay to Remember** (www.baytoremember.co.uk) from **Cardigan** (*Aberteifi*). Further north is **Aberaeron**, a pretty harbour town with a rainbow of pastel-hued seafront houses. For culture close to the sea, Cardigan's intimate **Theatr Mwldan** (www.mwldan.co.uk) is well worth a visit, or head to lively Aberystwyth for the striking **Aberystwyth Arts Centre** (www.aberystwythartscentre.co.uk). **Aberystwyth Cliff Railway** ([www.aberystwythcliffrailway.co.uk](http://aberystwythcliffrailway.co.uk)) takes you up a funicular to the summit of **Constitution Hill** (*Craig Glais*), for beautiful coastal views.

Menai, Llŷn and Meirionnydd

Enjoy old-school seaside charm at **Aberdyfi** and **Barmouth** (*Abermaw*); just outside the latter, find trendy eatery **Norbar** (www.facebook.com/thenorbar), a sleekly designed bar and restaurant that's ideal for a pitstop. Between **Fairbourne** and **Barmouth** is a particularly beautiful stretch of the path, with views across the **Mawddach Estuary** (*Aber Mawddach*) on one side while **Cader Idris** and the **Snowdonia (Eryri) National Park** loom inland. A trio of commanding coastal castles at **Harlech**, **Criccieth** (*Cricieth*) and **Caernarfon** will wow you, while magical **Portmeirion** (www.portmeirion-village.com) delights with its whimsical architecture and riotous floral displays. **The Llŷn Peninsula** (*Penrhyn Llŷn*) is one of Wales' least explored but most rewarding areas, where the coast path has a wild, romantic feel. Climb to the headland from **Aberdaron** and feel like you're at the edge of Britain – and completely at one with nature.

The Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn)

Most of **Anglesey's** coastal zone is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Enjoy sea, mountain, and forest views as you walk to **Llanddwyn Island** (*Ynys Llanddwyn*) along the beach. Once there,

breathe in the tranquillity of this spiritual site, which is the home and resting place of Wales' patron saint of lovers, St Dwynwen (*Santes Dwynwen*). At the isle's western edge is **Holyhead** (*Caergybi*), and perched right out to sea is **South Stack** (*Ynys Lawd*) **Lighthouse** – a dream location for every photographer. Back towards the mainland don't miss **Beaumaris** (*Biwmares*) **Castle** (www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/beaumaris-castle), considered the most technically perfect castle in Britain. Fancy seeing Anglesey from another angle? Then hop on board an exhilarating **RIB ride** (www.ribride.co.uk), zooming under the impressive bridges that span the **Menai Strait** (*Afon Menai*). On the trip out to **Puffin Island** (*Ynys Seiriol*) you'll see the adorable seabirds, as well as seals, cormorants, and old shipwrecks.

North Wales and the Dee Estuary (Aber Afon Dyfrdwy)

Perfectly preserved **Conwy Castle** (www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/conwycastle) and Conwy's town walls form part of a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** perched directly above the coast. Synonymous with Lewis Carroll and Alice's many adventures, **Llandudno** is a classic seaside resort with the glorious mini-wilderness of **Great Orme** (*Y Gogarth*) at its tip. Steep summit trails take in incredible coastal views and there's even a tram or cable car available for tired legs. Stroll out on Wales' longest pier at **Llandudno** – measuring 2,295 feet (700 m) – and get a culture fix at stylish waterfront arts complex **Venue Cymru** (www.venuecymru.co.uk). Spot wildlife at **Colwyn Bay** (*Bae Colwyn*) and enjoy **Prestatyn's** beaches before rounding off the coast path with – of course – another castle! **Flint's** (*Fflint*) 13th century castle (www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/flintcastle) was immortalised in Shakespeare's *Richard II* as the location where the unfortunate king is captured by his enemies and was also the first castle built in Wales during King Edward I's invasion.

Get a taste of Wales



No visit to Wales is complete without an exploration of our fabulous food scene. The menu is packed with the freshest ingredients, unusual local specialities, sweet treats and tempting tipplers. Here's how and where to sample some real Welsh flavour.

Welsh specialities

The Welsh coastline and countryside are key to cultivating some of Wales' finest foods, and this abundance of fresh produce has inevitably led to a growing community of local producers and innovative products.

Halen Môn is a family business that specialises in sea salt from the Isle of Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*). The business was started by boiling Anglesey sea water in the family kitchen in 1997, and discovering that the salt that was left was a great local product. The range now includes a number of different sea salts, and is used and sold in more than 22 countries and in top restaurants around the world. In 2015 the company opened Tŷ Halen, a saltcote (salt house) and visitor centre which offers unique behind the scenes tours.

Getting there: Halen Môn is best reached by car, and is 105 miles (169 km) from Manchester. www.halenmon.com

West Wales is famous for its **cockles**. Pay a visit to **Swansea Market** (*Marchnad Abertawe*) the largest indoor market in Wales, where fresh cockles are sold daily (Monday to Saturday). Eat them right there with a little vinegar for an incredibly fresh taste of the sea. Did you know that seaweed is a Welsh delicacy? In Wales it's called **laverbread**, or **bara lawr in Welsh** and is eaten on its own or used as an ingredient in a number of dishes. It's harvested along the Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*) and

Carmarthenshire (*Sir Gaerfyrddin*) coasts in West Wales, and is also available fresh at the market. Look out for the **Pembrokeshire Beach Food Company** (<https://www.beachfood.co.uk/index.php>) at various food and cultural festivals, and at their Café Môr street food outlet at Freshwater West beach in Pembrokeshire between April and September; they sell jars of it and have a host of recipes that use laverbread including Traditional Welsh Breakfast with Welshman's Caviar (their own name for laverbread).

Getting there: Swansea is easily reached by train or car; 187 miles (301 km) by car from London or around 3 hours 30 minutes by train. www.swanseaindoormarket.co.uk

And if the seaweed itself isn't enough, Wales also has seaweed gin! The Dà Mhile Distillery just outside **Llandysul** in Mid Wales launched this maritime-tinged tipple on St David's Day (*Dydd Gŵyl Dewi*) in 2014, and it's the perfect accompaniment to fresh fish. Seaweed is harvested from the Welsh coast and infused with the gin for three weeks to create a truly unique flavour. If you'd like to see how this unusual drink is made, you can even book a tour of the distillery.

Getting there: Llandysul is 82 miles (132 km) from Cardiff by road. www.damhile.co.uk

If you're in the mood for something sweet, you have to try some **Welshcakes**. They're eaten all year round, although the



Welsh mussels

intake increases around St David's Day (1st March) when Wales celebrates its patron saint. These small cakes are cooked on a bakestone or griddle, and the wonderful aroma this produces is truly something to savour. Cardiff Bay (*Bae Caerdydd*) is the home of **Fabulous Welshcakes**, where these wonderful creations are prepared in store all day every day. Call in to see what variations on the traditional recipe they are preparing that day. They've also recently opened a new shop in Cardiff city centre.

Getting there: Cardiff (*Caerdydd*) is 150 miles (241 km) from London, or around two hours on the train from London Paddington station. www.fabulouswelshcakes.co.uk

Bara Brith translates as 'speckled bread' and is a rich fruit loaf. Produced all over Wales with varying family recipes, the spiced fruit loaf is delicious when sliced thinly, spread with salted Welsh butter and enjoyed with a cup of tea. Or better still, taste it as part of a Welsh afternoon tea in the **Furnace Tea Room** at **Bodnant Welsh Food** in North Wales.

Getting there: Bodnant Welsh Food is approx. 85 miles (135 km) from Manchester by car. www.bodnant-welshfood.co.uk

Wales has plenty to offer when it comes to locally produced cheese. Try **Pwll Mawr** by the **Blaenafon Cheddar Company** (www.chunkofcheese.co.uk) which is matured 300 ft (90 m) below the earth at Big Pit National Coal Museum (www.museum.wales/bigpit) in South Wales. **Caws Cenarth** (www.cawscenarth.co.uk) from Mid Wales is the oldest producer of **Welsh Farmhouse Caerfili** cheese, and their most famous cheeses include the Brie-like **Perl Wen**, and the creamy blue **Perl Las**. The **Snowdonia Cheese Company** (www.snowdoniacheese.co.uk) in North Wales produces great cheese with equally great names. **Red Devil** is a fiery red-wax-coated cheese made with chillies and crushed pepper, **Black Bomber** is a creamy and smooth extra mature cheddar, and **Green Thunder** is a creamy cheddar with garlic and herbs.

You can sample a huge range of Welsh cheeses at **Madame Fromage** (www.madamefromage.com).



co.uk) in Cardiff, a deli and restaurant that specialises in cheesy Welsh cuisine.

Getting there: Cardiff is two hours by train from London.

One of Wales' most famous food products is **salt marsh lamb**. The salt marshes of Wales are a unique grazing environment for these lambs, giving their meat a unique flavour that's 'highly prized by chefs and diners alike'. Salt marsh lamb is often on the menu at **Fairyhill Hotel** which is located on the beautiful Gower Peninsula (*Penrhyn Gŵyr*) in West Wales.

Getting there: The Gower Peninsula is just outside Swansea (Abertawe), approx. 60 miles (96 km) west of Cardiff by car. <http://fairyhill.net/restaurant>

Foraging

Foraging for food can be an extremely satisfying experience, particularly when you bite into a sandwich filled with jam made from blackberries you picked yourself. We recommend you start your foraging

adventures with an expert to guide you – especially when searching for fungi. And if you're looking for foraging experiences, Wales has plenty on offer.

North Wales

Original Outdoors offer two foraging courses: 'Foraging and Wild Foods' and 'Coastal Foraging Walks'. 'Foraging and Wild Foods' takes place near Ruthin (*Rhuthun*) in the North East and introduces participants to basic foraging skills, also giving tips on how to continue to develop their knowledge. The 'Coastal Foraging Walks' are held in Dinas Dinlle in the North West and are suitable for both beginners and more advanced foragers. The course includes gathering fish and shellfish, and learning the laws of foraging and gathering wild plants.

Getting there: Ruthin is approx. 65 miles (105 km) from Manchester, and Dinas Dinlle is approx. 110 miles (180 km) from Manchester by car. www.originaloutdoors.co.uk

Mid Wales

Fungi Forays offer guided foraging trips looking for edible mushrooms, ending with a mushroom-based meal, plus a preserving and tasting session. If one day isn't enough, you can book a weekend break.

Getting there: Trips start in the town of Rhayader (*Rhaeadr*), which is approx. 80 miles (130 km) west of Birmingham, or approx. the same driving distance north of Cardiff by car. www.fungiforays.co.uk

West Wales

Forage for free food with **Wild About Pembrokeshire**, who run fun hedgerow and seashore foraging courses for beginners and families around St Davids (*Tyddewi*) in Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*).

Getting there: St Davids is approx. 110 miles (180 km) west of Cardiff by car. www.wildaboutpembrokeshire.co.uk



Welshcakes

Food trails

If you're interested in sampling different kinds of Welsh produce and want to meet some of the people who make it, then following a food trail or joining an organised food adventure could be the perfect foodie outing for you.

North Wales

The **Clwydian Range Food Trail** offers visitors an exciting way to discover the foodie delights in this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The trail is self-guided and includes producers such as Llaeth y Llan yoghurt, Bragdy Dinbych brewery and Caffi Florence café.

Getting there: You will need a car to drive between destinations on the trail, and the Clwydian Range (*Bryniau Clwyd*) is approx. 60 miles (96 km) from Manchester.
www.clwydianfoodtrail.com

Mid Wales

Over 20 producers are part of the **Ceredigion Taste Trail** (www.tastetrailwales.co.uk). Why not start at the trail's northernmost point at the seaside town of Aberystwyth and work your way down the length of the county following The Coastal Way (www.thewalesway.com)? The trail includes varied producers and products from cheese to chocolate and ice cream to gin.

Getting there: You will need a car to drive between destinations on the trail, and Aberystwyth is approx. 120 miles (200 km) west of Birmingham.



Coast restaurant, Saundersfoot



Be our guest

A place to stay is about much more than getting a good night's sleep.

You'll find amazing accommodation that fires the imagination all across Wales, from Mongolian yurts and green eco-cabins to luxurious art hotels and historic (sometimes haunted) inns. Settle in for a stay you'll never forget.

Twr-y-Felin Hotel, St Davids (Tyddewi), West Wales

Twr-y-Felin has a colourful history: it began life as a windmill in 1806, and was repeatedly destroyed by the elements until being rebuilt (using materials from a shipwreck) in 1866. In 1907, 21-year old Evan Evans converted it into a hotel he named Twr-y-Felin, Welsh for 'mill tower'. In 1940, evacuees from the London Blitz were put up there and it also served as a base for the Women's Royal Naval Service. Today, Twr-y-Felin attracts creative types in its latest guise as Wales' first art hotel, featuring 100 original artworks, luxury accommodation, fine dining and enviable proximity to some of Pembrokeshire's (*Sir Benfro*) best beaches. No wonder it was named AA Hotel of the Year for Wales 2017-2018. www.twryfelinhotel.com

Celtic Manor Resort, Newport (Casnewydd), South Wales

Celtic Manor Resort towers imperiously over its surroundings, its stately image befitting a resort that has accommodated both the world's greatest golfers and meetings of global leaders. Celtic Manor Resort's recent history includes hosting the 2010 Ryder Cup and 2014 NATO summit, when Barack Obama was among the visitors. Live like a President by staying in one of the luxurious Hunter Lodges, which feature a sauna in the bathroom, a hot tub outside and a bedroom overlooking the gorgeous Welsh countryside. The Resort's oldest rooms are

located in the original 1860 Manor House and boast sumptuous four-poster beds.

www.celtic-manor.com

Treberfedd Farm Octagonal Eco-Cabins, Ceredigion, Mid Wales

The names of Treberfedd Farm's two eco-cabins, Saffir and Aerona, sound like something from folklore or fairy tales, and the diminutive homes look as though they've been lifted from a storybook's pages, too. Set in green meadows, the eco-cabins comprise open-plan living spaces with cosy wood-burning fires, sheepskin rugs and fully equipped kitchens – ideal for a romantic retreat or family fun. The farm itself dates back to at least the 1400s, and restoration work on the farmhouse revealed murals dating back to around 1650. www.treberfedd.co.uk/eco-cabins

Life House, Llanbister, Mid Wales

An architect-and-writer (John Pawson) and a philosopher (Alain de Botton) are behind the creation of Life House, a 'timeless house of simplicity and beauty' whose aims go much higher than just a good night's sleep. There's a 'contemplation chamber' buried in a hillside where you're encouraged to train your mind on 'true essentials', a 'contemplation zone' for doing the same with a view of the Welsh mountains, a library bedroom, a music bedroom and a bathing bedroom where you 'reassess existence with the help of views onto



Treberfedd Farm, Ceredigion



The Bunkhouse, Glasbury-on-Wye

the Welsh valley'. www.living-architecture.co.uk/the-houses/LifeHouse/overview/

Black Boy Inn, Caernarfon, North Wales

The art of hospitality has been honed over five centuries at Black Boy Inn, which is located within the medieval town walls of historic Caernarfon, home to a famous and majestic castle. The inn opened in approximately 1522, making it one of Wales' oldest. Today it's the ideal place to experience a traditional, warm Welsh welcome and have a hearty meal before settling in for a cosy night. Look out for the ghostly nun that's said to pass through on her way to the nunnery, which used to be at the rear of the inn. www.black-boy-inn.com

Portmeirion, Gwynedd, North Wales

Portmeirion Hotel is part of marvellous Portmeirion Village, the brainchild of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis, who spent fifty years lovingly creating his vision of an Italianate village in coastal North Wales. The hotel opened in 1931 and has hosted artists, royalty, politicians

and tycoons, as well as noted authors and playwrights H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw and Noël Coward. The building gained Grade II listed status in 1971. Stay in the Peacock Suite, which the future King Edward VIII slept in in 1934. www.portmeirion.wales/stay/accommodation/portmeirion-hotel

Craig y Nos Castle, Brecon Beacons (Bannau Brycheiniog), Mid Wales

Not many hotels house a theatre – Craig y Nos is an exception. The Adelina Patti Theatre was built in honour of one of the castle's most famous inhabitants. Said to be the second most celebrated woman alive (after Queen Victoria) in 1900, she is little known today outside the opera world, as she lived before her voice could be preserved for posterity on sound recordings. The castle is also said to be Wales' most haunted, and you can take a ghost tour before settling in to a relaxing night's sleep. www.craigynoscastle.com

Ruthin Castle, Ruthin (*Rhuthun*), North Wales

The first castle documented here was built in 1277. Over the centuries it's been fought over and owned by notable people – including Henry VIII, Mary I and Charles I – before the wealthy Myddleton family set about improving it in the 19th century. In 1901, it was 'the centre of dangerous romantic intrigue at the highest level', when the Castle's then mistress, 'Patsy' Cornwallis-West, had a long love affair with Edward, Prince of Wales (who became King Edward VII). Ruthin has housed 21st century royalty too – Prince Charles included – and fittingly, there's a Prince of Wales Suite that occupies an entire floor, as well as further glamorous suites, deluxe and luxury rooms.

www.ruthincastle.co.uk

The Bunkhouse, Glasbury-on-Wye (*Y Clas-ar-Wy*), Mid Wales

Who can resist a bunkhouse with its own slide? The Bunkhouse in Glasbury-on-Wye was the talk of the town when it revealed its latest addition, which bypasses the need for stairs to get to the ground floor! It sleeps up to 14 and is ideal for fun-loving friends or family groups. There are 12 luxury bunk beds, a double room, a large and spacious dining room and toasty wood-burning stoves. Run by Wye Valley Canoes, it's the perfect launch-pad for a kayak along the picturesque River Wye (Afon Gwy).

www.wyevalleycanoes.co.uk/bunkhouse.html

Llangoed Hall, Llyswen, Mid Wales

A short distance west of The Bunkhouse is splendid Llangoed Hall. Stories abound – it's said this was the site of the first Welsh parliament in AD 560, the property has been lost and won in a card game and Sir Clough Williams-Ellis of Portmeirion fame redesigned the mansion in 1912 as a country house. Sir Bernard Ashley – husband of designer Laura Ashley – bought the property in 1987, after his wife's death, and opened it as a hotel in 1990. Laura Ashley furnishings are in use throughout the classy house, and there's an impressive art collection, including a room of works by Whistler. www.llangoedhall.co.uk

Shepherd's Hut, Presteigne (*Llanandras*), Mid Wales

Go back to basics and let nature provide the entertainment at Wild Meadow's beautiful Shepherd's Hut. Find it parked among three and a half acres of lush meadows and orchards, inviting you to escape the hustle and bustle of normal life for something altogether more tranquil and romantic. There's a full-sized double bed inside and maps, games and binoculars to facilitate exploration of the outside. Just pack a sense of adventure!

www.wildmeadow.co/shepherds-hut

The Bell at Skenfrith, Monmouthshire (*Sir Fynwy*), South Wales

A former 17th-century coaching inn, The Bell retains the welcoming, cosy atmosphere of an inn while having the amenities of a boutique hotel. Admire its flagstone floors, oak beams and antique furniture, while settling in for a sophisticated dinner in the award-winning restaurant and a night in one of the eleven stylish rooms. Pick up a copy of *Skenfrith's Lady of Letters*, a collection of poetry compiled in the 1930s by the village's postmistress, and take it out on a walk in the surrounding countryside described in her verses, largely unchanged since she penned them. www.skenfrith.co.uk

Llanerch Vineyard, Vale of Glamorgan (*Bro Morgannwg*), South Wales

The Romans brought vines to Wales 2,000 years ago, making the country's appearance in the wine world a little tardy – it's only in the last couple of decades that Welsh wine has gained prominence. This slow start gave way to the fast winning of awards and praise for Welsh whites, rosés and sparkling wines, with some red wine now reaching as high a standard as its counterparts. Llanerch planted its first vines in 1986 and produces highly-rated wine under its Cariad label. Have a taste of everything, then sleep it off in a farmhouse suite, studio room or apartment. www.llanerch-vineyard.co.uk



Ynyshir – Courtesy of Ynyshir

Ynyshir, Machynlleth, Mid Wales

Queen Victoria succumbed to the charms of Ynyshir—she loved the abundance of birds on the estate (immediately behind the house is a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds reserve) and kept Ynyshir as a hunting lodge. Parts of the property date back to the 15th century. Since its royal owner, further well-known people have stayed at Ynyshir, including the actor Richard Gere. Bring a large appetite for dinner; Ynyshir holds a Michelin star and chef Gareth Ward shows off fantastic fresh and local ingredients with every dish. www.ynyshir.co.uk



Portmeirion, Gwynedd

Join the party – events in Wales



Green Man festival

Whatever you're interested in, you're sure to find something fun in our packed calendar of festivals and events. There's much more happening than we have room for, but here are a few key dates for your diary. Head to www.visitwales.com/things-to-do/whats-on for a full listing, and also ideas for things to do or eat and great places to sleep during your trip.

Food and drink

Pembrokeshire Fish Week, West Wales, June

Get a real taste of the sea with over 250 mouthwatering events taking place throughout the county. Pembrokeshire Fish Week is one of our biggest and best food events, featuring themed walks, foraging and feasting, food markets, and fishing demonstrations that celebrate delicious local seafood and Pembrokeshire's (*Sir Benfro*) maritime heritage. www.pembrokeshirefishweek.co.uk

Abergavenny Food Festival, South Wales, 21–22 September

No foodie worth their salt should miss this celebration of top nosh. The South Wales market town of Abergavenny (*Y Fenni*) plays host to this highlight of the UK food calendar, serving up a rich menu of masterclasses by leading chefs, tastings galore, and stalls selling everything from cider to cheese, garnished with lots of street entertainment.

www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com

Gwledd Conwy Feast, North Wales, October

There's food, glorious food in historic Conwy. It's one of Wales' most popular festivals, with all kinds of foodie (and non-foodie) events set against a backdrop of Conwy Castle, which is illuminated to become a dazzling digital art

gallery. While you're there, don't forget to sample the famous local mussels, caught by hand from Conwy's crystal waters.

www.conwyfeast.co.uk

Music, arts and culture

Dydd Miwsig Cymru (Welsh Music Day), 8 February

Whether you're into indie, rock, punk, funk, folk, electronica, hip hop or anything else, there's incredible music being made in the Welsh language for you to discover. The day celebrates all forms of Welsh Language music and it's easy to tune in and discover something you'll love. If you want to have a listen to some great Welsh Music, there are six playlists curated by DJ Gareth Potter including Acoustic, Electronica, Campfire Sing Song, Chill Out, Workout and Legends to play on Spotify, Apple Music and Deezer, available here: <http://cymraeg.gov.wales/DyddMiwsigCymru/Cynwys/Playlists/?lang=en>

Machynlleth Comedy Festival, Mid Wales, 3–5 May

A Mid Wales market town may seem like an unusual location for a comedy festival, but this off-the-wall setting is very much in keeping with the event's 'anything goes' approach, and the town's wonderfully laid-back ethos. Featuring a who's-who of rising stars and established performers testing out brand new



Steelhouse Festival



National Eisteddfod of Wales

material, it's the place to be if you want a first look at what's going to be hot in comedy this year. www.machcomedyfest.co.uk

Focus Wales, North Wales, 16–18 May

Taking over Wrexham (*Wrecsam*) in North Wales, this multi-venue music festival features more than 200 performances from new and emerging Welsh acts, alongside sets from established UK and international performers. There are also panels featuring discussions and tips from music industry experts, plus art exhibitions, theatre performances and live comedy. www.focuswales.com

Hay Literary Festival, South Wales, 23 May–2 June

These days the event famously described by President Bill Clinton as 'the Woodstock of the mind' needs little introduction, but it wasn't always that way. Dreamt up around a kitchen table in the town known as the 'second-hand book capital of the world', Hay-on-Wye (*Y Gelli Gandryll*), it's now a globally recognised arts

and literature extravaganza featuring hundreds of leading writers, thinkers and performers. www.hayfestival.com

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, South Wales, 15–22 June

See if you can spot the next Sir Bryn Terfel at the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition. Classical singers from across the globe flock to the Welsh capital (*Caerdydd*) to compete in this high-profile bi-annual event. A true test of talent in which the finalists sing their hearts out, it has been dubbed 'the world's greatest singing competition'. www.bbc.co.uk

Steelhouse Festival, South Wales, 26–28 July

Turn it up to 11 at this annual celebration of loud guitars and earth-shaking drums. Conceived in 2011, Steelhouse has carved out a niche in the music scene as the place to be for proper rock music from the likes of Thunder, UFO, The Darkness and Europe. For those about to rock, we salute you. www.steelhousefestival.com

The Green Gathering, South Wales, 1–4 August

For festival fun with an eco-friendly twist, this jamboree of music, arts, poetry, science and wellbeing in Chepstow (*Cas-gwent*) is an inspirational addition to the events calendar. See live music in solar-powered tents, learn craft skills, practise meditation and learn how to live off the land. Good times don't have to cost the earth. www.greengathering.org.uk

Royal Welsh Show, Mid Wales, 22–25 July

It may be the UK's largest agricultural event, but you don't have to be a farmer to enjoy the Royal Welsh Show at Llanelwedd. Whether you're urban or rural, you'll find plenty of things to see and do at this annual showcase for all that's good about country life. Wonder at the sheepdog trials and stunt motorbike displays, or drool over demonstrations from top chefs and stalls selling delicious local produce. It's simply the biggest event in the countryside calendar. www.rwas.co.uk

National Eisteddfod, North Wales, 2–10 August

The travelling celebration of Welsh music, language and culture lands at historic Llanwrst in Conwy county this year, bringing with it thousands of competitors from across the country. They'll be taking part in Welsh language contests of poetry, song, and art culminating in the atmospheric Gorsedd of the Bards, a colourful ceremony honouring the achievements of Welsh poets and prose writers. There's also delicious food, musical performances of all kinds, and plenty of activities to keep the children entertained. Everyone's invited, so don't be put off if you aren't a Welsh speaker (though you may want to take part in an onsite Welsh language lesson once you're there). www.eisteddfod.wales/2019-eisteddfod

Green Man festival, Mid Wales, 15–18 August

Once a tiny folk event attended by just a few hundred people, Green Man has grown to be

one of the can't-miss fixtures of the summer festival season. Nestled amid the mountains near the town of Crickhowell (*Crucywel*), it now welcomes more than 15,000 visitors and was voted best festival of the year by listeners of BBC 6 Music. Whether you're a fan of twinkly indie, traditional folk, pulsating garage rock or ear-melting electronica, there will be something on the bill for you. www.greenman.net

The Iris Prize Film Festival, South Wales, 8–13 October

Showcasing LGBT+ film from across the globe, this six-day festival in Cardiff (*Caerdydd*) showcases the best in queer cinema. It also awards a £30,000 prize (the largest LGBT+ film prize in the world) to the festival's best film. Tune in for an eye-opening cinematic experience. www.irisprize.org

Sport and activities

Newport Wales Marathon, South Wales, 5 May

Our national marathon starts and finishes on Newport's (*Casnewydd*) historic waterfront, taking runners on a tour of the town's landmarks, historic places and natural environment. It's one of the flattest marathons in the UK too, so you'll be in a good position to score a personal best time (over 70 percent of runners posted a PB in 2018). www.newportwalesmarathon.co.uk

ICC Cricket World Cup 2019, South Wales, June

What's better than a bit of cricket? Lots of cricket. The 2019 edition of the ICC Cricket World Cup is taking place right here in the UK, with four games being played at the Cardiff Wales Stadium (Sophia Gardens). Fixtures include New Zealand vs Sri Lanka (1 June) and South Africa vs Afghanistan (15 June), plus what promises to be a hard-fought clash between England and Bangladesh (8 June). www.icc-cricket.com



Royal Welsh Show



Velothon Wales

Velothon Wales, South Wales, July

Head out for a cycle tour of South Wales in the company of some 18,000 other riders. Taking place on completely closed roads, this brilliant bike event is popular with both seasoned riders and more casual cyclists. The former can tackle an 86-mile (140 km) route with some serious climbs, while the latter can take things a little easier on a gentle 37-mile (60 km) ride.

www.velothon-wales.co.uk

Wales360, Mid and North Wales, 21–28 July

New for 2019, this gruelling cross-country mountain bike event is one of the biggest challenges in cycling. This six-day ride loops through the rugged Mid and North Wales countryside, packed with thigh-burning climbs and breathless descents. Saddle up, if you think you have the stamina and determination to make it through. www.360wales.com

World Alternative Games, Mid Wales, August

Llanwrtyd Wells has become a hot-spot for

year-round unusual sporting events, like the world-famous bog snorkelling championships and its Man vs Horse marathon race. Joining these quirky competitions is the World Alternative Games, taking place over three long weekends in August. Familiar athletic pursuits are replaced with contests like haybale tossing, egg throwing, scooter slaloms and slow bicycle races. www.worldalternativegames.com

British Speedway Grand Prix, South Wales, 21 September

Cardiff's Principality Stadium is used to a bit of noise, be it the roar of the crowd on international rugby days or huge concerts from the likes of The Rolling Stones and Ed Sheeran. Now it's the turn of motorbike engines to turn up the volume as the British Speedway Grand Prix returns to the Welsh capital. Get ready for muddy thrills and high-octane spills as the best riders in the world hurl their machines around the track in pursuit of one of the biggest prizes in motorsports. www.speedwaygp.com



Storm the castle



Conwy Castle

They may have been built to keep people out, but our castles are pretty welcoming places these days. There are more than 600 fabulous fortresses to explore all over our coast and countryside. From mighty strongholds to atmospheric ruins, every one has centuries of stories to tell.

Caerphilly Castle (*Castell Caerffili*), South Wales

The biggest castle in Wales was conceived by Gilbert ‘the Red’ de Clare, a red-haired Anglo-Norman noble. Building began in 1268, though the first attempts to construct the castle were obstructed by de Clare’s Welsh war opponent Llywelyn ap Gruffydd – the last native Prince of Wales. There’s a lot to take in at Caerphilly Castle, with moats, rings of stone and a ‘leaning tower’ that is more lop-sided than the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Recently added family attractions, Gilbert’s Maze and the Dragon’s Lair, make this the ideal place to take your little explorers. www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/caerphilly-castle

Chepstow Castle (*Castell Cas-gwent*), South Wales

Chepstow Castle boasts the oldest doors in Europe, dating back 800 years. It’s considered by some Wales’ first ‘real castle’, being one of the earliest built in stone. Construction started in 1067 and, once built, it passed through the hands of various knights and nobles. It was used as a prison in the 17th century, then spent around 200 years in decay before being deemed ‘romantic’ in the eyes of artists and tourists, who it still attracts today. Walk along the battlements, see those ancient doors and marvel at the beautiful Wye Valley (*Dyffryn Gwy*) views. www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/chepstow-castle

Cardiff Castle (*Castell Caerdydd*), South Wales

Slap-bang in the centre of Wales’ capital is Cardiff Castle, which has had many guises over the years. It began life as a Roman fort in the 3rd century, becoming a motte-and-bailey castle in the 11th century, and then getting a Gothic Revival makeover in the 19th century. It’s now a thriving attraction that has also starred on screen – there’s a film location tour for movie buffs – with regular events including medieval jousting and open-air theatre. www.cardiffcastle.com

Castell Coch, South Wales

Another Gothic Revival castle with a Norman foundation, and the same Third Marquess of Bute who oversaw Cardiff Castle’s Victorian revamp employed the same architect, William Burges, to create ‘a country residence for occasional occupation in the summer’. Like something from a fairy-tale, Castell Coch – which means ‘Red Castle’ – is fascinating to visit, with grand interiors, winding stairways and beautiful furniture to admire, plus enchanting forest all around. You can also reach the castle on foot or by bicycle from Cardiff on the Taff Trail. www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/castell-coch

Conwy, Caernarfon, Beaumaris (*Biwmares*), North Wales & Harlech, Mid Wales

This quartet of castles in North and Mid Wales



has been granted UNESCO World Heritage status, thanks to being the finest examples of late 13th century and 14th century military architecture in Europe. Built in the reign of King Edward I, and designed by James of St. George, each is extraordinarily well-preserved to this day. Beaumaris has been dubbed 'the most technically perfect castle in Britain' and, along with Harlech, was admired by UNESCO 'for the way they combine characteristic 13th century double-wall structures with a central plan, and for the beauty of their proportions and masonry.' Tick off all the classic components of a great castle: barbicans, drawbridges, fortified gates, dungeons, towers and curtain walls, and throw in some excellent sea views as well. The walled towns of Conwy and Caernarfon also form part of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. www.cadw.gov.wales

Kidwelly Castle (Castell Cydweli), West Wales

Dramatic location? Check. High towers equipped with arrow slits? Check. Plenty of exciting history to discover? Oh yes. Look out for the monument to 12th century warrior

princess Gwenllian ferch Gruffydd, who remains one of Wales' most admired heroines to this day, and who died in battle while bravely defending her country. Kidwelly is one of the best-preserved medieval castles, and the starting point for gorgeous riverside walks. www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/kidwellycastle

Powis Castle (Castell Powys), Mid Wales

Unlike many on this list, the original Powis Castle was built by a Welsh prince – Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn – in the mid-13th century. It's as well-known for its glorious gardens as for the castle itself, which is home to many precious artistic and historic objects from India and the Far East. There's a solid gold gem decorated with diamonds, emeralds and rubies from the throne of Tipu Sultan and a section of the same ruler's opulent tent, plus more treasures in the Clive Museum, on-site. The gardens are spectacular, with dancing statues and vividly colourful flower beds. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle-and-garden



Carreg Cennen Castle

Carreg Cennen Castle, West Wales

Located atop a limestone crag in the beautiful Brecon Beacons (*Bannau Brycheiniog*) National Park, Carreg Cennen may be far from intact, but its rugged appeal is irrefutable. Voted ‘Wales’ most romantic ruin’, the castle was attacked and captured several times through its early history, remodelled in the late 13th/early 14th century, only to be attacked again in July 1403 by Owain Glyndŵr and 800 of his men, who ultimately failed to capture it. Pick up a torch at the visitor centre so you can explore the shadowy caves underneath the castle. www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/Carreg-cennen-castle

Penrhyn Castle, North Wales

If your tastes are more neo-Norman than Gothic Revival, head to elegant Penrhyn, designed by Thomas Hopper, an architect renowned for his unorthodox style, and created between about 1822 and 1837. It was originally a medieval manor house, but little of the original house can be seen today and it’s

all turrets, towers, luxurious rooms and world-class art. Stroll the stately bedrooms and picnic in the grounds – a haven for kids, there are nature trails and acres of space in which to run free. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/penrhyn-castle

Castell Dinas Brân, North Wales

For location, it’s hard to beat Castell Dinas Brân, which perches above Llangollen and offers utterly breath-taking views over the River Dee (*Afon Dyfrdwy*) and Eglwyseg Mountain. It’s a fairly steep walk up to the medieval castle – whose name means Crow’s Castle – and there’s an Iron Age hillfort up there too. The castle was built in the 13th century for Gruffydd Maelor, Prince of Powys Fadog, but Edward I’s troops destroyed it during their campaign to crush the people of Wales.

Raglan Castle (Castell Rhaglan), South Wales

Handsome and majestic, Raglan is a late medieval castle – around 150 years late onto the castle construction scene, in fact, as work began in the 1430s. Made more for show than for battle, Raglan includes an impressive gatehouse and tower and, though it mainly intended to impress with its good looks, it did fulfil its castle duty and hold off Oliver Cromwell’s forces for 13 weeks at the end of the English Civil War. Today, there are regular exhibitions and events, and fans of the BBC’s *Merlin* may recognise it as a filming location for the TV show. www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/raglancastle

Dinefwr Park and Castle, West Wales

The views from the top of Dinefwr Castle are beautiful, looking out onto the tranquil Tywi Valley (*Dyffryn Tywi*) and surrounding deer park. The castle is forever linked with the Princes of Deheubarth – a kingdom in South West Wales – and it’s thought that Rhys ap Gruffydd, who rebuilt the castle, also built Carreg Cennen. Dinefwr is the site of the only parkland National Nature Reserve in Wales and 20th-century Newton House. The site is managed by the National Trust. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dinefwr



Carreg Cennen Castle

Cilgerran Castle, West Wales

Perched over the Teifi, the longest river entirely within Wales, is possibly the most rotund castle in Wales. Two circular towers form the bulk of this medieval fortress, which was fought over by the English and Welsh repeatedly, eventually left to ruin and abandoned by 1400. There are often events on site, including re-enactments that'll take you back 800 years. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cilgerran-castle

Caldicot Castle (*Castell Cil-y-coed*), South Wales

This stone medieval castle in Monmouthshire (*Sir Fynwy*) has a colourful history from its Norman foundation to its role as a royal stronghold in the Middle Ages, and restoration as a Victorian family home. Take in views of the 55-acre country park from the battlements and see the enormous canon in the courtyard. Caldicot hosts music concerts, festivals and open-air cinema during the summer. [www.visitmonmouthshire.com/caldicotcastle](http://visitmonmouthshire.com/caldicotcastle)

Did you know? Wales has more castles per square mile than anywhere else in the world.



Caernarfon Castle

Chain reaction



Antur Stiniog, Blaenau Ffestiniog

Discover Wales by bike on a cycling trip with real pedal power. Get on your bike for an unforgettable ride, whether you're a hardcore dirt-track enthusiast, a road-racing Geraint Thomas in the making or a gentle roller who likes to take things easy.

Mountain biking

Wales is renowned world-wide as a world-class mountain biking destination. Over the years, our rugged terrain has been augmented by a wealth of excellent courses suitable for all ages and abilities. There are seven purpose-built mountain biking centres in Wales, plus eight mountain biking bases. Find out more at www.mbwales.com

Mid Wales

One of Wales' oldest and best-known mountain biking centres is Coed y Brenin. If you're a beginner, or are looking for a trail that the whole family can enjoy, try the green Yr Afon trail, which takes you along the Mawddach River and past the old Gwynfynydd gold mines. For a more adrenaline-filled and testing adventure, tackle Tarw Du, the first purpose-built mountain bike trail in the UK. Expect to encounter rapid descents, rocky terrain, and beautiful views of the Snowdonia range. Bikes are available to hire from the on-site Beics Brenin bike shop. www.beicsbrenin.co.uk

Getting there: Coed y Brenin is best reached by car, and is 102 miles (164 km) from Manchester.

Where to stay: Eight miles (13 km) away in the nearby town of Dolgellau is Ffynnon, a luxury boutique townhouse, perfect for relaxing after a busy day on the bike. They even offer safe storage and cleaning facilities for mountain bikes. www.ffynnontownhouse.com

Where to eat: Bwyty Mawddach lies eight miles (13 km) south of Coed y Brenin. The restaurant combines its modern architecture with the beautiful surroundings and panoramic views over the Mawddach Estuary (*Aber Mawddach*) and Cader Idris mountain range. The food is fresh and seasonal with ingredients sourced as locally as possible. www.mawddach.com

South Wales

Opened in 2013, BikePark Wales is located just south of the Brecon Beacons (*Bannau Brycheiniog*) National Park. The green-rated Badger's Run is designed as an introduction to mountain biking, and is suitable for all the family. If you're after a fast-paced expert trail, try the jump-packed Enter the Dragon or the technical Dai Hard, all tight twists, rocks and drops. There's also a mini bus uplift service to take you up to the start of the trails for your next run down. Bike hire is available on site, and booking is recommended. www.bikeparkwales.com

Getting there: By car, BikePark Wales is 21 miles (34 km) north of Cardiff (*Caerdydd*), or 60 miles (97 km) from Bristol. Or alternatively you can cycle there on the Taff Trail cycle path.

Where to stay: Winchfawr Lodges are a group of three luxury self-catering lodges five miles (8 km) from BikePark Wales. Bike hire is available, and the lodges include a secure storage area with facilities to wash bikes, and



also a dry room and bike racks.
www.winchfawrlodge.co.uk

Where to eat: Nine miles (14 km) north of BikePark Wales is Nant Ddu Lodge. This hotel and spa offers a great dining experience at their bar and bistro with fresh ingredients prepared with simplicity and style. www.nantddu-lodge.co.uk

Cycle Tours

North Wales

Beics Betws in Betws-y-Coed offers guided cycle tours in the heart of the Snowdonia (*Eryri*) National Park. For experienced riders, The Marin Trail is 15 miles (24 km) of forest tracks, while Penmachno can be split into two tracks, or combined for a 19-mile (30 km) day out. There are also a series of gentle forest roads for more relaxed riders. Bike hire is available, and includes helmet and toolkit. www.bikewales.co.uk.

Getting there: By car Betws-y-Coed is 95 miles (153 km) from Manchester. Alternatively, the

train from Manchester Piccadilly takes around three hours.

Where to stay: For an alternative accommodation option, treat yourself to some glamping at the slate caverns in Blaenau Ffestiniog, located about 10 miles (16 km) from Betws-y-Coed. These cosy wooden lodges sleep between four and six people and give easy access to some of North Wales' best activity attractions (including thrilling downhill bike park Antur Stiniog). www.llechwedd-slate-caverns.co.uk/glamping/glamping-at-the-caverns

Where to eat: Ty Gwyn in Betws-y-Coed is a family-run hotel, and was once a coaching inn. The menu features a wide variety of dishes, with many ingredients sourced in Wales, such as Conwy Mussels, Aberdaron Lobster and Powys Steak. www.tygwynhotel.co.uk

Mid Wales

Guided cycling holidays in Mid Wales are available with Drover Holidays, located right on the Wales-England border in Hay-on-

Wye (*Y Gelli Gandryll*). Drover Holidays guide groups of four to eight people and the tour includes accommodation, packed lunch, luggage transfer and full vehicle back-up. The three-day Radnor Ring route is a great way to explore the unspoilt wild of Mid Wales. www.droverholidays.co.uk

Getting there: Hay-on-Wye is 58 miles (93 km) north of Cardiff in the car, or 150 miles (241 km) west of London. Or take a train to nearby Abergavenny (*Y Fenni*) (2 hours 30 minutes from London). Drover Holidays tours include pick-up and drop off from the nearest railway station at the beginning and end of the tour.

Where to stay: Accommodation is included in the cycling holiday, but for accommodation in Hay-on-Wye you can stay at The Swan, an elegant Georgian mansion in the centre of town with 19 comfortable en-suite rooms. www.swanathay.com

Where to eat: Richard Booth's Bookshop in Hay-on-Wye is so much more than just a bookshop; it also houses a cinema and a café that serves light bites and lunches until 4.30pm most days. www.boothbooks.co.uk

South Wales

What better way of seeing the capital city than a leisurely bike tour? Cardiff Cycle Tours have two different tour options, both lasting three hours: The Cardiff Bay Tour and The Cardiff City Tour. The Cardiff Bay Tour takes in the best of Cardiff Bay, including the barrage, Doctor Who filming locations and the impressive buildings around Roald Dahl Plass. The Cardiff City Tour takes in all the city's major landmarks, including parks and waterways. You can also contact the organisers to plan bespoke tours. Bike hire is available and the tours are suitable for all ages and abilities. www.cardiffcycletours.com

Getting there: Cardiff is easily accessible from London; trains from London take two hours, or it's 150 miles (241 km) by car.

Where to stay: The tours start from Nos Da Hotel and Hostel, so why not stay there too? The accommodation ranges from shared

dormitories to private rooms that sleep up to three people and private en-suite rooms for up to six people. There are also studio rooms for up to six people with en-suite facilities and a mini kitchen. www.nosda.co.uk

Where to eat: Madame Fromage, located in old Castle Arcade in Cardiff city centre offers a laid-back service with delicious seasonal food including home-made Welsh food and a varied delicatessen and patisserie menu. www.madamefromage.co.uk

Iconic Routes

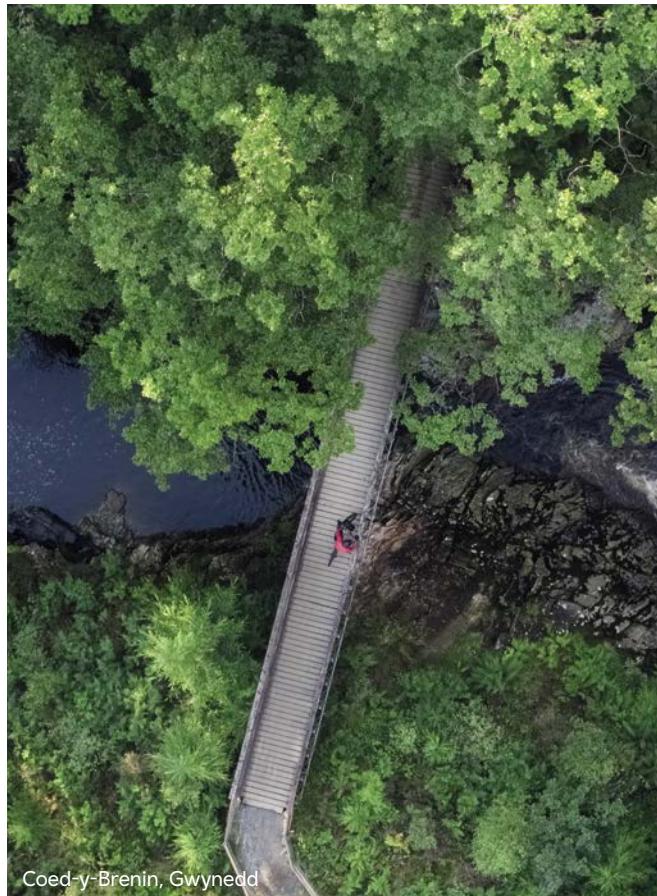
Pan-Wales

Lôn Las Cymru runs for over 250 miles (402 km) down the whole length of Wales, from Holyhead (*Caergybi*) in the North West to either Chepstow (*Cas-gwent*) or Cardiff in the South East. This is a very challenging ride, but a great way to see Wales on two wheels. Some of the attractions along the way include Caernarfon Castle, the Mawddach Estuary and Blaen-y-Glyn Waterfalls.

Getting there: Holyhead is 120 miles (193 km) by car from Manchester, or 3 hours 30 minutes by train.

Where to stay: After spending several days cycling the length of Wales, you'll be looking forward to a comfortable bed at the end of your journey. Cathedral 73 is an old Victorian House in the centre of Cardiff that has been transformed into fashionable and modern guest accommodation. www.cathedral73.com

Where to eat: Cardiff is full of great places to eat, one of which is Dusty Knuckle Pizza Company. Less than a mile from Cathedral 73, this award winning pizza restaurant serves up authentic Neapolitan wood-fired pizza from its funky courtyard premises. It's one of the 10 best pizza places outside London, according to *The Guardian*. www.dustynuckle.co.uk



Coed-y-Brenin, Gwynedd



Elan Valley, Powys

South Wales

The Taff Trail is a popular cycling route for many people in Wales, with many opting to cycle only a small part of the whole trail. The Taff Trail takes you 55 miles (89 km) north from Cardiff to Brecon (*Aberhonddu*). Starting in Cardiff, you soon leave the urban environment behind and find yourself cycling through beautiful landscape surrounded by hills, and past the iconic Castell Coch – Wales' own fairy-tale castle. The trail then takes you through Wales' former industrial heartland including Trefforest (*Trefforest*) (birthplace of Sir Tom Jones) and Trehafod, where you can learn more about the area's industrial history at the Rhondda Heritage Park. Continue on towards Merthyr Tydfil (*Merthyr Tudful*) – another Welsh town made famous by the Industrial Revolution – and the trail ends in Brecon, where you can visit the town's cathedral after cycling through the glorious Brecon Beacons National Park.

Getting there: Cardiff is easily accessible from London. Trains from London take two hours, or it's 150 miles (241 km) by car.

Where to stay: A short three-mile (5 km) drive from Brecon is Peterstone Court, an historic house in the heart of the Brecon Beacons National Park, complete with spa and leisure suite – perfect after a long day in the saddle. www.peterstone-court.com

Where to eat: For an intimate dining experience, head 11 miles (18 km) north to Llangoed Hall. The chef uses Welsh meat, such as Radnorshire Lamb and Welsh Black Beef, with much of the produce being grown in the hotel's kitchen garden. If you're not in the mood for a meal, how about a spot of afternoon tea? www.llangoedhall.co.uk

Hidden Gems

North Wales

Lôn Eifion takes you along 12 miles (20 km) of scenic views and historical landmarks, starting in Caernarfon and finishing in Bryncir. The trail starts near the imposing structure of Caernarfon Castle and takes you south alongside the Welsh Highland Railway. Cycle

past beautiful views of Caernarfon Bay and Snowdonia (*Eryri*), and you might want to stop for a rest at the Iñigo Jones Slateworks in Groeslon to see the craftsmen at work and pop into the café. Bike hire is available from Beics Menai. www.anturwaunfawr.org/

Getting there: Caernarfon is 104 miles (167 km) from Manchester by car.

Where to stay: Considered to be one of Wales' oldest inns, the Black Boy Inn in Caernarfon has been offering accommodation for over five centuries. The inn is located within the old Caernarfon town walls, just down the road from Caernarfon Castle. www.black-boy-inn.com

Where to eat: Galeri Caernarfon is an arts centre on the waterfront in Caernarfon. Pop in to the café bar for some fresh local produce, including delicious cakes. www.galericaernarfon.com/

Mid Wales

The Elan Valley Trail is a nine-mile (14 km) trail, and an ideal introduction to off-road cycling. This spectacular route takes you past three reservoirs, and the mighty stone walls of the dam holding millions of gallons of water in place. The Elan Valley Visitor Centre has a café, and you might even be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the red kites that thrive in this part of the world. Bike hire is available from Clive Powell Mountain Bike Hire. www.clivepowell-mtb.co.uk/thebikeshop.php

Getting there: The Elan Valley is best reached by car, and is 77 miles (124 km) north of Cardiff, or 84 miles (135 km) west of Birmingham.

Where to stay: Wernhir Farm is a cosy B&B not far from Rhayader (*Rhaeadr*) and the Elan Valley (*Cwm Elan*), with four comfortable bedrooms. This working cattle farm is a member of the Cyclists are Welcome scheme, making it the ideal stop off on a biking break. www.wernhir.com

Where to eat: Just outside Rhayader, you'll find the welcoming Triangle Inn. This 16th-century drover's inn specialises in home-cooked, locally

sourced food, best enjoyed in front the roaring fire in the bar. www.triangleinn.co.uk

West Wales

Starting from the Discovery Centre in Llanelli, the Millennium Coastal Path trail stretches seven miles (11 km) along the coast and woodland to Pembrey Country Park. The trail goes through Pembrey Forest, one of the UK's few sand dune forests, and the Llanelli Wetland Centre which is home to many different species of birds, including little egrets and great white egrets.

Getting there: Llanelli is 54 miles (87 m) from Cardiff by car, or 1 hour 15 minutes by train.

Where to stay: If you want to stay in a luxury apartment with a beautiful view, then how about the Gower View Penthouse on the beachfront in Llanelli? There's a sandy beach on the doorstep, and it's a five-minute drive from Machynys Golf and Country Club. www.holidayaccommodationwales.co.uk

Where to eat: Sosban is an award-winning restaurant in Llanelli owned by two former Welsh rugby stars, Stephen Jones and Dwayne Peel. The restaurant's menu changes daily, depending on the local produce available on the day. www.sosbanrestaurant.com

Road race

The inaugural Velothon Wales was held in June 2015, with the race starting and finishing in Cardiff city centre. Both professional cyclists and regular enthusiasts took part, choosing between a 31-mile (50 km) and 89-mile (140 km) race on a course of completely closed roads around South East Wales. The event is now a regular on the Welsh cycling calendar with 18,000 taking part every year. If you'd like to take part keep your eyes on the website for upcoming details of this year's race. www.velothon-wales.co.uk



Park life

Beddgelert, Snowdonia

You can't say you really know Wales until you've explored our National Parks. There are three in total, the Brecon Beacons (*Bannau Brycheiniog*), Pembrokeshire Coast (*Arfordir Penfro*) and Snowdonia (*Eryri*), each showing off different aspects of our wildly varied coast and countryside. Inside these vast and peaceful places are almost limitless opportunities to craft your own unique Welsh experiences. Here's what you need to know to get started.

Snowdonia: zip lines, bouncy underground nets, the summit, watersports, lakes and the gold rush...

Snowdonia – *Eryri* in Welsh – was designated the first National Park in Wales in 1951. The biggest draw for visitors is Snowdon (*Yr Wyddfa*) itself, Wales' highest mountain at 3560 ft (1085 m). Around 350,000 people go up to the summit on foot or by train each year. Legend surrounds the mountain, which is said to be the tomb of a giant slain by King Arthur. The Park is attractive to adventurous travellers for reasons beyond its mountains. It's also home to Wales' largest natural lake, so there is plenty to keep watersports fans happy, as well as Wales' premier mountain biking area. In and around the Park, newer adventure attractions such as Zip World, Bounce Below and Surf Snowdonia are enticing adrenaline-junkies too.

Active adventures

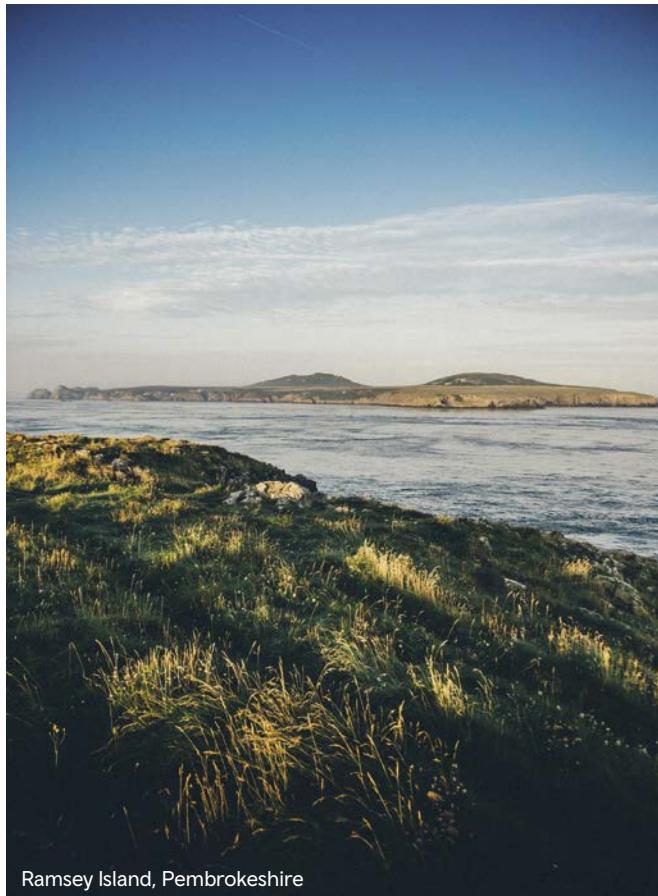
Walking up Snowdon – *Yr Wyddfa* in Welsh – is a rewarding experience. When you reach the summit you're treated to a panorama of mountain ridges and shimmering lakes beneath you, and views out as far as Ireland on a clear day. There are six routes up to the summit: the most straightforward, the Llanberis Path, runs along the train line, while the Watkin Path involves an ascent of more than 3281 ft (1000 m). Visitors are advised to check the weather before setting out on a climb, to wear appropriate clothing and to read the National

Park Authority's Mountain Safety Advice (www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/visiting/safety-advice) before venturing up the mountain.

A more gentle option is to take the Snowdon Mountain Railway (www.snowdonrailway.co.uk) up to the summit, either opting for a round trip (passengers are given 30 minutes to explore) or a one-way drop off at the top, with the option to walk down. Please note that the train only runs between mid March and October, and that between mid March and May the train only ascends as far as Clogwyn, not all the way to the summit.

Cader Idris, in southern Snowdonia, is another popular place for walkers and rock climbers. Its name means 'Seat of Idris', who was a legendary giant. It's said that the hounds of the underworld fly around its peaks, and that anyone who spends the night on the mountain will wake up either a poet, a madman ... or not at all.

Watersports enthusiasts should head straight for the town of Bala, an adventure seekers' paradise and gateway to the National Park. It's home to the National White Water Centre (www.canoewales.com/national-white-water-rafting-centre), with fantastic rafting possibilities on the Upper and Lower River Tryweryn. Llyn Tegid is the largest natural lake in Wales, apparently home to a mysterious creature known as 'Teggie'. During the summer it could be hard to spot Teggie amidst the many rafts, canoes and sailboats gliding over its surface. You can book water- and land-



Ramsey Island, Pembrokeshire



Coasteering near Rhoscolyn, Holy Island, Anglesey

based adventures with Bala Watersports (www.balawatersports.com). Another excellent company for water adventures is The National Mountain Sports Centre at Plas y Brenin (www.pyb.co.uk), where you can take out a kayak or canoe onto the Llynnaau Mymbyr lakes or along the local rivers.

Coed y Brenin Forest Park is a must-visit destination for mountain bikers (www.mbwales.com/agents/coed-y-brenin). If you're visiting without your own trusty bike you can hire one from Beics Brenin (www.beicsbrenin.co.uk), where you can also pick up handy advice and maps. There are 70 miles (113 km) of purpose-built cycle trails to enjoy, with eight graded routes suitable for beginners to advanced daredevils.

If speed is your speciality, head to Zip World (www.zipworld.co.uk) and try out the fastest zip line in the world (it's also the longest in Europe), or try Zip World Caverns to shoot through an underground adventure playground that has lain untouched for over 200 years. Indiana Jones, eat your heart out!

More subterranean stimulation comes in the form of Bounce Below, a series of addictive cargo nets, walkways, slides and tunnels made from netting in the Llechwedd Slate Caverns. Surf Snowdonia (www.surfsnowdonia.co.uk) in the Conwy Valley is another high-octane activity that marries a uniquely Welsh location – a stunning valley – with adventure and exhilaration. In this case it's a world-first inland surf lagoon!

Don't miss...

Visitors to the Snowdonia National Park enjoy its immense natural beauty, as well as the charm of its market towns and villages (www.eryri-npa.gov.uk/visiting/snowdonia-for-all/towns-and-villages).

Harlech, in the west part of the National Park, is home to a famous castle built in the 13th century by Edward I, as well as a beautiful beach. A lovely place to be based – with swoon-worthy views of Snowdonia's mountains – the town is full of charming tea shops and antique stores, and makes a good base for mountain walkers.

Alternatively, you can use Betws-y-Coed as your springboard to Snowdonia and approach the mountains from the east. The stone village, as pretty as a postcard, attracted droves of Victorian artists who came to record the diversity of the landscape. Conquered Snowdon? Enjoy walks in the beautiful Gwydyr Forest that surrounds Betws-y-Coed. Don't miss Swallow Falls (*Rhaeadr Ewynnol*), a dreamy waterfall two miles (3.2 km) west of town.

Beddgelert is an enchanting village you'll find it hard to stop snapping photos of – there's the romantic ivy covered bridge, a purple veil of heather over the surrounding hills in summer and the rough stone buildings. The village was reportedly named after the dog, Gelert, belonging to 13th-century prince Llywelyn Fawr (Llywelyn the Great), who thought it had savaged his baby son, so killed it – only to find out the dog had killed the wolf who had in fact attacked the baby prince.

Aberdyfi, on the southern tip of the National Park, is a charming seaside town with pastel-coloured houses along its seafront, thriving ice-cream shops in the summer and spectacular views over Cardigan Bay.

Known for its gold, Dolgellau is a market town with a rich history and more than 200 listed buildings. An industrious location – with a thriving wool trade in the 18th century and leather tanning as well, the 19th century saw a mini gold rush hit the town, the metal mined much admired for its hint of pink. Dolgellau gold has traditionally been used for royal wedding bands – the Duchess of Cambridge included. Dolgellau is the starting point of the Mawddach Trail, a flat walking and cycling path that takes in the striking Mawddach Estuary (*Aber Mawddach*).

Getting there: Llanberis is approx. 100 miles (160 km) by road from Manchester. Betws-y-Coed is accessible by rail (3 hours from Manchester; 3 hours 50 minutes from London). Once in the Park, the Snowdon Sherpa is a public transport service that takes visitors around Snowdonia and its attractions during the summer months. See www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Parking-roads-and-travel/Travel-passes/Snowdon-Sherpa.aspx.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park: puffins, coast path, Preseli Hills, Harry Potter and a pilgrimage city...

Britain's only coastal national park, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (*Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Penfro*) offers some of Wales' most spectacular sandy beaches, rugged cliffs and secluded rocky coves. Unlike most other National Parks in Britain, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park doesn't cover a connected mass of land, but encompasses unconnected areas both on the coast and inland.

Nowhere in Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is more than 10 miles (16 km) from the sea, and it doesn't end at the shoreline: the islands off Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*) also form part of the Park. Rich in history, wildlife and sheer beauty, many have seen inhabitants since prehistory. Several were named by the Vikings, which is where their English names – and some of the Welsh names – come from – Grassholm (*Gwales*), Middleholm, Skomer (*Sgomer*), Skokholm (*Sgogwm*), Caldey (*Ynys Bŷr*) and Ramsey (*Ynys Dewi*). Inland, the Preseli Hills (*Mynyddoedd Preseli*) are a playground for lovers of ancient history, with legends woven into the wild moorland and expanses of rugged heath.

The National Park is ideal for families – kids and adults alike will love puffin-spotting, coasteering and walking in the footsteps of Harry Potter.

Active adventures

The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park is a magnet for walkers. A designated National Trail, the Pembrokeshire Coast Path – 85% of which runs through the National Park – winds for 186 miles (300 km) along some of the most scenic coastline in Wales: see secluded coves, windswept beaches, rugged cliffs and winding estuaries on your travels. The total rise and fall of the entire Coast Path is 35,000 ft (10,668 m), making it greater than Everest, but you don't have to do it all at once. There are more than 200 short walks to choose from, with seasonal shuttle buses solving the problem of how to get back to where you started (www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk).



The Pembrokeshire Coast Path is part of the Wales Coast Path, which runs around the country's entire coastline. Coasteering involves 'getting around a coastline in any way possible', and can see participants cliff-jumping, swimming, scrambling and pottering about in sea caves. Commercial coasteering first started in Pembrokeshire, so if you're keen to give it a go, you're in the right place. Several companies offer coasteering and provide you with the necessary wetsuit and helmet – just bring along a sense of adventure (www.visitpembrokeshire.com/activities-adventure/coasteering).

Wildlife

Head to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park to see a dazzling array of wildlife. Always wanted to say you've seen whales in Wales? Your best bet is a boat trip to Ramsey Island with Voyages of Discovery (www.ramseyisland.co.uk). The team's detailed knowledge of the seas – and the creatures that dwell in them – mean you've a strong chance of seeing minke, sei and fin whales, as well as migrating dolphins. Head over between May and September.

Stay on dry land with a good pair of binoculars and from Strumble Head (*Pen Strwmbll*), and around the north Pembrokeshire coast, you might spy common porpoises, dolphins, sunfish and even basking sharks.

Puffins have to be a contender for the cutest animal on earth, and you can get an eyeful of them on a trip to Skomer or Skokholm Islands. In the spring and summer months, catch a sunset boat from Martin's Haven, near Marloes, and see puffins and other seabirds flitting home after their day's fishing. Watch them wiggle into their burrows with their catch to feed their demanding young.

In July, Manx shearwaters venture out to fish in the evening and return in the middle of the night in their thousands to feed their young, creating a ruckus as they do so.

Back on the mainland, the Deer Park is on the very western tip of the Martin's Haven peninsula, with glorious views out to the offshore islands and St Bride's Bay (*Bae Sain Ffraid*). Misnamed, the Deer Park has never been home to deer, but rather to happily grazing Welsh mountain

ponies. Enjoy a walk (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/marloes-sands-and-mere) to the end of the peninsula, catch a beautiful sunset and see seals and their pups on the rocks below.

Silver screen outings

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park may already be familiar to some who have seen it in glorious technicolour at the movies. Freshwater West beach is a particularly frequent star of the silver screen – it was used as the location for battle scenes in Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood*. Further drama took place here when *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was filmed. Harry, Ron and Hermione stayed at Shell Cottage while plotting their next move and after Dobby was killed by Bellatrix Lestrange, the house elf was buried there (sob!). In reality, Freshwater West is a serene and beautiful place to visit – no likelihood of battles with swords or wands! Enjoy walks on the beach and watch the surfers enjoying the swell (www.visitpembrokeshire.com/explore-pembrokeshire/beaches/freshwater-west).

Don't miss...

In the northern part of the National Park, the Preseli Hills or Preseli Mountains (www.visitpembrokeshire.com/explore-pembrokeshire/preseli-mountains) – either is accepted – are completely different to the coastal parts of the Park. No less interesting to the nature lover, this part of the Pembrokeshire National Park is fantastic for walking in the footsteps of our ancient ancestors. Head on the Golden Road (*Yr Heol Aur*), an eight-mile (13 km) ancient track that follows a route said to date back to the Neolithic period, 5000 years ago. Don't miss Bronze Age remain Foel Drygarn, where stone ramparts and banks have merged with the natural landscape over time.

Getting there: St Davids (*Tyddewi*) is approx. 110 miles (177 km) from Cardiff by road. By public transport, there are rail links to Tenby (2hrs 40 minutes from Cardiff) and Pembroke (just over 3 hours from Cardiff). Buses run the length of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, 7 days a week May-September and 2 days

a week in winter. For more information see www.visitpembrokeshire.com/explore-pembrokeshire/getting-around.

Brecon Beacons – Black Mountains, black skies, biking, bookshops, the Batcave...

The closest National Park to Cardiff (*Caerdydd*), the Brecon Beacons covers approximately 520 square miles (1350 sq km) and takes its name from the Central Beacons (*Y Bannau Canolog*), a collection of mountains south of the town of Brecon (*Aberhonddu*). Within these mountains is Pen y Fan, at 2907 ft (886 m), southern Britain's tallest peak.

Many people visit the Brecon Beacons for a good dose of natural beauty. There's a special light that hits these hills and mountains throughout the day that makes the Park a landscape photographer's dream. There's a special darkness too; the Brecon Beacons was only the fifth place in the world to be granted the title of Dark Sky Reserve in 2013, and it's perfect for stargazing (www.breconbeacons.org/about-brecon-beacons-dark-sky-reserve).

Active adventures

Walking is hugely popular in the Brecon Beacons and the reason many people visit. There are hundreds of walking routes in the Park, from gentle strolls to thigh-busting climbs. The most popular combines the two highest peaks, Pen y Fan and Corn Du, and if your legs can take it (remember it's a circular walk, so you have to do it all again backwards!) you can take in the third peak of the route, Cribyn. Just to confuse everyone, the west of the Brecon Beacons is home to the Black Mountain (*Y Mynydd Duon Du*) range – offering some of the most challenging and exhilarating walking in South Wales – while to the east, the wild and unspoiled Black Mountains (*Y Mynyddoedd Duon*) are separated from the rest of the Brecon Beacons by the River Usk (*Afon Wysg*); take your walking boots and ascend Sugar Loaf (Pen-y-fâl) and Table Mountain (*Crug Hywel*).

For a real adventure, walk the Beacons Way (*Ffordd y Bannau*) (www.breconbeacons.org/



[beacons-way](#)), a 95-mile (152 km) walk that covers all the highest peaks; you can complete the trail in 8 days.

If you're more a fan of cycling than walking, the Taff Trail (*Llwybr Taf*) (www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/route/taff-trail-cardiff-to-brecon) runs between the town of Brecon (*Aberhonddu*) down to Cardiff, and is 55 miles (88 km) of fascinating changing scenery that combines both rural and urban. You can complete the whole trail in a day, should you wish: hire bikes in Brecon, cycle to Cardiff then catch the train back to Merthyr Tydfil (*Merthyr Tudful*) and cycle back the 15 miles (24 km) to Brecon. If mountain biking is more your thing, download the Brecon Beacons National Park's guide (www.breconbeacons.org/cycling-mountain-biking) to mountain biking, with information on 14 single-track routes that take you through forests and over mountains.

Drover Holidays (www.droverholidays.co.uk) organise guided and self-guided walking and cycling holidays, so book a trip and let someone else take on the planning – just turn up and enjoy!

The Brecon Beacons provide lush terrain for horse-riding and there are plenty of waymarked trails and riding routes; horse-riding centres (www.horseridingbreconbeacons.com/horse-riding-centres) throughout the National Park cater for beginners, improvers and advanced riders.

Truly unwind as you paddle a canoe or kayak and watch the world float gently by. Hire one at Wye Valley Canoes (www.wyevalleycanoes.co.uk) and row downstream to Hay-on-Wye (*Y Gelli Gandryll*) for lunch. Spend even more time on the water aboard a Brecon Park Boat (www.beaconparkboats.com); the company offers luxury canal boat holidays where you can cruise past magnificent mountains and charming villages at just 2.5 miles (4 km) per hour.

Don't miss...

Carreg Cennen (www.cadw.gov.wales/daysout/Carreg-cennen-castle) is one of Wales' most romantic and dramatically situated castles. Located in the west of the National Park, it's a majestic hilltop construction with a mysterious cave to explore (take a torch!).



Take children to Dan yr Ogof, the National Showcaves Centre for Wales (www.showcaves.co.uk) near Abercraf. Claimed to be the largest system of subterranean caves in Europe, there are three atmospheric underground caverns to wander through. Peer at stalactites and limestone formations and look out for the 'rasher of bacon'. There's also a fantastic dinosaur park that kids love, and a Shire horse centre and farm (ditto, try tearing children away!).

Llanthony (*Llanddewi Nant Honddu*) (www.cadw.gov.wales/dayout/llanthonypriory), in the north east of the Brecon Beacons, is an early 13th-century priory of which majestic, towering arches remain. It's set against a stunning backdrop of Monmouthshire (*Sir Fynwy*) countryside and the priory was painted by JMW Turner.

If you've ascended (and descended) Ysgyryd Fawr (Skirrid) in the Black Mountains, you deserve a pint. The Skirrid Inn (www.skirridmountaininn.co.uk) is reportedly one of the oldest pubs in Wales; brimming with history

(and apparently, ghosts), Shakespeare is said to have taken inspiration here.

The Brecon Beacons is home to Waterfall Country (*Gwlad y Sgydau*), a series of spectacular waterfalls you can walk between – and in some cases, walk behind, feeling the roar of the falls at close quarters. Further west is Sgwd Henrhyd which, at 88.5 ft (27 m), is the highest fall in southern Wales; it doubled up as the entrance to the Bat Cave in *The Dark Knight Rises*. A short distance from Pontneddfechan is the Penderyn Distillery (www.penderyn.wales/) – try some Welsh whisky made with pure Brecon water.

Getting there: Brecon is approx. 40 miles (64 km) from Cardiff by road. There are train routes into Abergavenny (*Y Fenni*) (2 hours 15 minutes from London), from Cardiff a bus runs directly to Brecon and a bus from Swansea (*Abertawe*) services Pontneddfechan for access to Waterfall Country. See www.breconbeacons.org/getting-here for information about travel within the National Park.



Do you want
to hear a story?

Wales is built on fantastic tales of myth and legend. Giants, kings, bandits, wizards, holy men and fairy folk have all walked these lands. Their stories still ring out in the hills and valleys where history and fantasy mingle. Get ready to discover another world.

King Arthur (*Y Brenin Arthur*)

Nobody knows for sure whether King Arthur was Welsh – or whether he was ever a king, for that matter – but several legends place him in Wales, and the first known reference to him was in a Welsh poem written in around AD 594.

Look out for Maen Huail in the centre of the North Wales town of Ruthin (*Rhuthun*). This stone-with-a-story is said to have been the chopping block Arthur used to slay a rival, Huail. Heading towards the coast, Carn March Arthur, near Aberdyfi in Mid Wales, bears what is alleged to be the hoof-print of Arthur's horse Llamrai, imprinted during a hectic monster-slaying session. Legend also has it that in North Wales Arthur killed off Snowdon's (*Yr Wyddfa*) resident giant, Rhita Gawr, and his men supposedly covered the corpse in stones at the summit of the peak.

Two Welsh lakes, Llyn Llydaw and Llyn Ogwen, claim to be the watery resting place of Arthur's sword, which was so powerful it had a name – 'Excalibur' in English and 'Caledfwlch' in Welsh. Both are in the Snowdonia National Park in North Wales, and while Llyn Llydaw is inaccessible, Llyn Ogwen is popular with walkers heading up dramatic Tryfan.

Head to the Preseli Mountains (*Mynyddoedd y Preseli*) in Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*), West Wales, and pay homage to the warrior at Bedd Arthur, a set of standing stones said to mark Arthur's final resting place – a title claimed by other spots in Wales too. Beautiful Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*) – off the Llŷn Peninsula

(*Penrhyn Llŷn*) in North Wales – is believed by some to be the Isle of Avalon from Arthurian legend; apparently Arthur sleeps in a cave there, waiting to rise up and save Wales in its direst hour of need. www.visitsnowdonia.info, www.visitpembrokeshire.com, www.bardsey.org

St David (*Dewi Sant*)

The white dove that appears in statues and stained-glass depictions of our patron saint St David (better known as Dewi Sant in Welsh), which refers to his most famous miracle.

According to legend, David was preaching in the village of Llanddewi Brefi when a white dove landed on his shoulder. The ground on which he stood then rose up to form a hill, enabling the assembled crowd to hear him better. In the

12th century it was declared by the Pope that two pilgrimages to St Davids Cathedral (*Eglwys Gadeiriol Tyddewi*) in Pembrokeshire were equivalent to a pilgrimage to Rome, while three visits matched one to Jerusalem. Today, you can enjoy evensong, historic architecture and, in the summer, a fantastic classical music festival at the Cathedral. www.stdavidscathedral.org.uk, www.stdavidscathedralfestival.co.uk

Saint Dwynwen (*Santes Dwynwen*)

The Welsh patron saint of lovers, St Dwynwen was a lovelorn 5th-century princess who fell for the wrong man and asked for God's help to forget him. Sure enough, an angel visited her



in her sleep and gave her a potion to forget the chap, who was turned into a block of ice. God granted Dwynwen three wishes: she asked that Maelon, the object of her affections, be thawed; that God should meet the needs of all lovers; and that she should never marry. Dwynwen spent her days on Llanddwyn Island (*Ynys Llanddwyn*), off the coast of Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*) in North Wales, where she set up a convent. To this day, lovers head to the picturesque tidal island to visit Dwynwen's Well. It is said that if fish are seen to be active on a couple's visit, the husband will prove to be a faithful one. www.visitanglesey.co.uk

Merlin

'When Merlin's Oak comes tumbling down, down shall fall Carmarthen Town'. So went the rhyme referring to Merlin the wizard, King Arthur's advisor. He is said to have been born in Carmarthen (*Caerfyrddin*), West Wales, and the oak he bewitched stood in place for centuries until 1978, when it was taken to the Carmarthenshire County Museum. Shortly after that, Carmarthen suffered its worst ever

floods... Coincidence? Today, you can see a fragment of the oak at the museum.

Some claim Merlin was imprisoned in a cave to the northeast of Carmarthen at Bryn Myrddin, or 'Merlin's Hill'; listen carefully, as you can still hear him groaning there, apparently. As well as King Arthur and 20,000 saints, Bardsey Island (*Ynys Enlli*) in North Wales is said to be Merlin's final resting place. He's not in a cave though, preferring a magical castle surrounded by the thirteen treasures of Britain and nine bardic companions. www.discovercarmarthenshire.com/, www.bardsey.org

The Lady of the Lake and the Physicians of Myddfai

The classic tale of magic and understanding starts and ends at Llyn y Fan Fach, a lake under The Black Mountain (*Y Mynydd Du*) in the western Brecon Beacons (*Bannau Brycheiniog*), Mid Wales. The story goes that an enchanted lady rose out of the lake and married a local farmer on the condition that he would never hit her. Wedded bliss didn't ensue

as, due to a series of mix-ups, the promise was broken. The lady returned to her lake and is said to remain there still. Look out for her on a bracing walk that takes you past jumping fish at a trout hatchery.

After his wife returned to Llyn y Fan Fach, the farmer who had married the water-dwelling enchantress was left to raise his three sons alone. They went on to become great healers, known as the Physicians of Myddfai, and the village of Myddfai claims fame as the birthplace of modern medicine; the brothers used natural products gathered from the surrounding area. Head out on a Brecon Beacons Foraging excursion to collect your own wild ingredients – to eat, rather than medicate with! www.breconbeacons.org, www.breconbeaconsforaging.com

Cader Idris

Sleep on the slopes of Cader Idris alone, and apparently you'll wake up as either a madman, a poet... or never wake up again. Why, then, would you do that? Ancient bardic traditions saw writers sleeping on mountains in the hope of finding inspiration. Today's visitors to Cader Idris, which lies in the southern part of Snowdonia (*Eryri*) National Park, are certainly inspired by breath-taking scenery and a dramatic glacial landscape sculpted by the last Ice Age. Walk to the summit or its surrounds, taking in beautiful lakes and alpine flora. Cader means 'seat' and Idris was said by some to be a giant, so you're essentially scaling a massive chair – though other stories link Idris with Arthurian legend, while some say he was a Welsh warrior-prince. www.eryri-npa.gov.uk

Twm Siôn Cati

Likened to Robin Hood – though without the same spirit of generosity – Twm Siôn Cati was a bard and bandit named Thomas Jones who was born in Tregaron, Mid Wales, around 1530. He used to fire a bow and arrow at rich victims, pinning them to their saddles before robbing them. He hid from the Sheriff of Carmarthen in a cave on Dinas Hill, now in the Gwenffrwd-Dinas RSPB nature reserve.

Located just north of Llandovery (*Llanymddyfri*), West Wales, the cave is intriguing – though hard to access – with carvings that date as far back as 1882. Go from March to May when the forest floor is covered in bluebells. www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/gwenffrwd-dinas/

Beddgelert

Could Beddgelert be the world's only village to be named after a dog? In the 13th century, Llywelyn Fawr (Llywelyn the Great) – a Prince of Gwynedd and eventual *de facto* ruler of Wales – went out hunting with his wife, returning to find his infant son missing and his dog, Gelert, covered in blood. He concluded that the hound had mauled the baby, and he killed Gelert. But just as the dog uttered his final yell, the baby's cries were heard and the wee one discovered alive and well, next to the dead wolf Gelert had slain to protect his master's son. Filled with remorse, Llywelyn buried the dog, marked his grave with a cairn of stones and never smiled again. Beddgelert, means 'Gelert's grave'. It's one of North Wales' prettiest villages, with lovely walking and cycling terrain nearby and a monument to Gelert you can visit. www.beddgelerttourism.com

Owain Glyndŵr

Owain Glyndŵr was the self-proclaimed last native Welsh person to hold the title of Prince of Wales. In the late 1300s and early 1400s, he led the Welsh revolt against the English, known in Wales as the Last War of Independence. Though it ultimately failed, the rebellion cemented Glyndŵr as a national hero and leant him near-mythical status. He features in Shakespeare's play *Henry IV, Part 1*, in which he's depicted as an exotic, spiritual man ruled by magic. Visit medieval Conwy Castle in North Wales which, in 1399, was held for several months by Glyndŵr's forces following a surprise attack; Harlech Castle in Mid Wales was captured in 1404, and played a key role as Glyndŵr's official residence and court. Both are now part of the **Castles and Town Walls of King Edward I in Gwynedd** UNESCO World

Heritage Site. Walk Glyndŵr's Way, a national trail which traces his history through Mid Wales; it passes the Owain Glyndŵr Centre in Machynlleth, the site of his parliament, where you can learn more about the man and the myth. www.cadw.gov.wales, www.nationaltrail.co.uk/glyndwrs-way, www.canolfanglyndwr.org

The Red Lady of Paviland

The oldest character to appear on this list, the Red Lady of Paviland dates back 33,000 years to the Upper Palaeolithic period. Paviland Cave (*Ogof Pen-y-Fai*), or Goat's Hole, is the site of the oldest ceremonial burial found in Western Europe. Discovered in 1823 by William Buckland, Professor of Geology at Oxford University, it was first thought that the skeleton was that of a Roman prostitute or, some claimed, a witch. Perhaps this had something to do with the seashell necklace it sported, however it has since been discovered that the 'red lady' was, in fact, a young man. It's not easy to access the cave, located in West Wales, but you can see its pear-shaped entrance on a walk of the dramatic South Gower Cliffs (*Clogwyni De Gŵyr*).

Llywelyn the Last (*Llywelyn ein Llyw Olaf*)

Known as 'Llywelyn the Last' because he was the last sovereign prince and king of Wales, Llywelyn ap Gruffudd came from a long line of Welsh princes, succeeding his uncle, Dafydd ap Llywelyn, in 1246. His wasn't exactly a quiet reign. Characterised by battles with both English royalty and members of his own family, and his – literal – stomping ground, Gwynedd, in North Wales, saw its fair share of upheaval and conflict. His campaigns seemed to have paid off in 1267, when King Henry III officially recognised Llywelyn as Prince of Wales, the high point of his power. Unfortunately for Llywelyn, Henry's death in 1272 saw King Edward installed on the throne. He became an enemy of Llywelyn and forced the signing of the Treaty of Aberconwy, stripping the prince of most of his lands and essentially meaning that Welsh self-rule would end upon his death. However even more disruption was in

store – Llywelyn's final campaign (supporting his brother Dafydd ap Gruffudd) ended in his death, at the Battle of Orewin Bridge at Builth Wells (*Llanfair-ym-Muallt*), Mid Wales. Visit the village of Cilmeri and see the memorial stone to Llywelyn the Last.

Guto Nyth Brân

Legends abound surrounding the athlete Guto Nyth Brân, born in South Wales in the village of Llwyncelyn in 1700. It was said he could run from his home to Pontypridd – a distance of 7 miles (11 km) – returning before his mother's kettle had boiled. Others said he could catch a bird in flight. And, reputedly, he could run 50 yards (46 meters) in four seconds and 10 miles (16 km) in 45 minutes. Spotting his athletic talents, Siân o'r Siop (Siân from the Shop!), organised a race for Guto against an unbeaten English captain, which the Welshman easily won, collecting £400 prize money. Siân and Guto fell in love and Guto continued to race and win, eventually running out of willing opponents. After years in retirement, Guto emerged for one final, fateful race, beating the 'Prince of Bedwas', a new runner on the scene, to run 12 miles (19 km) in 53 minutes. But sadly, he collapsed and died during the victory celebrations, aged just 37. Guto is remembered every year on 31 December with the Nos Galan road race, held in Mountain Ash (*Aberpennar*), South Wales, which traces the route of Guto's first race. The lively event attracts runners and spectators from all over Britain, including a different famous Welsh mystery runner each year. It begins with a church service and a wreath is laid over Guto's gravestone in Llanwynno, and the race ends at a commemorative statue of Guto Nyth Brân, depicted mid-run. www.nosgalan.co.uk

Gerald of Wales (*Gerallt Gymro*)

Descended from a Norman knight father and a mother with links to Welsh royalty, Gerald of Wales was known throughout his lifetime as Giraldus Cambrensis, Gerallt Gymro, Master Gerald de Barry, Gerald the Archdeacon, Gerald Bishop-elect of St.



Llyn y Fan Fach, Brecon Beacons

Davids – this abundance of names reflects the many varied aspects of Gerald's life. He was a scholar and writer of 17 (known) books that paint a vivid portrayal of medieval Wales. He was also a churchman and reformer, courtier and diplomat. Knowing that he wanted to be a priest at an early age, he writes in his autobiography that while his brothers made sand castles on the beach he built churches! He's well known for his patriotic attempts to have St Davids (*Tyddewi*) in West Wales, recognised as an archbishopric, visiting Rome three time to see the Pope and being nominated Bishop of St Davids several times – but to no avail. Had he succeeded, the Welsh church would have been liberated from the allegiance it owed to the archbishopric of Canterbury in England, which the ruling King Henry II had no desire for. Gerald died an old man, having retired to a monastery. Visit Pembrokeshire's Manorbier Castle (*Castell Maenorbyr*), where Gerald was born, and of course, St Davids Cathedral (*Eglwys Gadeiriol Tyddewi*), where he is said to be buried. www.manorbiercastle.co.uk, www.stdavidscathedral.org.uk

Did you know? The name 'Arthur' is said to come from the Welsh language, with 'arth' meaning bear – well, it would take a bear-man to slay a giant, wouldn't it?!

St David (*Dewi Sant*) is Wales' patron saint, and St David's Day takes place each year on 1 March, the day he died. Parades are held all over Wales, with the biggest in Cardiff, and it's traditional to pin a daffodil or leek onto your clothes, and for children go to school in traditional Welsh costume.

Though not recognised by the Vatican as an official saint, St Dwynwen's Day (*Dydd Santes Dwynwen*) is also marked in Wales, on 25 January. It's a bit like Wales' own version of Valentine's Day, and the patron saint of lovers is remembered through the exchange of love spoons, a traditional token of love. 'Rwy'n dy garu di' is a handy Welsh phrase for you to learn; it means – of course – I love you.



Adventures for everyone

A physical disability or special requirement is no barrier to exploring our coast and countryside. Whether it's coasteering or horse-riding, many organisations now offer specifically designed and completely accessible adventurous activities.

RIB Ride Adventure Boat Tours

For those with a taste for high-octane adventures, **Anglesey RIB Rides** in Menai Bridge (*Porthaethwy*), North Wales will provide the thrill that you've been looking for. With a maximum speed of 31 mph (50 kph), these fast boat trips will introduce you to the shipwrecks, swells and seals of the Anglesey (*Ynys Môn*) coast. Working in partnership with the adventurer Bear Grylls to create daring package adventures, these trips are not for the fainthearted.

The skippers have experience of enabling people with a wide range of disabilities to enjoy a RIB Ride trip, adapting their steering and assisting participants to move on and off their boats. A new 12-seater RIB has seats with back support for those participants needing extra security. RIB Ride request that disabled visitors who require additional support contact them in advance to ensure that the necessary provisions are in place. www.ribride.co.uk

Wheely Boat Fishing

The **Wheely Boat Trust** gives disabled people – and wheelchair users in particular – the opportunity to use boats with ease. They operate at locations across Wales and offer a range of fishing experiences including sea fishing from Connah's Quay (*Cei Connal*) in North Wales to fly fishing on the Penderyn and Ystradfellte reservoirs in South Wales.

For a truly spectacular experience, visit Llyn Mwyngil, Tal-y-llyn in the south of the Snowdonia (*Eryri*) National Park. In the shadow of towering Cadair Idris mountain and the lake's steep-sided banks, try your hand at fly fishing from the secure deck of the Wheelyboat Mark II. The lake is famous for its brown trout, but in September and October you can try your hand at catching migratory salmon and sewin (otherwise known as sea trout). www.wheelyboats.org

Coasteering

Celtic Quest operates on the Pembrokeshire (*Sir Benfro*) coast in West Wales, and has plenty of experience in enabling visitors of all abilities (including those with physical disabilities) to explore its cliffs, and they are justly proud of their achievements. At the point where the land meets the sea, get to grips with the coast from a different perspective.

As long as participants are safe to be fully immersed in the sea and have a 'can do' attitude, Celtic Quest can tailor a trip to provide you with the support you need. A recent participant with cerebral palsy was supported to jump off rocks into the sea with instructors on both sides. Celtic Quest use lifejackets with extra buoyancy, meaning that less strong swimmers can feel confident in the water. www.celticquestcoasteering.com



Pembrokeshire Beaches

Pembrokeshire boasts 18 easy access beaches that cater for the needs of disabled visitors. Take your pick from long stretches of sand or sheltered coves, seaside resorts and secluded gems.

You can hire specially designed beach wheelchairs at a number of locations in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/default.asp?PID=681), giving everyone a chance to explore the Park's many sandy beaches. www.pembrokeshirecoast.wales/default.asp?PID=181

See also: www.visitwales.com/explore/accessible-wales/wheelchair-access-beaches

Brecon and Monmouthshire Canal

Dragonfly Cruises offer a wheelchair-friendly canal boat trip on the Brecon and Monmouthshire Canal (*Camlas Mynwy a Brycheiniog*) in Mid and South Wales, covering 32 miles (52 km) of canal in a two and a half hour round trip. The Dragonfly barge has a

wheelchair lift from the quayside and space for two wheelchairs.

Experience the fun of passing through canal locks and crossing a historic aqueduct. As your vessel glides along with the peaks of the Brecon Beacons (*Bannau Brycheiniog*) in the background and the idyllic countryside of the Vale of Usk (*Dyffryn Wysg*) in the foreground, sit back and enjoy the views from the water. www.dragonfly-cruises.co.uk

Red Ridge Outdoor Centre

The **Red Ridge Activity Centre** in Cefn Coch, Mid Wales is an enthusiastic and experienced provider of outdoor pursuits for people with additional needs. It is a founding member of the Adventure for All movement and offers residential adventure holidays for groups and individuals.

You can sample rock climbing, trial abseiling or experiment with paddle boarding – a wide choice of activities is on offer for all ages and abilities. With the aid of an instructor who will challenge and motivate you to try new



Wales Coast Path, Aberdaron, Gwynedd

activities, conquer your fears step by step and surprise yourself. www.redridgecentre.co.uk

Wales Coast Path

The **Wales Coast Path**, which follows the entire coastline of the country, has adapted sections of the path for use by wheelchair users. Visitors of all abilities can now experience the bracing clifftop winds, the coastal panoramas and wildlife-spotting opportunities.

Aberporth on the Ceredigion coast in Mid Wales, is a particularly good place for wheelchair users to take on the Coast Path. A 0.6-mile (1 km) section of the path has been adapted for inclusive access with a smooth surface and gentle slopes. It's the ideal way for everybody to enjoy the sweeping views of Cardigan Bay (*Bae Ceredigion*) from clifftop paths with wheelchair-friendly gradients and viewpoint benches. www.walescoastpath.gov.uk/about-the-path/accessibility

For all of the above adventure experiences, visitors with accessibility needs are advised to contact the organisations listed in advance

of booking or attending; there is no absolute guarantee that the organisations will not refuse participation on safety grounds.

CAERDYDD



Let's talk Welsh

You can't miss it. Our native language is all around you, written on signs and place names and spoken in pubs, shops and on the street. You'll likely hear it most if you venture to the north and the west, but you'll meet Welsh speakers all over the country. Time for a crash course in *Cymraeg*.

Spoken and written Welsh is incredibly important to our sense of who we are as a nation. It forms a direct, unbroken link to the legendary figures of our history – and it's a language that's still vibrantly alive today. We have a Welsh language television channel, S4C, and radio station, BBC Radio Cymru. There's a weekly national paper, 'Y Cymro', as well as Welsh language magazines and regional papers.

Modern Wales is a proudly bilingual country. Everyone can speak English (which is handy). But for us, our language is the key that unlocks our culture, literature, music, history – all the stuff that makes us who we are. It lets us talk to each other using words and idioms, in a variety of regional dialects, that have been passed down through the centuries. We can join in the singing when our National Anthem, *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau*, and the hymn *Calon Lân* reverberate round sporting stadiums across the world, during the annual Six Nations rugby championship and at international football matches. The language has also taken gleefully to social media: being phonetic and easily abbreviated, Welsh turns out to be superbly suited to Twitter.

Above all, the Welsh language is a vital part of the shared heritage of these islands. So if you're British, or interested in our past, it's your language, too. Enjoy it.

A quick history of Welsh

AD 43 The Romans begin to conquer Britain. Everyone in what is now England, southern Scotland and Wales speaks the same language: Common Brittonic, from which modern Welsh descends.

cAD 500 Invading Anglo-Saxons drive Britons to the western fringes, and Brittonic splits into four languages: Welsh, Cornish, Cumbric and Breton (in northern France).

cAD 600 The poet Aneirin writes *Y Gododdin*, commemorating a battle between the Britons and Angles. The poem, which contains the earliest known reference to King Arthur, is passed on orally; the earliest surviving manuscript is from centuries later.

1176 First formal Eisteddfod – a festival of bards and musicians – held at Cardigan Castle (*Castell Aberteifi*) by the Lord Rhys. Today there's a permanent exhibition at the castle, and it's still used for concerts.

c1250 The earliest surviving Welsh manuscript is written. *The Black Book of Carmarthen* is a collection of 9th-12th century poetry, and includes many Arthurian tales. The book is now housed at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

1536 Henry VIII's Act of Union bans Welsh speakers from holding public office. As a result, the Welsh gentry become fluent in English, while most of the working and middle classes retain Welsh as their daily language.

1546 The first book in Welsh is printed: Sir John Price's *Yn Y Lhyvr Hwnn* – literally, 'In This Book', which are the opening words. It's mostly a collection of Christian texts, with a calendar, alphabet and instructions on how to read Welsh, and is now kept at the National Library of Wales.

1563 Elizabeth I throws the Welsh language an unlikely lifeline by decreeing that all churches in Wales should have a Welsh translation of the Bible. She probably hoped that the Welsh people would learn English by comparing texts, but when Bishop William Morgan's translation is published in 1588, it has the opposite effect, sustaining the Welsh language for centuries to come.

1734 The preacher Griffith Jones sets up mobile schools to teach reading, using Welsh religious texts. By the end of the century, Wales has one of the highest literacy rates in Europe.

1861 The modern National Eisteddfod is founded. This annual festival of music, poetry, literature and the arts is held in North and South Wales on alternate years. In 2019 it's taking place in Llanrwst, Conwy.

1893 The University of Wales is founded, made up of three colleges – Aberystwyth, Bangor and Cardiff (*Caerdydd*).

1907 The National Library of Wales is founded in Aberystwyth, Mid Wales, and its first president is Sir John Williams, an illustrious surgeon who delivered several royal babies, including the future Edward VIII and George VI. He donated his personal collection of 25,000 books and manuscripts, and in 1909 over the course of two days, over 12 tonnes of books were moved by horse and cart and train to the Library. Most of the greatest treasures of early Welsh writing are now held here.

1923 BBC makes its first radio broadcast in Welsh. The programme opens with a rendition of the folk song, *Dafydd y Garreg Wen*.

1962 Plaid Cymru co-founder Saunders Lewis uses his BBC radio lecture *Tynged yr Iaith* (The Fate of the Language) to call for direct action. Pressure group Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg

(Welsh Language Society) is formed later that year.

1974 First broadcast of *Pobol y Cwm*. It's the BBC's longest-running TV soap, and is still broadcast on the Welsh language TV channel, S4C, every weekday evening at 8pm.

1977 BBC Radio Cymru begins broadcasting. It was the UK's first FM-only radio station.

1982 Launch of Welsh language TV channel, S4C. Many of its original Welsh commissions have led to English versions – notably animations like *SuperTed* and *Sam Tân* (*Fireman Sam*) and, most recently, bilingual series *Y Gwyll* (Hinterland), *Un Bore Mercher* (Keeping Faith) and *Craith* (Hidden).

1993 The Welsh Language Act 1993 gives Welsh equal status with English in public life.

2011 The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 strengthens the use of Welsh in public life, ensures equal status for both Welsh and English as the official languages of Wales, and leads to the appointment of a Welsh Language Commissioner to promote and facilitate the use of the language.

2017 Around 20 percent of the population speak Welsh – that's around half a million people. The figures are likely to rise in future: every child now learns Welsh up to the age of 16, and a fifth of children attend Welsh-medium secondary schools.

Top tips for speaking Welsh

Okay, those names on the road signs can look a little daunting at first sight. But Welsh is a phonetic language, so once you know a few simple rules, it's actually quite easy to read and pronounce. Here are four of the handiest rules:

1. We've got all the same vowels as English, and a couple of extras: w and y. The w sounds like the oo in 'book'. The y is trickier: it sounds like uh, ur or ih, depending on context, but don't worry about that. If you find yourself asking for directions to Cwmystwyth, just say 'coom-us-t-with'. Easy.

2. The stress is mostly on the penultimate syllable. Cwm-y-st-wyth. Caer-nar-fon. Cw-rw. (Cwrw means 'beer'. Very important.)
3. We've got a couple of moderately challenging *ll* and *ch* sounds. The *ch* is just like the Scottish 'loch'. To master the double-L, go to say the letter L, then move your tongue fractionally back and up, and blow. Again, easy.
4. In Welsh, a single *f* is pronounced like a *v* (for the *f* sound, we use a double *ff*). So if you're in Ffairfach, it's 'fire-varch'. Also watch out for the double *dd* (pronounced like the *th* in 'this'). A single *d* is... well, just a regular *d*. So our capital city's name is Caerdydd and sounds similar to Kire-deeth.

Enough rules! Time for some practice...

Every name tells a story

Welsh place names are really, really good at telling you something about the geography and history of a town or village. Here's a list of the most common clues to making your visit a richer experience.

Aber mouth or confluence of a river, e.g. Aberystwyth (mouth of the River Ystwyth)

Afon river, e.g. Blaenafon (literally 'front', or source, of a river)

Bryn hill, e.g. Brynmawr (big hill!)

Bwlch pass or gap, e.g. Bwlch-y-Clawdd (gap in the hedge/dyke)

Caer fort, e.g. Caernarfon (fort in Arfon)

Coed wood, e.g. Betws-y-Coed (prayer house in the wood)

Cors bog, e.g. Gorseinon (Eynon's bog)

Cwm valley, e.g. Cwm-y-Glo (valley of coal)

Glyn valley or glen, e.g. Glyn Teg (fair valley)

Gwaen moorland or heath, e.g. Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen (white hemlock heath)

Llan church or parish, e.g. Llandeilo (church of St Teilo)

Llyn lake, e.g. Tal-y-llyn (end of the lake)

Mynydd mountain, e.g. Llanfynydd (church on the mountain)

Pen top, head or end, e.g. Penmaenmawr (great head of stone)

Pont bridge, e.g. Pontypridd (from Pont-y-tŷ-pridd: bridge by the earthen house)

Rhyd ford, e.g. Rhydfelin (ford by the mill)

Tre homestead or town, e.g. Trearddur (Arthur's town)

Just the facts

—Today around 562,000 people speak Welsh – that's around a fifth of the population.

—There is no letter K in the modern Welsh alphabet, but it was widely used until the 16th century. When William Morgan's Bible was first published, the printers didn't have enough Ks, so they replaced them all with Cs.

—In 1865 a Welsh settlement was established in the Chubut Province of Argentina. Today around 50,000 Argentinians claim Welsh descent, and the language is still spoken by several thousand people.

—Some of the earliest Welsh literature comes from *Yr Hen Ogledd* – The Old North – in what is today northern England and southern Scotland.

—The two Voyager spacecraft, launched in 1977, each contain a golden record with images and sounds from Earth recorded on them, to be discovered by extra-terrestrial life. The recordings include a greeting in Welsh. Voyager 1 is now in interstellar space, more than 20,000,000,000 km (over 12 billion miles) away.

Just the facts

- Two Welsh language films have been nominated for an Academy Award – *Hedd Wyn* and *Solomon a Gaenor*.
- Hinterland*, our own Nordic-noir-style TV detective series was filmed twice. The Welsh version, *Y Gwyll*, was shot simultaneously with the English version. The same later happened with *Keeping Faith* (*Un Bore Mercher*) and *Hidden* (*Craith*).
- Several of the stars of Wales' Euro 2016 football squad are Welsh speakers, including Joe Allen, Owain Fôn Williams, Ben Davies, David Vaughan, Osian Roberts (Assistant Manager) and Aaron Ramsey – whose talent was first spotted at a football session run by Urdd Gobaith Cymru, the Welsh language youth movement.

Six really Welsh places to visit

Gwynedd, including Snowdonia (Eryri), North Wales

To experience the Welsh language at its most vibrant, it makes sense to head to Gwynedd, the county with the highest proportion of Welsh speakers. Around two-thirds of people speak Welsh here, so you'll hear it every day, everywhere. As a bonus, we'll throw in incredible mountain scenery and the glorious beaches of the Llŷn Peninsula. www.visitSnowdonia.info

Cardigan Castle (Castell Aberteifi), Mid Wales

The first formal Eisteddfod – a competitive gathering of bards and musicians – was held here by the Lord Rhys in 1176, so it holds a special place in Welsh culture. The castle and its grounds have been beautifully restored in the last decade, and it's now got history exhibitions, a restaurant, a tea room, holiday cottages – and, appropriately, is used for concerts. We're

sure the Lord Rhys would approve. We're also fairly confident that he'd nip across the road to the Pizza Tipi, too, for a proper wood-fired pizza in a perfect spot by the river. www.cardigancastle.com

National Eisteddfod of Wales (Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru)

Although music and poetry competitions have been a continuous part of our culture for at least a thousand years, today's National Eisteddfod began in 1861. It's been held annually ever since, visiting North and South Wales on alternate years (in 2019 it's in Llanrwst, Conwy), attracting around 160,000 visitors. For younger competitors, there's the Urdd Eisteddfod, organised by Urdd Gobaith Cymru, which will be in Cardiff Bay (*Bae Caerdydd*), South Wales, in 2019. The Urdd was founded in 1922 to promote the language, and is today the largest youth organisation in Wales, with more than 50,000 members. www.eisteddfod.wales, www.urdd.cymru

Aberystwyth, Mid Wales

And not just because it's a pretty face, with a splendid Victorian pier 'n' prom. Aberystwyth has played an important role in the preservation of the Welsh language. The National Library of Wales was founded here in 1907 and holds most of the greatest treasures of Welsh literature. The pressure group Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (Welsh Language Society) is based here, the greatest of all Welsh poets, Dafydd ap Gwilym, is (probably) buried a few miles away at Strata Florida Abbey (*Abaty Ystrad Fflur*) and it's the biggest town in Ceredigion, a county that's a Welsh-speaking rural heartland. Apart from all that, it's a thoroughly pleasant place to spend a holiday. www.llgc.org.uk, www.cymdeithas.cymru, www.discoverceredigion.co.uk

Nant Gwrtheyrn, North Wales

The best way to learn a language is to jump right in and immerse yourself. Nant Gwrtheyrn is just the place to do it: a magical spot on the

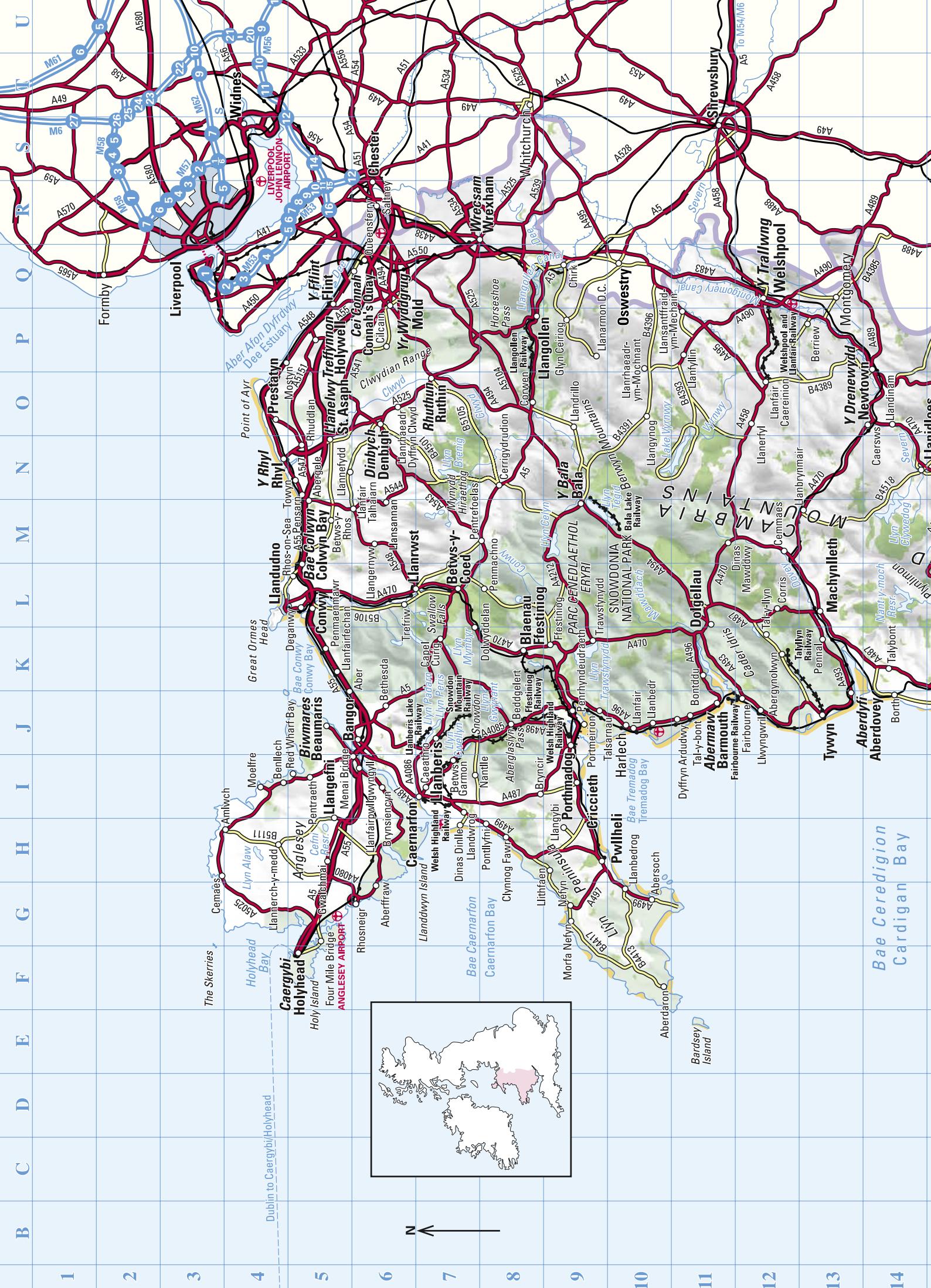


Aberystwyth, Ceredigion

north coast of the Llŷn Peninsula, with holiday cottages, a heritage centre and a residential Welsh language school, all set in an old quarrymen's village. www.nantgwrtheyrn.org

Cardiff (Caerdydd), South Wales

The Welsh capital has been a proudly multi-cultural city since it became the world's biggest coal-exporting port in the 19th century. It's estimated that around 94 languages are spoken in Cardiff, including (of course) a growing number of Welsh speakers. A good place to start is Yr Hen Lyfrgell (The Old Library), a Welsh cultural centre that has a museum, shop, live Welsh entertainment, and a great café. In short, a really good place to come and soak up Welsh-speaking culture (with an excellent piece of cake). In a similar spirit, the annual Tafwyl festival, held in Cardiff city centre in early July, is a weekend celebration of music, comedy, sport, the arts, and life in general. It's an opportunity for Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers alike to get together and let their hair down, basically. www.visitcardiff.com, www.yrhenlyfrgell.wales, www.tafwyl.org





Cartograffeg gan Cosmographics
Cartography by Cosmographics

Map syfaenol drwy garedigrwydd CollinsBartholomew ©
Base map by kind permission of CollinsBartholomew ©

© Croeso Cymru - Llywodraeth Cynullaid
© Visit Wales - Welsh Government 2017

Notes

Front cover images:
Llangennith, Gower Peninsula
I Cook Thai, Cardiff
Surf Snowdonia, Dolgarrog
Puffin, Skomer Island
Morgan Arcade, Cardiff
Caerphilly Castle

Back cover images:
Plas Cadnant, Anglesey
St Davids Cathedral
Capel Curig, Snowdonia
Caldey Island, Pembrokeshire
Portmeirion, Gwynedd
Llyn Gwynant, Snowdonia

