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Let’s get going
Welcome to Wales and our 2016 Year of Adventure.

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Surf and turf
That’s what you get at the world’s first inland surfing lagoon. Find out more about adventures and activities in the hills, vales and mountains of our Great Outdoors here.

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The coast with the most
Nearly 1,000 miles (1,600km) of coastline, in fact – with a path all the way around, plus all kinds of aqua activities. Go on, splash out.

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A date with Doctor Who
And much more at Cardiff, our “back to the future”, buzzing capital city.

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Up the garden path
Our gardens and green spaces are absolutely gorgeous. Hardly surprising, really, since we’re carpeted with all that green, green grass of home.

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Over 600 and still counting
We’re unbeatable when it comes to castles. Start your count at our World Heritage Sites and romantic ruins.

Action plan
It all kicks off here – a run-down of what you’ll find on the pages of this guide and the start of your adventures in Wales.

Our 2016 Year of Adventure embraces all kinds of enriching, life-changing experiences, from high-adrenaline outdoor activities to exciting discoveries to be made when exploring Wales’s rich heritage and abundant wildlife.

Cover image—Penrhyneddewraeth, North Wales
I proudly carry my Welsh flag on all my expeditions, to some of the most remote and wonderful corners of our planet, yet it never fails to amaze me just how blessed we are here at home in Wales.

Richard Parks, extreme athlete
Wales: Where? On the south-western shores of the UK. One of Britain’s most pristine places, with a wealth of National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coast and Nature Reserves.

Wales: Why? You won’t want to miss high and mighty Snowdonia, the green, green grass of the Brecon Beacons or our stunning seashores (*Lonely Planet* rated coastal Wales as the best region in the world). Nor Cardiff, our cosmopolitan capital – a city of classical architecture, green spaces and a buzzing cultural scene. We have World Heritage Sites, International Dark Sky Reserves and everything under the sun when it comes to outdoor activities. All rounded off by the warmest of welcomes and a deep-rooted passion – we call it hwyl in Welsh, the oldest living language in Europe – we love sharing with visitors.

Wales: How? And – this is the best bit – we’re just two hours from London. We’re famous for our great food – everything from world-beating Welsh lamb and Black beef to fresh-off-the boat seafood. Not to mention an equally tasty choice of places to stay.

How about Roch, a castle perched on a rock? Or the magical Italianate village of Portmeirion? You can book into a genuine working farm or a National Trust property overlooking one of Britain’s favourite beaches (Rhossili, on the Gower Peninsula). There’s the pub – Browns of Laugharne – where Dylan Thomas used to drink (it’s much more comfy nowadays, but still full of character). Llangoe Hall, a leading – and supremely luxurious – country house hotel has strong links with Laura Ashley. And for something really different take yourself off to a “Little Red Gypsy Caravan” in our Mid Wales lake district.

And it all comes with genuine, from-the-heart hospitality, summed up nicely, we think, by one Welsh word: *croeso*, welcome.
04—Zip World, Snowdonia
05—Yurt, Graig Wen, Arthog
06—Portmeirion
07—Dolphin-spotting, Cardigan Bay
08—Coasteering, Pembrokeshire
09—Doctor Who Experience, Cardiff Bay
10—Worm's Head from Rhossili Down, Gower
11—Llyn y Fan Fach, Black Mountain
12—BikePark Wales, Merthyr Tydfil
Adventure capital

This is Crib Goch. It’s famous throughout the mountaineering world as the most spectacular, and difficult, route up Snowdon – and nobody but experienced climbers, with all the right gear, and in the right weather, should dream of doing it. This is the birthplace of British rock climbing and Everest training, and deserves the utmost respect.
2016 is our Year of Adventure. But please don’t think this is a new thing for us.

We’re a small – but perfectly formed – country with a big sense of adventure. We’ve had it for a long time. Hardly surprising really, when you look at our mountains (the highest in the UK south of the remote Scottish Highlands). And explore our 870-mile (1,400km) coastline, a huge stretch of which is rated number two in the world by the National Geographic magazine.

We were good enough for the team that first conquered Mount Everest, who trained here in the 1950s amongst the crags, slabs and screes of the Snowdonia National Park. In the 1990s, modern mountain biking – think ride-of-your-life singletracks and rip-roaring rockfests – was conjured up in the forests of Wales.

It’s all got a little out of hand since.

On a scale of one to 10, our adventure and activity scene has been cranked up to eleven.

You might want to scale a waterfall. Underground, of course. Check.

Or fly by zip wire at 100mph (160kph) above a slate quarry. Check.

Or go surfing – not in the sea (that’s so yesterday), but in the heart of the country. Check.

We’re the UK’s outdoor activity capital. Choose one – go on, pick any activity you like – and it’s odds on that we’ll have it covered.

Alternative adventures too

But, again, please don’t think that our Year of Adventure is all about thrills, spills, mud, sweat and gears. Adventure travel in Wales also means discovering new and unusual places, watching wildlife, stargazing in our Dark Skies.

And having your own personal adventures and journeys of discovery in the realms of art and crafts, words and music.

So you can, in no particular order, watch dolphins and red kites, forage for edible plants and seaweed (dulse is sealicious, you know), and decamp to celebrations like the world-famous Hay Festival (Bill Clinton’s “Woodstock of the Mind”).

Or take a 2,000-year journey through time from the Romans to Doctor Who at Cardiff, our cosmopolitan capital (we’ll explain that one later).

Perhaps you’d prefer to release your inner artist on a painting weekend in Snowdonia (we provide the inspiration). Then there are all those castles to discover – a lifetime’s work, really, with over 600 to get around.

The adventure begins here.

Wales is where the adventure starts in 2016.

Bear Grylls, survival expert
We’re one of the greenest parts of Britain. You'll travel for mile after uninterrupted mile from north to south through a green tapestry of mountains, hills and valleys.
We're a country of farms and forests, hills and mountains, lakes, waterfalls and wildlife – in fact, over a quarter of Wales is protected by National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), nature and wildlife reserves.

There are also huge chunks of what we call "wild Wales", countryside dotted with small towns and villages where the pace of life is peaceful and people-friendly.

On these next few pages we'll tell you how to get active and adventurous amongst it all. But first, here's a brief overview:

**National and natural**

**Brecon Beacons National Park.** Big skies (and Dark Skies for stargazing), grassy mountains that roll across the landscape like giant green waves, and an unusual “Waterfall Country” of cascades, gorges and caves. www.breconbeacons.org

**Snowdonia National Park.** Our very own Rocky Mountains, rising to the highest peak in Southern Britain. A stunning coastline too, with sandy beaches, beautiful estuaries and dizzying sea-cliffs. www.eryri-npa.gov.uk

**Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB.** A breezy, exhilarating range of velvety smooth hills and verdant vales at the gateway to North Wales. www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk

**Wye Valley AONB.** Luxuriant woods and romantic riverbanks on the approach to South Wales. www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

**Heart of Wales and Mid Wales border country.** They are not in any National Park because they don’t need to be. Welcome to the timeless, unchanging face of Wales which still goes about its business in the traditional way – and where you can follow ancient drovers’ roads across the Cambrian Mountains, the lonely, lovely “roof of Wales”.

**Wild in the country.** See if you can spot ospreys and red kites (there’s no problem with sheep). And seek out the Snowdon lily, a rare arctic-alpine plant that survives amongst the crevices of the Cwm Idwal National Nature Reserve, North Wales. www.naturalresources.wales

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**Here's a taster of what you can get up to:**

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**Green for go**

Our adventure and activities scene is as varied as our landscape. Which means that you can go big (and bold) in the mountains of Snowdonia, be lazy (and laid-back) on the sleepy canals of Mid Wales. Or pump adrenaline on mountain bikes, get very wet when white-water rafting, or slip gently into a mix of country life and wildlife-watching.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk  
www.mbwales.com  
www.ukrafting.co.uk

**Fly by wire**

Snowdonia is home to Europe’s – and some of the world’s – largest, longest and fastest zip wire adventures. Zip World Velocity is billed as the “nearest you’ll come to flying”. You’ll reach speeds of over 100 miles (160 kilometres) per hour on the world’s fastest zip ride. Zip World Titan, Europe’s largest zip zone, serves up miles of aerial adrenaline on three different lines. Their names – Anarchy, Bedlam and Chaos – give you some idea of what to expect.

Zip World doesn’t do things by halves. Its latest venture is Zip World Caverns, the world’s largest fully underground zip line and adventure course. You can even go trampolining underground, bouncing on giant nets suspended in a cavern that’s twice the size of London’s St Paul’s Cathedral.

www.zipworld.co.uk  
www.bouncebelow.net

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01—Corn Du and Brecon Beacons from Upper Tawe Valley  
02—Cantilever Rock, Snowdonia  
03—Tryfan, Llyn Idwal and Llyn Ogwen, Ogwen Valley, Snowdonia  
04—Zip World Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog  

See overleaf for more adventurous experiences
Surfing Snowdonia-style

Snowdonia keeps breaking world records. Surf Snowdonia, the world’s first inland surfing lagoon, opened in 2015 to great acclaim. Why wait for the perfect wave when it’s guaranteed by revolutionary Wavegarden® technology? Experts can surf powerful 6ft (2m) waves, while beginners find their feet on gentler breaks. It’s a complete adventure destination, with an equally addictive “Crash and Splash” obstacle lagoon – all set in the green, gorgeous Conwy Valley.

www.surfsnowdonia.co.uk

Softly, softly

Though we have lots, you don’t have to climb our mountains. Gentle countryside strolls are a Welsh speciality – walks like the Mynydd Illtud Common trail from the Brecon Beacons National Park’s Visitor Centre, a grassy stroll with widescreen panoramas of the Beacons plus close-up encounters with ancient Celtic sites.

www.breconbeacons.org/walking

It’s the same when it comes to cycling. You can huff and puff on your own Tour de Wales, or freewheel through a country-wide network of easy, scenic, signposted routes that are traffic-light (or completely traffic-free).

www.sustrans.org.uk/wales
Arty ambles

We’ve inspired countless artists, poets and writers in our time. We’ll ignite your “green fuse” too – something that Dylan Thomas captured in words – when you follow in the poet’s footsteps on themed trails around the fields and lanes of Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. Actors Richard Burton, Sir Anthony Hopkins and Michael Sheen are other local heroes. They hail from the South Wales Valleys, once a source of the world’s coal, iron and steel – and also the source of the spirit and passion that fuelled their work (for Richard Burton Walking Trails go to www.visitnpt.co.uk).

And so it goes on. Contemporary artists and craftworkers have set up shop in studios throughout the country. Follow art trails like www.helfagelf.co.uk in North Wales and www.ceredigionarttrail.org.uk in the south.

Light my fire

Want to get back to nature and release your inner spirit? Then learn all about bushcraft in our wild Welsh countryside. Forage for food, build shelters, master the skills of firecraft and go native at centres from north to south (at places like www.beargrylssurvivalacademy.com, www.bushcraftcourses.co.uk, www.dryadbushcraft.co.uk, and www.shaggysheepwales.co.uk).
We’re surrounded by the sea... well, almost. Three of our four sides are coastal, a sandy, salty succession of beaches and bays, cliffs and coves.

We made history a few years back when Wales became the first country in the world to open a continuous coastal path, all 870 miles (1,400km) of it. The variety is astonishing, from the Victorian gem of Llandudno in the north (complete, of course, with pier and Punch and Judy), southwards along Cardigan Bay’s dolphin-friendly waters to Pembrokeshire (Britain’s only coastal National Park) and around to Swansea, Cardiff and Newport, our three cities by the sea.

As you would expect, coastal-based adventures and activities are equally varied – we’ll take a look at these on the next few pages. But first, here’s a seabird’s eye view of it all:
Island escapes

Go island-hopping in Pembrokeshire. On Caldey Island just offshore from Tenby there’s a Cistercian monastery open to visitors. Further along the coast, Skomer, Skokholm, Ramsey and Grassholm can all be visited by boat. Pack your binoculars, for they teem with wildlife – gannets (the world’s third largest colony) on Grassholm, Manx shearwaters on Skomer. In North Wales, Bardsey Island off the tip of the Llŷn Peninsula, once home to smugglers and saints, is another important nature reserve rich in wildlife.

www.caldey-island.co.uk
www.rspb.org.uk
www.welshwildlife.org
www.bardsey.org

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

The Park wraps itself around the tip of South-west Wales. We’ll let National Geographic sing its praises. The magazine named it one of the best places to visit in the world (number two in its Top 10, no less).

www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk

Wales Coast Path

Another respected international travel guide, Lonely Planet, said that our new path made Wales “the best destination on Earth”. “How better to truly appreciate the shape – and soul – of a nation?” it asked. Don’t worry. We don’t expect you to walk the entire length. There’s lots of advice on short walks, coastal highlights, beaches, etc on www.walescoastpath.gov.uk and the app www.walescoastapp.com.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

We have three protected coastal AONBs – the Isle of Anglesey and Llŷn Peninsula in the north, and the Gower Peninsula in the south.

www.visitanglesey.co.uk
www.ahne-llyn-aonb.org
www.visitswanseabay.com/destinations/gower-peninsula

01—Tenby harbour
02—Rhossili beach, Gower
03—Porth Wen, Isle of Anglesey
04—Westdale Bay, Pembrokeshire
05—Caldey Island, Pembrokeshire

Heritage Coastline

There’s a lot of this too – in places like Cardigan Bay where grassy farmlands sweep down to the sea, and the dramatic cliff-backed Glamorgan coast near Cardiff.

Making a splash

Our coastal adventures create big splashes and gentle ripples that will shake you up and calm you down. Jump in at the deep end off a cliff in Pembrokeshire. Or paddle in the shallows and collect shells (on Shell Island, where else?). Ride the surf on the Gower Peninsula or sit back and see how many dolphins you can spot on a boat trip from New Quay.

Aqua adventures

Where to start? Taking the plunge with coasteering, perhaps – the jumping off cliffs we mentioned above. Like mountain biking, we pioneered this adrenaline activity here in Wales. You’ll scramble over rocks to places where only seabirds and seals go – and you can do it with operators from north to south. Then there’s stand-up paddleboarding, the new big thing in watersports. Not forgetting surfing on our west-facing beaches, wakeboarding, windsurfing, water skiing and kayaking. See our website for details of accredited operators.

See overleaf for more adventurous experiences
Looking for your epic?
We think we’ve found it...

Three beside the sea

There are 870 miles (1,400km) to choose from on the Wales Coast Path. Here’s a flavour – three sandy ambles guaranteed to blow your socks off.

A fine romance. On the Isle of Anglesey in the north, Newborough’s beach is so vast there’s no danger of tripping over sandcastles. Savour the sensational views across to Snowdonia and the mighty castle at Caernarfon, built in medieval times by Edward I and now a World Heritage Site. For the ultimate romantic ramble come on 25 January (our Valentine’s Day) and visit the ruined church dedicated to St Dwynwen, Wales’s patron saint of lovers.

Bridge over tranquil waters. In Mid Wales, how about a walk beside the railway? That’s right, a railway. No need for concern. It’s the super-scenic Cambrian Coast line and you’ll be walking on Barmouth Bridge across the beautiful Mawddach Estuary where mountains tumble into the sea. It’s a heart-stopping coastal highlight.

Pilgrim’s way. In St David’s, Pembrokeshire, follow in the footsteps of Celtic saints along a rugged headland with inspiring views to Porthclais (where Wales’s patron saint is said to have been baptised) and the ancient religious shrine dedicated to St Non, mother of David. Look on it as more of a pilgrimage than a walk.
Peachy beaches

Ours come in all shapes and sizes. Pendine Sands on Carmarthen Bay is so big that it has been used for world land speed records. Mwnt on Cardigan Bay is small but perfectly formed – there’s even a tiny whitewashed church perched above the beach to complete the picture. Rhossili on the Gower Peninsula is a Welsh superstar, regularly winning “best beach” accolades in the media.

And at our two major seaside resorts in north and south – Llandudno and Tenby – they are so generous with their sands that they give you the choice of more than one beach in each case.

Many of our beaches – 40 at the last count, including those at Llandudno and Tenby – fly the Blue Flag, the international hallmark of top quality. www.blueflag.org

Snowdon’s arm

That’s what they call the Llyn Peninsula. Or sometimes the “Land’s End” of North Wales. Pointing its crooked finger into the Irish Sea for 30 miles (48km), it’s a westward-looking place with its own Celtic character. Towering cliffs and sheltered coves make up its coastline, along with little harbours and – at Pwllheli – one of Wales’s top marinas. www.hafanpwllheli.co.uk

Here are some Llyn Peninsula highlights:

Porth y Swnt, Aberdaron, the new National Trust visitor centre that serves as a gateway to Llyn’s culture and beauty. www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Nant Gwrtheyrn Welsh Language and Heritage Centre, Llithfaen. Based at a small, former quarrying village in an amazing location tucked away beneath sheer cliffs on the north coast. www.nantgwrtheyrn.org

Tŷ Coch, Porthdinllaen. You have to go. This waterfront inn has been called the “third best beach bar in the world”. It’s part of a picturesque village entirely protected by the National Trust. www.tycoch.co.uk

Porth-oer (known also as “Whistling Sands”). They are squeaky clean – quite literally, for they squeak or whistle beneath your feet (one of the few places in the world where this happens, along with the Booming Dunes in Namibia and the Eureka Dunes in Death Valley).

Adventures in travel

For more ideas on what to do and where to go on the coast please see the travel itineraries on pages 42/45.
City life

For more ideas on what to see and do in our capital city turn to the itinerary on page 55.
Cardiff – our buzzing capital – has been around for millennia, but it definitely isn’t showing its age. It’s a fresh, go-ahead city, beautifully balanced between past, present and future. History and heritage rub shoulders with art, culture and cosmopolitan city life – quite literally in the case of Cardiff’s 2,000-year-old castle, standing just a stone’s throw from world-class shopping (and world-class Impressionist art at the National Museum).

Throw in all those parks and gardens – it’s one of Britain’s greenest urban spaces – and an exciting new waterfront along Cardiff Bay and you’ll see why a recent survey rated Cardiff Britain’s number-one city for quality of life.

The compact city centre is easy to explore on foot, while 21st-century Cardiff Bay is just a short water taxi ride away. You’ll find urban adventures around every corner in our fun, welcoming city. Here are a few to get you started.

**Visit the Doctor**

Space- and time-travelling hero Doctor Who is one of the city’s most famous residents. The TV series – a big hit worldwide – is shot here in Cardiff, so Doctor devotees will recognise familiar locations. You can even take part in an interactive adventure with the Time Lord himself and see props and sets from the show at the Doctor Who Experience. www.doctorwho.tv/events/doctor-who-experience

**Shop till you drop**

For retail therapy Cardiff is just what the Doctor ordered. Our maze of canopied Victorian arcades – a unique city feature – are bursting with boutiques and speciality shops selling one-of-a-kind items. Alternatively, pick up a bargain – everything from fresh fish and fruit to vinyl records and antiques – at the bustling covered market, a much-loved landmark. Or indulge in designer brand purchases at glitzy St David’s Centre. www.stdavidscardiff.com

**See super structures**

Standing close together in the centre of town, Cardiff Castle and Principality Stadium bookend the city’s fascinating past and dynamic present. Starting life as a Roman fort and ending up as a glittering Victorian mansion dripping in wealthy detail, the castle has seen plenty of action over the years. State-of-the-art Principality Stadium sees battles of a different sort, when 74,500 passionate fans pack its stands for international rugby matches. The stadium also hosts big pop concerts and other major sporting events (including stellar contests like the upcoming 2017 Champions League soccer final). www.cardiffcastle.com www.principalitystadium.wales

**Take a bite of the city**

Treat your tastebuds to an adventure. Alongside a huge choice of cafés and restaurants serving cuisine from across the globe, you’ll find a thriving scene of street food and pop-up restaurants. Check out www.hangfiresmokehouse.com, www.gotbeef.co.uk and www.streetfoodcardiff.com. To make your meal a real event, wash it down with a drink in Cardiff’s craft beer quarter (located around Womanby Street, just across the road from Principality Stadium).

**Be a culture vulture**

Housed in our elegant neoclassical Civic Centre, the National Museum of Wales is an encyclopaedia set in stone (dazzling white Portland stone, in fact, echoing the style of Washington DC). It’s full of diverse – and surprising – treasures. Who would have thought it? The Welsh capital proudly displays the best collection of Impressionist art (Van Gogh, Cézanne, Monet, etc) outside Paris, along with Celtic jewellery and dinosaur skeletons straight out of Jurassic Park. You’ll also want to catch a show at the iconic Wales Millennium Centre, the gleaming bronze-domed arts venue that dominates the Cardiff Bay skyline. www.museumwales.ac.uk www.wmc.org.uk
You’ll find a bumper crop of green spaces blooming in every corner of our lush country.
Get started on your own garden trail with the following highlights.

Go wild

Historic Bodnant in Snowdonia is one of Britain’s most admired gardens. Its formal terraces are just part of its charms. Wild nature abounds in The Dell, a green oasis of untamed undergrowth and towering trees (including the UK’s tallest redwoods) along the banks of the burbling River Hiraethlyn.

Star feature. The famous Laburnum Arch is a 180ft (55m) curved walk. Come in late May/early June when it produces a magnificent cascade of long yellow flowers.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden
The comeback kid

On a hillside overlooking the Menai Strait – which separates the little island of Anglesey from the North Wales mainland – **Plas Cadnant** is a garden reborn. Forgotten and overgrown for the best part of a century, recent restoration work has returned much of this 200-acre (80ha) estate to its former glory.

**Star feature.** Three really, for it's three gardens for the price of one – a quirky walled garden, a secret valley garden with tumbling waterfalls and a woodland garden studded with dramatic rocky outcrops. 

www.plascadnantgardens.co.uk

The one-man band

Wales meets Holland at **Cae Hir Gardens**. Created by Dutch ex-pat Wil Akkermans using nothing but his bare hands and normal garden tools, this 6-acre (2.5ha) garden in Ceredigion is a spectacular achievement. Its intoxicating blend of wild and cultivated features is a testament to Wil's singular imagination.

**Star feature.** Difficult to choose. Cae Hir's freewheeling approach throws up surprises at every turn, from the watery bog garden to carefully sculpted plantings peppered with free-growing Welsh wildflowers.

www.caehirgardens.com

The Italian job

The Italianate terraces at **Powis Castle**, Welshpool bring a taste of the Med to rural Mid Wales. Promenade along them, taking in Powis's theatrical blend of exotic plants, classical sculptures and dramatic topiary hedges.

**Star feature.** The gardens' famous clipped yews are hedges on an epic scale. Almost 300 years old and measuring over 45ft (14m) in height, keeping these green giants in tip-top condition requires extreme gardening – and gardeners with a serious head for heights. 

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/powis-castle

The garden "lost in time"

Nestled in Carmarthenshire's Vale of Tywi, **Aberglasney** has inspired poets since 1477. Stroll through the intimate 10-acre (4.5ha) site, home to three walled gardens and a spectacular tunnel of yews, and you may feel like writing a few verses yourself.

**Star feature.** The tranquil Elizabethan cloister garden is a true one-of-a-kind. Reclaimed from thick undergrowth, it features the UK's only surviving example of a parapet walkway.

www.aberglasney.org

The big one

The **National Botanic Garden of Wales** (close to Aberglasney but very different) is an awe-inspiring mix of tradition and innovation. Explore the 200-year-old Double Walled Garden before feeling the heat in the Great Glasshouse. Designed by Sir Norman Foster, this 374ft (110m) dome is the largest single-span glasshouse in the world.

**Star feature.** Visit California, Australia, the Canary Islands, Chile, South Africa and the Mediterranean, all without leaving Wales. See rare and exotic plants from across the globe in the climate-controlled Great Glasshouse.

www.gardenofwales.org.uk

Garden trail

For more on gardens and green Wales follow the travel itinerary on pages 50/51.
Rock stars
Wales has more castles per square mile than any other country in the world – over 600 at the last count. Our famous fortresses aren’t dusty relics of a bygone age, but places where centuries of Welsh history vividly come to life.

World-class castles

Built by English king Edward I in the 13th century to pacify his noisy Welsh neighbours, the mighty northern fortresses at Beaumaris, Caernarfon, Conwy and Harlech are as impressive today as when they first opened for business. Little wonder these must-visit monuments are all UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Living history. Our age-old castles move with the times. Check out the new visitor centre at Harlech, a state-of-the-art facility that tells the site’s 800-year story through involving interactive exhibits and hi-tech displays.

Size matters

Caerphilly Castle, close to Cardiff, is a real heavyweight. Covering nearly 30 acres (12ha), it’s one of the biggest castles in Europe and the second largest in Britain (after Her Majesty the Queen’s pad at Windsor).

Living history. Caerphilly, like many of our fortresses, regularly stages events – mock battles, pageants, feasting and jousting – that relive the medieval period. At Caerphilly you’ll experience the sights, sounds and smells of the past, complete with battling knights and demonstrations of formidable, stone-throwing siege engines.

Local heros

Many of our castles were built by invaders seeking to subdue the Welsh. But there are plenty that are all our own work. Fortresses like Dolbadarn, overlooking the lake of Llyn Padarn in Snowdonia, and secluded Castell y Bere deep in the Mid Wales hills were built by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, Llywelyn the Great, prince of the ancient kingdom of Gwynedd.

Living history. Explore the lives of Wales’s native rulers at the Princes of Gwynedd exhibition in Conwy (www.visitsnowdonia.info/princes_of_gwynedd-202.aspx). This interactive display uses maps, documents and sound recordings that immerse you in the culture and conflicts of our country’s eventful past. For more on the many sites that tell the princes’ story go to: www.princesofgwynedd.info

New kids on the block

Castles like Cyfarthfa in the south (www.visitmerthyr.co.uk) and Penrhyn near Bangor in North Wales shine a light on more recent Welsh history. Built in the 19th century with Industrial Revolution fortunes made from coal, slate, iron and steel, these comparative newcomers are every bit as fascinating as their older cousins.

Living history. Huge neo-Norman Penrhyn Castle is packed with things to see and do. Venture “above stairs” to find a dazzling collection of art and artefacts, including a one-ton slate bed made for Queen Victoria. Then go below and see how the other half lived in the restored kitchen and stable blocks.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/penrhyn-castle

Perfectly placed

Carreg Cennen Castle’s perch on a rocky hilltop is the best seat in the house for breathtaking vistas of green Carmarthenshire countryside. Also in Carmarthenshire, lonely Llansteffan Castle’s setting is equally awe-inspiring. Here, you look out across sand and sea from a headland at the mouth of the River Tywi.

Living history (with a chill factor). See things from a different perspective at lofty Carreg Cennen by hiring a torch for an exciting underground exploration of the dark, damp cavern hidden beneath the foundations.

www.carregcennencastle.com

Adventures in travel

For more on Wales’s history and heritage turn to the travel itinerary on pages 48/49.
Meet the people

We asked four very different tourism businesses to give us their thoughts on what makes Wales special.

From the heart

Mick and Nia Taylor run Y Talbot at Tregaron. It's a famously warm, comfy and welcoming country inn at the heart of Wales – and also at the heart of the local community. www.ytalbot.com

“The 2016 Year of Adventure is a very good thing for us. We have lots of local knowledge – where to walk and cycle, what to see and do – and enjoy sharing it with guests. Because of our relatively isolated location and wild countryside, everything here is more of an adventure.

“It’s a cultural adventure too. We’re a Welsh country inn in a Welsh-speaking agricultural area. Y Talbot belongs to the local community as well as its visitors. Guests invariably remark on our warmth, friendliness and authenticity – we don’t go in for the ‘have a nice day’ approach. They also mention our big beds and power showers. And in the bar the locals are always very interested in chatting with everyone.

“Our personal adventures? Jumping in a pool under a waterfall on the Abergwesyn Pass, the old drovers’ road across the Cambrian Mountains (Nia). I’ll stick to cycling over it (Mick).”
Vineyard visits

Llanerch Vineyard in the lush Vale of Glamorgan near Cardiff offers award-winning wines, luxury accommodation and mouthwatering meals. Owner Ryan Davies likes to keep things personal. www.llanerch-vineyard.co.uk

“We try to add something new every year. Our big adventure for 2016 is the launch of guided tours of the vineyard and wine tastings – plus the opportunity to buy them and ask any questions.

“I pride myself on keeping everything as personal as possible and being front of house as much as I can. Visitors really respond to being able to meet the people behind the scenes. As well as attracting guests from all over the world, we’re also very plugged into our local community. Having that mix creates a really nice buzz.

“I’m a big extreme sports fan. I love kitesurfing on the beaches of West Wales, but our country has something for every kind of adventurer. There are attractions like Zip World and Surf Snowdonia, the vineyards and the metropolitan experiences of Cardiff. Wales is a comparatively small country, but it has incredible diversity.”

Approachable adventures

Action-packed Zip World in North Wales is home to Europe’s longest zip ride and the largest underground zipline adventure course on the globe, but for director Sean Taylor, it’s all about the welcome. www.zipworld.co.uk

“A lot of visitors don’t know what to expect when they come here, particularly with Zip World Caverns and Bounce Below. It’s hard to imagine what it’s like underground until you’re actually there. But when people see it for themselves, they’re just blown away.

“But there’s no point having the best adventure in the world if you haven’t got the best welcome. We are embedded in the community. Most of our staff are local Welsh speakers and many used to work in the quarry that is now Zip World.

“Everyone has a different take on adventure. It could be climbing the towers at Caernarfon Castle, white-water rafting on the River Tryweryn or coming to see us. You can do it all around here.”

The perfect flavour

Halen Môn sea salt makes its way from Wales to tables and kitchens worldwide. For founder Alison Lea-Wilson, the clear blue waters around the Isle of Anglesey provide inspiration, raw materials and a beautiful backdrop. www.halenmon.com

“The 2016 Year of Adventure is a great opportunity to showcase our sea salt. It’s perfect for adventurous taste buds.

“Making visitors feel welcome is really important to us. It’s like inviting someone into your home. The highlight of a visit here is the tutored salt tasting. Where else would you get to sit down and taste your way round different types of salts and learn what sets Halen Môn apart?

“My idea of an adventure is meeting someone unusual, eating or drinking something new, learning something that I will remember and talk about to my friends and family. In that respect, Wales is the perfect place. There’s a huge array of things to do, feel and taste, against a backdrop of incredible scenery and interesting people.”
Everything from tasty traditional dishes to cutting-edge contemporary cuisine, all inspired by the very best produce fresh from farm and fishing boat, green pastures and the wide blue yonder of our seas. Here’s a sample.

**Beef and lamb.** Two famous Welsh products, thanks to our lush grazing pastures. For extra-special taste choose Welsh Black beef (lean, marbled and full of flavour) and saltmarsh lamb (succulent, sweet and tender).

**Catch of the day.** Fresh salmon and sea-trout (known locally as sewin) come from our rivers, fishy and crustacean treats like lobster, sea bass, oysters and mussels from our seas.

**Cheese please.** Welsh artisan cheeses are handcrafted down on the farm – and award-winners at international competitions. Varieties include brie-style soft cheese, tasty Cheddars, crumbly Caerphilly and goats’ cheeses from suppliers like the Carmarthenshire Cheese Company in the south and the Snowdonia Cheese Company in the north.

**Water, wine and whisky.** Speciality Welsh waters like Tŷ Nant accompany fine dining in top restaurants from London to Los Angeles. Our single malt whisky from Penderyn Distillery earns rave reviews – even from the Scots – while Welsh vineyards produce excellent quality wines that have put Wales on the world map.

**It’s tea time.** There’s a long tradition of baking in Wales. Enjoy, as we say, “a nice cup of tea” and a welshcake (flavoured with spice and dried fruit and sprinkled with sugar), bara brith (a fruit cake) or crumbly slice of teisen lap. Mmm... delicious.

**From field to fork.** Fresh is best. It’s all on a plate at our farmers’ markets, farm shops and food festivals – honest, wholesome produce with minimum food miles and maximum taste. Markets are held from south to north at places like Abergavenny, Brecon, Carmarthen, Fishguard, Dolgellau and Mold.

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**A tasty tour**

Follow our food tour on pages 46/47. It takes in all things foodie, from cool cafés to hip, hot restaurants, local markets to food festivals. You’ll also find websites that link to what we have covered on this page.

01—Blaenavon Cheddar cheese matures underground at the Big Pit National Coal Museum
02—Conwy is famous for its mussels
03—Penderyn Whisky
Chefs under the grill

Bryan Webb, from Tyddyn Llan Country House near Corwen, is one of Wales’s most accomplished chefs, with a Michelin star to prove it.

www.tyddynllan.co.uk

What made you become a chef?

Bryan: I seemed to be OK at it from an early age. If not, I had always dreamt of being a radio DJ.
Will: I never wanted to be anything else.

What dish do you most enjoy cooking?

B: Good fresh ingredients, like wild bass with laverbread, roast grouse and bread sauce – and I never tire of cooking a good steak au poivre.
W: Sea bass is one of my all-time favourites to prepare and cook. Getting that perfect crispy skin and sweet, juicy flesh is so satisfying. Away from work I love to barbecue.

What’s your favourite local ingredient?

B: The local beef, lamb and pork, really good stuff.
W: Lobster from Caldey Island, which you can see from the restaurant. It’s up there with the best.

Any cooking tips for mere mortals like us?

B: Don’t work in a mess and make a list of what you are going to do before you start.
W: Get stuff done in advance. Preparation is everything – two-thirds of our work is done before service.

What’s your favourite place to eat in Wales (no, you can’t choose your own)?

B: The Walnut Tree, Abergavenny. Always has been.
W: Top Joes in Tenby. It’s a really laid-back pizza restaurant. Never had a bad meal there.

Away from the kitchen, how do you spend your time?

B: With my amazing wife Susan. We work so much together, so it’s great when we can take in culture, visit art galleries, museums and eat in different restaurants. I just love her company.
W: Exploring Pembrokeshire’s beautiful beaches with my wife. Monkstone, hidden away between Saundersfoot and Tenby, is our favourite. I’m also a keen amateur boxer.

Will Holland is head chef at Coast near Saundersfoot in Pembrokeshire, one of the newest stars on the Welsh culinary scene.

www.coastsaundersfoot.co.uk
Make yourself at home
We do things differently here in Wales. We have big, internationally branded hotels, of course. But our places to stay are mainly modestly sized and personally run (often personally owned too) – which means that you get the very best service from hosts who really care.

We’re famously friendly. Our hotels, guest accommodation, farmhouses and self-catering are known for their warmth of welcome. It’s friendliness that comes with fastidious standards. There’s individuality too. You can stay at an arty, luxury country hotel or eco-retreat, working farm or cossetting spa, centuries-old inn or cutting-edge boutiquey townhouse.

Here’s a snapshot of what to expect, with examples of places that have won Wales National Tourism Awards in the last few years.

Country comforts

Our country house hotels mix classic with contemporary, combining historic pedigrees with all modern comforts. Queen Victoria stayed at Ynyshir Hall near Machynlleth. From the outside it still looks the same, but the interior has been fashioned into an intimate little world of art and comfort, warmth and fine dining. Llangoed Hall between Brecon and Builth Wells is a country mansion transformed by the wealth and taste of the Laura Ashley fashion empire. www.ynyshirhall.co.uk www.llangoedhall.co.uk

Spas and sport

One exception to our “small is beautiful” rule is Celtic Manor Resort, Newport. As its name suggests, it’s a complete resort destination with world-class golf (remember The 2010 Ryder Cup?) and superb spa facilities. At St Bride’s Spa Hotel, Saundersfoot, you can luxuriate in the infinity pool set on a headland overlooking the harbour and Carmarthen Bay. www.celtic-manor.com www.stbridesspahotel.com

Self-catering in style

We have an exceptional choice of cottages and apartments that give you the freedom and flexibility to come and go as you please. Clydey Cottages in Pembrokeshire are a good example. Eighteenth-century farm buildings have been turned into 10 luxury cottages where old meets new in an harmonious blend of oak beams and sleek bathrooms, exposed stone walls and underfloor heating. At Plas Cadnant on the Isle of Anglesey there’s a choice of immaculate, stylish cottages rich in period detail set in an historic “secret garden”. www.clydeycottages.co.uk www.plascadnant.co.uk

And now for something completely different...

How can you resist something called Cosy Under Canvas? In a lovely woodland setting near Hay-on-Wye you’ll find eco-friendly geodomes and tents fully kitted out with comfy beds, fluffy rugs, snuggly sheepskins and wood-burning stoves. It’s all about enjoying nature and the outdoors without giving up on life’s luxuries. Similarly, Wye Valley Canoes, also near Hay, prove that bunkhouse accommodation doesn’t have to be rough-and-ready. Their “posh bunkhouse” has accommodation that puts many a hotel to shame. www.cosyundercanvas.co.uk www.wyevalleycanoes.co.uk
Fantastic Mr Dahl. Born in Cardiff in 1916, Roald Dahl left Wales as a teenage boy, exiled to boarding school. But Wales never left him. Wales represented home, happiness and holidays with his own children. A hundred years on, we’re welcoming him back for a year of unexpected pleasures.

www.literaturewales.org/roalddahl100
It's our big Year of Adventure, but great days out come in all shapes and sizes. Here are just a few ideas – check out our website for many more.
www.visitwales.com

01—Some of Roald Dahl's best-loved characters
02—Italian rugby supporter, Wales v Italy
03—St David's Day Parade, St David's
04—Cardiff Half Marathon, Wales Millennium Centre
05—Principality Stadium, Cardiff

ALL YEAR

Roald Dahl 100 Wales
The great storyteller was born in Cardiff in 1916, and Wales is running events throughout the year, all over the country, to celebrate Roald Dahl's centenary.
www.literaturewales.org

FEBRUARY

12 February
Six Nations Rugby, Cardiff, Wales v Scotland
Wales goes head to head with Scotland in the RBS Six Nations Championship. Soak up the unique atmosphere at the Principality Stadium. After the game, join the locals in one of Cardiff's bars or pubs for your own post match analysis.
www.principalitystadium.wales

18 March
Six Nations Rugby, Cardiff, Wales v Italy
www.principalitystadium.wales

26 March
World Half Marathon Championships, Cardiff
The 25,000-strong field allows amateurs to race alongside (or to be honest, quite far behind) the world's elite athletes. Our money's on the Kenyan chap.
www.cardiff2016.co.uk

MARCH

1 March
St David's Day Parade, Cardiff
To celebrate our patron saint's day there's a big parade through the centre of Cardiff, and plenty of festivals, concerts and street parties all over Wales. Wear a leek. Or daffodil. We're not picky.
www.stdavidsday.org

04—
APRIL

April (tbc)
Dark Skies Festival, Hay-on-Wye
The Brecon Beacons National Park is an International Dark Sky Reserve, where the night sky's staggering beauty is allowed to shine through. This weekend event brings experts to illuminate the experience.
www.darkskiesfestival.org

1 – 3 April
The Laugharne Weekend
Ian Rankin, Tracey Thorn, Brix Smith-Start, Mark Thomas and Alexei Sayle are the first names announced this year. Like the town itself, it's quirky brilliant, with the oddest (in a good way) assortment of literary and musical talent ever assembled in one place.
www.thelaugharneweekend.com

15 – 17 April
RHS Flower Show, Cardiff
Held in Bute Park against the backdrop of Cardiff Castle, the show provides an inspirational display of vibrant gardening floral delights and expert advice.
www.rhs.org.uk

29 April – 2 May
Talgarth Walking Festival
Guided walks in the unspoilt and stunning Brecon Beacons. Suitable for walkers of all ages and abilities. Some are suitable for dogs, too.
www.talgarthwalkingfestival.org

MAY

14 May
International Dylan Thomas Day, Pan-Wales
Under Milk Wood was first read on-stage in New York on this day, which is as good an excuse as any for throwing literary events, big and small, all over Wales.
www.literaturewales.org/dylan-day

21 – 22 May
Snowdonia Slateman Triathlon, Llanberis
There are two brutally brilliant triathlons this weekend: the Sprint and the Full. Or if you're utterly rock-hard, complete both and earn the coveted title of Slateman Savage, you nutter.
www.snowdoniaslateman.com

22 May
Velothon Wales, Cardiff
Road cycling has become massive in Wales. More than 20,000 signed up for the 2016 velethon before a date had even been announced. The route isn’t finalised, but expect around 87 miles (140km) of beautiful scenery and lung-busting climbs.
www.velothon-wales.co.uk
26 May – 5 June
Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye
Calling it a “book festival” doesn’t even come close to describing what goes on at this incredible gathering of the world’s greatest writers and thinkers. There are 900+ events over the 10 days, featuring politicians and poets, scientists and comedians, novelists and astronauts, economists and ecologists, musicians and philosophers – all coming together to kick around big ideas that will change the way you think forever. The format couldn’t be simpler: you turn up in a big tent and listen to these geniuses, and ask them questions. There’s also great food and drink, lovely scenery – and plenty of books, of course.
www.hayfestival.com

29 May
Welsh Open Stoneskimming Championships, Llanwrtyd Wells
Stoneskimming is the ancient art of bouncing stones as far as possible across water. The official world record is 88 skips, but a bloke who works with my mate Cenwyn’s brother did 142 the other day.
www.green-events.co.uk

29 – 30 May
Cowbridge Food & Drink Festival
Cowbridge is the Vale of Glamorgan’s most chi-chi, boutiquey town. Here it is at its most vibrant, with a weekend of culinary excellence and all-round family entertainment.
www.cowbridgefoodanddrink.org

JUNE

June – September
Cardiff Festival
It’s a long, hot summer of activity in the capital, with all kind of entertainment – including gigs, theatre, street entertainers, food festival, powerboating – gathered under the Festival banner.
www.cardiff-events.com/events

3 – 5 June
SSE Enterprise Wales Senior Open, Celtic Manor Resort, Newport
England’s Paul Wesselingh pipped our own Ian Woosnam to the 2015 title, after a superb 67 final round. But we forgive him, because he said such lovely things about Celtic Manor’s Roman Road Course and the warmth of the welcome.
www.celtic-manor.com/golf
www.europeantour.com

10 – 12 June
All Wales Boat Show, Pwllheli
A celebratory festival of all water-based activities, from wakeboarding to that luxury yacht we’ve been saving for by putting loose change in a big whisky bottle.
www.allwalesboatshow.com

11 – 13 June
Man v Horse, Llanwrtyd Wells
It began as a lively pub debate: which is quicker over mountain terrain – man or horse? So they devised a 22-mile (35km) race to find out. Man has beaten horse just twice in the event’s 35-year history, so we’re guessing the evidence points horsewardly.
www.green-events.co.uk

17 – 26 June
Gregynog Festival
This is simply one of the best classical festivals in Britain. It’s notably strong on early music, but in its illustrious history has premiered pieces by the likes of Gustav Holst and, more recently, his blondness Eric Whitacre.
www.gregynogfestival.org
25 June – 3 July
Pembrokeshire Fish Week Festival, various venues
You can get great seafood all year round in Pembrokeshire, but this is peak season, with more than 250 events celebrating the county’s great seafood and beautiful coastline.
www.pembrokeshirefishweek.co.uk

2 July
Fifth Royal London One-Day Cricket International, Cardiff
England v Sri Lanka
They may have had initial misgivings, but the “Barmy Army” (what we call the English cricket fans) has been wowed by the SSE SWALEC stadium’s superb hosting of England matches. The ground’s friendly, easy to reach – and Cardiff does look rather splendid from those blimp shots on the telly.
www.ecb.co.uk

5 – 10 July
Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, Llangollen
An extraordinary cultural celebration featuring 4,000 competitors from around the world in song, dance and music, and performances by the biggest singing stars. A Fringe event has also sprung up, taking place in the town a week later.
www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk

9 July
British Speedway Grand Prix, Cardiff
Cardiff’s Principality Stadium hosts its 15th consecutive Grand Prix. Basically, it’s four laps of the track, most of it spent going sideways, like the clappers, on bikes that don’t have brakes. Madmen.
www.speedwaygp.com

18 – 21 July
Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells
The daddy of all agricultural shows. We love tip-toeing through the livestock sheds (mind that bull), but the zillions of craft stalls, food hall and exhibitions bring in herds of non-farmers and tourists, too. Deservedly so – this is the heartbeat of rural Wales at its most lively.
www.rwas.wales
29 – 31 July
Big Cheese Festival, Caerphilly
Caerphilly’s whopping castle is the hub of this mighty shindig that celebrates history, heritage and culture. Good family fun, basically.
www.visitcaerphilly.com

29 July – 6 August
National Eisteddfod of Wales, Abergavenny
Wales’s biggest arts festival is also its oldest, tracing its roots back to the year 1176. It’s an eclectic mix of old and new, traditional and modern, and a celebration of Wales’s culture and language. You don’t have to speak (or be) Welsh to enjoy the spectacle of an old language having very contemporary fun.
www.eisteddfod.org.uk

AUGUST

9 – 10 August
Anglesey County Show, Holyhead
Anglesey was once the bread-basket of Wales, and the biggest two-day agricultural show in Wales has more than 350 trade stands, entertainment marquee and lots of country pursuits.
www.angleseyshow.org.uk

13 August
Pride Cymru, Cardiff
The city-centre Parade kicks off a day of live music that ends with an unmissable After Party. It’s the biggest and best LGBT bash in the calendar.
www.pridecymru.co.uk

18 – 21 August
Green Man Festival, Crickhowell
Green Man was founded in 2003 as a one-day campfire folk event, and still stands out proudly in the left-field. It’s bigger – around 20,000 capacity these days – but still inhabits its own glorious alternative universe. The setting is gorgeous, and there’s the sheer diversity of entertainment: 10 areas, 1,500 performers, 24-hour events, comedy, poetry, literature, wildlife walks – and some of the best music around, from cutting-edge contemporary stars to venerable legends.
www.greenman.net

20 August
Race the Train, Tywyn
The narrow-gauge Talyllyn steam train is the pace-maker at this fabulous multi-terrain race. There are several options, from the Toddlers Trot (a lap of the field) to the full 14-miler (23km), which the train can usually manage in about 1hr 48min.
www.racethetrain.com

06— Royal Welsh Show, Builth Wells
07— Pride Cymru, Cardiff
08— Battle re-enactment, Big Cheese Festival, Caerphilly
10— Talyllyn Railway, Tywyn
28 August
World Bog Snorkelling Championship, Llanwrtyd Wells
We love the wilful idiocy of Llanwrtyd Wells events. Now in its 31st year, daring competitors battle it out in a 197ft (60m) trench cut into a peat bog for the coveted title of World Champion Bog Snorkeller.
www.green-events.co.uk

SEPTEMBER

1–4 September
Festival No. 6, Portmeirion
This intimate weekend of music, arts and culture is set in and around the most stunning festival site you will ever see. Grace Jones, Belle & Sebastian, Pet Shop Boys, Manic Street Preachers, Beck and My Bloody Valentine have been memorable headliners.
www.festivalnumber6.com

4 September
Fifth Royal London One–Day Cricket International, Cardiff
England v Pakistan
One–day international cricket at the SSE SWALEC stadium in the heart of Wales’s capital.
www.ecb.co.uk

17–18 September
Abergavenny Food Festival
This is one of the biggest events in the UK foodie calendar, with local produce and international delicacies, celebrity chefs, master classes, tastings and street stalls all on the menu.
www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com

17–18 September
City of the Unexpected (Roald Dahl), Cardiff
This is the big one: the flagship event of the Roald Dahl 100 celebrations. The entire capital city is a stage for large-scale spectacles, theatre and art, bringing Dahl’s works alive in surprising ways.
www.wmc.org.uk

18 September
Ironman Wales, Pembrokeshire
A 2.4-mile (3.8km) swim, a 112-mile (180km) cycle, followed by a marathon, with only 17 hours to complete it all. Just an average Sunday, really.
www.ironmanwales.com

OCTOBER

October (tbc)
Anglesey Oyster & Welsh Produce Festival, Trearddur Bay
It started as an informal event where locals would gather to eat oysters and get merry, but now shows off all kinds of excellent local produce.
www.angleseyoysterfestival.com

23–24 October
Gwledd Conwy Feast, Conwy
Conwy’s always a great place to visit, but this weekend sees one of the biggest celebrations of the music, art and food of Wales. The quayside, the castle and medieval streets burst with flavours, sounds and sights.
www.gwleddconwyfeast.co.uk
27 October – 9 November
Dylan Thomas Festival, Swansea
After the global hoo-hah of Dylan Thomas’s 2015 centenary, Swansea settles back down to enjoy this excellent annual literary festival, inspired by our most famous poet.
www.dylanthomas.com

28 – 30 October
Wales Rally GB
The British leg of the FIA World Rally Championship has been based in Wales since 2000. We confidently expect a Finnish man to be driving at warp speed through a dark forest in late October.
www.walesrallygb.com

NOVEMBER

November – January
Christmas in Cardiff
Lots of events fall under the Christmas in Cardiff banner, from panto to ballet. Cardiff Winter Wonderland in the Civic Centre has ice-skating and rides, mulled wine and roasted chestnuts.
www.cardiff-events.com
www.cardiffwinterwonderland.com

DECEMBER

Throughout December
Santa Steam Specials
There are 11 steam railways in the Great Little Trains fleet, and most run Santa Specials during the Christmas season.
www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk

All information is correct as we go to press, but plans can change, so do check the websites for up-to-date information.
Adventure travel

Our suggested travel itineraries start here. On the next 20 pages you will find detailed day-by-day itineraries with overnight stops and relevant websites. Based on various themes – countryside, wildlife, coast, castles and so on – they range from a few days to a whole week. But please don’t think you have to follow them to the letter.

You can easily mix and match the various itineraries to create your own personal tour or tours, combining, for example, visits to farm shops (from the food-based itinerary) with a walk along the Wales Coast Path (from our coastal-based tours).

Obviously, there’s no way we could fit everything into the 10 travel itineraries featured here. So use these tours for inspiration, and seek out other parts of Wales on your travels. It’s all part of the adventure.
Bite-sized Beacons

Here’s a two-night/three-day taster of the Brecon Beacons National Park. It’s known as our “Great Outdoors”, so come prepared for an active time. Even so, you’ll only scratch the surface, for the Park covers a whopping 520 square miles (1,347 square kilometres) and contains the highest mountains in South Wales. You’ll just have to come back again.

www.breconbeacons.org
Start at **Abergavenny**, the prosperous market town at the eastern gateway to the National Park. Head up the beautiful Usk Valley for a few miles to **Crickhowell** – it’s charming and chic, with enticing speciality shopping and the chance to climb Crug Hywel (so now you know where the town’s English name comes from). The summit of Crug Hywel (“Howell’s Fort”, named after a Celtic chieftain) commands far-reaching views from the Wales/England border deep into the heart of the country.

The nearby **Llangorse Multi-Activity Centre** certainly lives up to its name. You can ride horses or zip wires, take a tree-tops challenge on an aerial ropeway or – if it’s raining – go climbing on Wales’s only indoor natural rockface.

Then soak up the placid views from mountain-backed **Llangorse Lake**, or paddle your way across the largest natural lake in South Wales (boat hire is available).

**Overnight: Brecon**

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**Day two**

**Water and widescreen views**

The terminus of the **Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal** is just a short walk from Brecon’s handsome town centre (fans of Georgian architecture won’t be disappointed). The 35-mile (56km) waterway, which has been voted “Britain’s prettiest canal”, snakes lazily southwards through the National Park to Pontypool. You won’t have time to see it all but you can, at least, savour a glimpse on a short cruise or hire a self-drive boat for a few hours.

**www.breconbeacons.org/monmouthshire-brecon-canal**
**www.dragonfly-cruises.co.uk**

The **National Park’s Visitor Centre** at nearby Libanus is set on Mynydd Illtud, a high shelf of land with classic views across to Pen-y-fan, at 2,907ft (886m) the highest summit in South Wales. Or you might prefer to get up close and experience it for real by following the well-defined footpath to the top from **Storey Arms**.

**www.breconbeacons.org/national-park-visitor-centre**

**Overnight: Brecon**

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**Day three**

**Waterfalls and caves**

The Brecon Beacons springs a few surprises. As well as its abundant open spaces and big skies there’s a “**waterfall country**” of cascades, deep gorges and caves. Follow the footpath along the River Mellte south of the hamlet of Ystradfellte to a staircase of spectacular falls set amongst woods and gnarled rocks.

The rocks are limestone, which have weathered to form a maze of caves. You can peer into this vast underground world of tunnels, chambers, stalactites and stalagmites at the **National Showcaves Centre for Wales**, Abercraf – a subterranean antidote, perhaps, to all those open-air Beacons views.

**www.showcaves.co.uk**

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01—Abergavenny Castle
02—National Showcaves Centre for Wales, Abercraf
03—Llangorse Lake
04—Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal
05—Upper Clungwyn Falls
06—Canal art
07—Pen-y-fan and Corn Du, Brecon Beacons
08—River Usk, Crickhowell
Escape to the country

Countryside adventures and experiences in Wales can be full-on or laid-back, challenging or relaxing. Here’s a mix of ideas based on a seven-day itinerary from north to south.

Day one
Walking in the air

Start on a high with a walk along the “stream in the sky”. Pontcysyllte Aqueduct is a late 18th-century architectural masterpiece. Britain’s largest aqueduct and a World Heritage Site, it carries the Llangollen Canal across a broad vale. Canal boats and trips are available, so you can drift 150ft (45m) above the valley floor as well as walk on the path alongside.
www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk

Then make a bee-line for Betws-y-Coed at the gateway to the Snowdonia National Park. Catch the Snowdon Sherpa, the hop-on, hop-off bus service, for an afternoon trip into the mountains. Or get stuck in at the nearby Plas y Brenin National Mountain Sports Centre on a three-hour taster from a huge choice of adventure activities.
www.visitsnowdonia.info www.pyb.co.uk

If you’re visiting in October look out for the Snowdonia Marathon, one of Britain’s toughest and most scenic mountain races.
www.snowdoniamarathon.co.uk

Overnight: Betws-y-Coed

Day two
Treasure island

Caernarfon Castle never fails to impress – and intimidate. Tough and towering, it was built as a royal palace as well as military stronghold by King Edward I in his medieval campaign against Wales, a statement in stone of supremacy and power. Climb the towers and visit exhibitions and displays at this World Heritage Site for a glimpse into the struggles and strife of bygone times.
www.cadw.gov.wales

Cross the bridge over the Menai Strait to the Isle of Anglesey. Though just a stone’s throw from mountainous Snowdonia, it’s quite flat – except for Parys Mountain, where centuries of copper mining have transformed the landscape into a bizarre, rust-coloured moonscape (sci-fi filmmakers love it). The Copper Kingdom Centre at Amlwch sets the scene for this unworldly but unmissable place. It’s an incongruous spot, for in contrast to this blasted landscape the remainder of the island is rich in wildlife and natural beauty.
www.visitanglesey.co.uk www.copperkingdom.co.uk

Overnight: Llangefni
Day four
Birdwatching and more trainspotting

Ospreys are a rare sight. At the Dyfi Osprey Project you may be lucky to catch a glimpse of adults and their young (the birds are typically around from April to September). Even if you don’t, Cors Dyfi is a wonderful little nature reserve that teems with wildlife most of the year. www.dyfiospreyproject.com

You’re almost guaranteed to spot a red kite – the symbol of Mid Wales – from the Vale of Rheidol Railway. The Rheidol, operating from Aberystwyth, is one of the most charming of our many “great little trains”. It takes you to the mountain village of Devil’s Bridge, where there are more adventures as you explore the Victorians’ “dread chasm”, a gushing cascade set in a deep, narrow, wooded gorge. www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

www.devilsbridgefalls.co.uk

There’s more spectacular scenery on the Cwmystwyth road that traverses the wild Cambrian Mountains before looping around the Elan Valley lakes. www.elanvalley.org.uk

Overnight: Rhayader

Day five
Bogs and books

On the face of it, Llanwrtyd Wells seems a sleepy place. But appearances are deceptive. This former Victorian spa, reputedly the smallest town in Britain, has reinvented itself as the capital of wacky, off-the-wall festivals and events. How about a spot of bog snorkelling? The world championships are held here, in a ditch filled with peaty water that looks like stale beer – and tastes even worse. Other events include a man versus horse marathon (amazingly, homo sapiens sometimes wins), a stone skimming championship, mountain bike chariot racing and a Roman get-together (togas optional). There’s always something going on, including more conventional festivals based on walking and cycling. www.green-events.co.uk

Hay-on-Wye is another famous little Welsh town. Known the world over as the “town of books”, it stages an early summer festival that attracts stellar names in literature, politics, entertainment and the arts (Bill Clinton baptised it the “Woodstock of the Mind”). 2016’s festival takes place 26 May–5 June, but Hay is worth visiting at any time of the year. The streets and alleyways are crammed with bookshops selling everything from antiquarian tomes to bargain paperbacks, as well as shops specialising in fashion, crafts and antiques. www.hayfestival.org

Overnight: Hay-on-Wye

Day six
Paddles and saddles

It’s a short drive from Hay to Glasbury, where you’ll pick up your Canadian canoe or kayak for a morning’s paddle along an idyllic stretch of the River Wye. Why is the Wye Britain’s favourite river (please forgive the pun)? You’ll soon find out.

In the afternoon go pony trekking in the Brecon Beacons. Wales was made for horse riding. Thousands of miles of bridlepaths take you from valley floor to mountain high. Local operators include the Cantref Horse Riding Centre. For the full picture go to www.breconbeacons.org/horse-riding-pony-trekking

Overnight: Brecon

Day seven
Mountain bikes and medieval ruins

Modern mountain biking in Britain, using forests and hand-made trails, began in Wales. The newest of our many centres is BikePark Wales in the hills of the South Wales Valleys. It’s a complete centre, with a network of specially created trails for riders of all abilities, a bike hire shop, cool café – and, if you don’t fancy the uphill bit, transport for you and your bike to the top. www.bikeparkwales.com

We said at the start that adventures here range from extreme to serene. End your trip at Tintern Abbey, the soaring medieval ruin beside the River Wye that has inspired poets and painters for centuries. www.cadw.gov.wales
Go west

Here’s a five-day coastal journey. South-west Wales has been called a “peninsula of peninsulas”. Its coastline constantly changes, twisting, turning and diving restlessly into the sea in a flow of beaches and bays, harbours and headlands. There’s an equally restless range of aquatic activities and experiences on offer – coasteering, surfing and sailing to name just three. But you can also take it easy by spotting seabirds, seals and dolphins, and following literary, arty and spiritual trails.

Day one
Baywatching

From Swansea drive beside “a long and splendid curving shore”. That’s how local hero Dylan Thomas described Swansea Bay. In no time you’re in The Mumbles, the trendy little resort and sailing centre (Catherine Zeta-Jones has a house here) at the gateway to the Gower Peninsula. It was the first part of Britain to be declared an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. You’ll soon see why when you arrive at Three Cliffs Bay, rated as having “Britain’s best view”. Better still, go surfing. Gower is a magnet for surfers, with an excellent choice of surfing centres for all levels of experience. And if your travel plans allow, try to catch one of its sensational sunsets.

www.visitswanseabay.com

The beach goes on – and on – along Carmarthen Bay. Don’t be misled by Pembrey Country Park’s name. Yes, it has “country” in the form of grasslands and pine forest, but its number-one feature is Wales’s number-one beach (in terms of size, at least). Cefn Sidan Sands is almost Saharan in scale, stretching for seven miles (11km). For breezy beach walks with breathtaking views it’s hard to beat.

www.discovercarmarthenshire.com

Then it’s on to Laugharne, where Dylan Thomas famously “got off the bus and forgot to get on again”. You’ll feel the same way when you walk along the lane to Dylan’s Boathouse home, which nowadays celebrates his life and work.

www.dylanthomasboathouse.com

Overnight: Laugharne

Day two
Into the National Park

The neighbouring resorts of Saundersfoot and Tenby are at the southern gateway to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, one of Europe’s finest stretches of coastal natural beauty.

www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk
www.visitpembrokeshire.com

Tenby, with its steep-sided harbour, candy-coloured Georgian houses and narrow medieval streets, is Pembrokeshire’s most popular base. It’s a charming little resort, with award-winning beaches and a period charm undimmed by the passage of time. Writing today, we can’t improve on this 19th-century description of Tenby as a resort “whose every view is picturesque in the extreme”.

Boat trips are almost compulsory in South-west Wales, so sail across to Caldey Island (it takes less than half-an-hour). Walk to the lighthouse, watch seals on the rocks below and visit the abbey where Cistercian monks respect a vow a silence and busy themselves making perfume and chocolate.

www.caldey-island.co.uk

Coastal walking is definitely a Pembrokeshire must-do. Follow the coast path from Lydstep around the rugged headland to the sands at Manorbier – and, as a bonus, visit beach-side Manorbier Castle, dubbed “the pleasantest spot in Wales”.

www.manorbiercastle.co.uk

Overnight: Tenby
Day three
The essence of Pembrokeshire

Bosherston is a pocket of intense beauty and interest. Within a few miles you will find almost everything that makes Pembrokeshire special - spectacular dune and cliff walking along to Stackpole Head, secluded Stackpole Quay, two world-class beaches (Broad Haven and Barafundle), a rich wildlife (sea thrift at your feet, seabirds in the air) and Christian heritage at tiny, quirky St Govan’s Chapel in a remarkable location hidden amongst sea rocks. And that’s before you explore the lovely Bosherston Lakes, three long fingers of land created in the late 18th century as part of a country estate.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stackpole

Drive to another Broad Haven - a small resort located in the far west - then along St Bride’s Bay to Newgale. The surf is perfect here, so it’s a good place to try your hand at SUP (stand-up paddleboarding, the latest watersports craze). Apparently, it’s easier than normal surfing since you are already upright. So they say.

Overnight: St David’s

Day four
Pilgrim’s progress

St David’s is Britain’s smallest, most evocative city. Its cathedral, in a grassy hollow, was founded by Wales’s patron saint. Two pilgrimages to St David’s equalled one to Rome. So St David’s is used to welcoming walkers. And artists. And wildlife watchers. And foodies and foragers. And swimmers, surfers and coasteers. And anyone wanting to bask in the deeply Celtic, palpably spiritual aura that surrounds this siren-like mini-city and its beautiful little peninsula, fringed by an uplifting stretch of the Pembrokeshire (and Wales) Coast Path.

But first, get your bearings by calling into Oriel y Parc, the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park’s eco-conscious visitor centre and art gallery. Then take your pick from the activities mentioned above – and end your day thoroughly revived.

www.orielyparc.co.uk

Overnight: Cardigan

Day five
Cardigan Bay beckons

You have now left the National Park but you wouldn’t know it. Cardigan Bay’s Heritage Coastline is equally pristine and picturesque. It’s time, we think, for another boat trip. Venture out into the blue yonder on a trip from New Quay to waters renowned for their populations of bottlenose dolphins (Europe's largest), porpoises and seals. Landlubbers can stick to terra firma and visit Cardigan Bay Sea Quest, a marine wildlife centre that takes you – via virtual reality diving goggles – beneath the waves without getting wet.

www.discoverceredigion.co.uk
www.welshwildlife.org

Call into Aberaeron – it’s a smart haven for boats, foodies and lovers of Georgian-style architecture – before completing the southern stretch of Cardigan Bay at Aberystwyth, the resort-cum-university town that serves as Mid Wales’s unofficial “capital”. There’s a lot to do here. For an overview, walk up the 430ft (131m) Constitution Hill that soars skywards from the end of the promenade. Or, if you’re feeling lazy after the last few days, take the Cliff Railway, a “conveyance of gentlefolk” since 1896.

www.aberystwythcliffrailway.co.uk

Then visit the National Library of Wales. It’s not just about books, even though there are millions here. The library is a complete cultural centre and gallery, where you can trace your ancestry, see exhibitions and browse digital archives.

www.llgc.org.uk

Overnight: Aberystwyth
Anglesey from all angles

This three-day tour takes you around the Isle of Anglesey. It’s very scenic – the entire 125-mile (201km) coast is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, dotted with small resorts and sandy beaches. You’ll enjoy watersports, walking and golf, and also be kept busy discovering the island’s remarkable wealth of ancient monuments (a staggering 150). But it’s not all go. Anglesey is a restful place too, with unhurried experiences that match the overall mood of the island.

www.visitanglesey.co.uk

Day one
Strait and narrow

Cross over the Menai Strait from mainland North Wales on one of two bridges. Head for the stylish Georgian seatown and sailing resort of Beaumaris. Stroll along the pier before visiting its medieval castle, a World Heritage Site. Historians reckon it’s the most sophisticated of the 13th-century castles built by King Edward I in his campaign against the Welsh. You’ll see why when you walk the battlements and gaze down at its impregnable walls-within-walls defences. Look outwards and you are rewarded with inspiring water and mountain views.

www.cadw.gov.wales

Then it’s time for “The Blast”. It’s one of the white-knuckle RIB rides (that’s a rigid inflatable boat to you and me) available from Beaumaris along the Menai Strait (others depart from Menai Bridge and Holyhead).

If you don’t have sea-legs but still want to get up close to the Menai Strait then follow part of the around-island Anglesey Coastal Path westwards from Beaumaris along a wooded shoreline, passing beneath the Menai and Britannia Bridges if you walk far enough.

www.visitanglesey.co.uk

Overnight: Beaumaris

01—Menai Suspension Bridge
02—Beaumaris pier
03—Llanbadrig, near Cemaes
04—Bronze statue of Dic Evans (lifeboatman), Moelfre

www.visitanglesey.co.uk
Day two
Seabirds and shipwrecks

Drive along Anglesey’s east coast to Benllech and Red Wharf Bay, a vast sandy beach. Further north, Moelfre’s Seawatch Centre tells the story of shipwrecks, lifeboats and marine wildlife. There’s heritage on dry land too, in the shape of fascinating ancient sites like Lligwy Burial Chamber (with enormous 18ft/5.5m capstone) and Din Lligwy (a native village).
www.cadw.gov.wales

Drive via Cemaes, the most northerly village in Wales. Golfers won’t want to miss the chance of playing at Bull Bay, a testing 18-hole championship course laid out on a rugged headland with panoramic sea views.

Holyhead is a busy port with ferry links to Ireland. You’ll see ships coming and going from Holyhead Mountain, a rugged 722ft (220m) headland. It’s the perfect lookout point. South Stack Lighthouse, reached by 400 steps, commands stunning views of sea-cliffs and seabirds. Better still for birdwatchers is Ellin’s Tower, a Royal Society for the Protection of Birds visitor centre.
www.trinityhouse.co.uk
www.rspb.org.uk

Overnight: Trearddur Bay

Day three
On the beach, under the sea

Saddle up and ride along the sands from Anglesey Riding Centre at the western mouth of the Menai Strait. Then call into nearby Anglesey Sea Zoo. Wales’s biggest aquarium is very inventive in the way it recreates underwater habitats displaying local and exotic marine life.
www.angleseyridingcentre.co.uk
www.angleseyseazoo.co.uk

Plas Newydd is close by. This magnificent country house on the shores of the Menai Strait dates from the 18th century. Its treasure-filled interior contains the famous Rex Whistler mural, a colossal work of art 58ft (18m) long painted in the 1930s depicting an imaginary Italianate scene bathed in warmth and colour – just the thing if it’s raining outside.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Overnight: Menai Bridge
A flavour of Wales

Here’s a six-day taste of Wales, a tour of the entire country taking in food festivals and farm shops, fine dining restaurants and cosy, characterful inns.

Day one
The “golden triangle”

Head into Wales on the M4/M48 motorway. From Chepstow take the scenic A466 up the Wye Valley and call into the Old Station at Tintern. This former Victorian railway station, a top-rated tea room, serves tasty treats like freshly baked cakes and home-made soups. You’ll also find visitor information and railway memorabilia.

www.tinternvillage.co.uk

You are now entering our “golden triangle” of good taste, roughly defined by the towns of Monmouth, Crickhowell and Usk. The food revolution began in Wales in the 1960s at The Walnut Tree inn near Abergavenny. Inspired by the quality and flavour of our local produce, it has since spread to all corners of Wales. But its spirit remains especially strong in these rolling green hills. The Michelin-starred Walnut Tree is nowadays joined by a grand banquet of places to eat. During September’s famous Abergavenny Food Festival top chefs give masterclasses and the streets are crammed with all manner of food stalls.

www.thewalnuttreeinn.com
www.abergavennyfoodfestival.com

Overnight: Abergavenny

Day two
Bread from heaven, whisky (and welshcakes) from Wales

The Bakers’ Table at Talgarth is a living example of the way in which our rural communities have embraced good, wholesome food. Volunteers renovated the old watermill – take a tour, then tuck into delicious home-made and home-baked treats in the café and bakery (to echoes of the famous Welsh hymn Bread of Heaven perhaps). Ask about the “Miller’s Experience” days.

www.talgarthmill.com

We all know that the Scots are proud of their whisky. So are we. At the Penderyn Distillery you will find out why its single-malt whisky is recognised worldwide as one of the finest. It’s the “smoothest wisgi” (no translation needed), they say. Sample it on a tasting tour from the Visitor Centre.

www.welsh-whisky.co.uk

Drive down to Cardiff, where taste experiences mirror the cosmopolitan nature of our capital city. Cardiff’s eclectic dining scene embraces global street food and pop-up restaurants – and, at the more traditional end of the tasting menu, the wholesome welshcake, a time-honoured tea-time treat.
Restaurants and inns serving catch-of-the-day seafoods are sprinkled all along the coast – places like **The Griffin Inn**, Dale, where much of what you eat is caught by the **Griffin Girl**, the inn’s very own fishing boat.

www.griffinindindle.co.uk

**Overnight:** Dale or Haverfordwest

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**Day five**

**Shopping, sea salt and sophisticated dining**

Time to go shopping. Who need Harrods Food Hall when you have **Glasfryn Farm Shop** near Pwllheli? This rural emporium sells the best Welsh Black beef and Llŷn lamb (from the shop’s own estate) together with all kinds of fresh, local and seasonal produce. Then head to Caernarfon. **The Black Boy Inn**, in the shadow of Caernarfon’s mighty medieval castle, is everything you would expect of an historic hostelry dating from 1522, with oak beams, roaring fires and cozy nooks and crannies. It’s also famous for its food, and is a firm favourite with locals and visitors alike.

www.siop-glasfryn.com
www.black-boy-inn.com

There’s ordinary, run-of-the-mill salt. Then there’s the Rolls-Royce of salt from Anglesey. **Halen Môn Anglesey Sea Salt** is a must-have ingredient in top restaurants from London to Los Angeles. Take a behind-the-scenes tour from its new Visitor Centre in Brynsiencyn. End the day with some more delicious dining at **Signatures**, Conwy, which serves the finest modern British cuisine. It’s chic, cosmopolitan and cool, but with warm Welsh hospitality.

www.halenmon.com
www.signaturesrestaurant.co.uk

**Overnight:** Conwy

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**Day six**

**Two tasty valleys**

**Bodnant Welsh Food Centre**, in the heart of the beautiful Conwy Valley, showcases the very best of our foodie scene. Old farm buildings have been lovingly converted into a centre where you can buy farm-fresh produce and home-baked goodies, enjoy a snack or meal in the tea room or restaurant, and even brush up on your skills at a cookery school. Bodnant’s passion for food is contagious: nearby there’s **The Bee Inn**, recently named “the best pub to eat in Wales”.

www.bodnant-welshfood.co.uk
www.thebeeinn.co.uk

They also love their food on the **Rhug Estate**, Corwen – so much so that they opened a fabulous farm shop and café that sells produce from their organic farm and other quality suppliers. The focus is on Welsh, local and organic – and the ultimate in juicy burgers.

www.rhug.co.uk

From here, it’s a drive along another lovely valley – the Vale of Clwyd – following the **Clwydian Range Food Trail** to the Welsh border and Chester.

www.foodtrail.co.uk
Time travel

Take this six-day trip through thousands of years of Welsh history and heritage. Along the way you’ll find ancient castles, soaring cathedrals and living reminders of our industrial past.

Day one
Living history and “black gold”

There’s no better place to start your journey through Wales’s past than St Fagans National History Museum on the outskirts of Cardiff. Spread over 100 acres (40ha) of beautiful parkland are more than 40 historic buildings, transported stone-by-stone, timber-by-timber from all corners of the country to create a huge living museum. Mills, farmhouses and village workshops stand as reminders of Wales’s rural past, while a terraced row of ironworkers’ cottages transplanted from Merthyr Tydfil in the South Wales Valleys mark the arrival of industry.

www.museumwales.ac.uk/stfagans

Make a literal pit stop at Rhondda Heritage Park near Pontypridd as you strap on a lamp for the Underground Experience Tour guided by an ex-miner. You are in the shoes of colliers who once dug for “black gold” deep underground at this immersive experience, which gives a powerful insight into an industry that reshaped and revolutionised the previously pastoral South Wales Valleys. The story continues on the surface, with an indoor reconstruction of a typical Valleys village street.

www.rctbc.gov.uk

Overnight: Swansea

Day two
Fortress Wales

History is a little more ancient at 13th-century Kidwelly Castle, a few miles south of Carmarthen. Standing proud on the banks of the River Gwendraeth, this exceptionally well-preserved fortress is one of our hidden gems. We recommend arriving early enough to catch a glimpse of its rugged battlements emerging from the morning mist. It’s an unforgettable introduction to the 600-plus castles dotted across our landscape.

www.cadw.gov.wales

Perched in a dominant position above the estuary, Pembroke Castle is equally impressive. Founded by Norman invaders, it was the birthplace of Henry VII, founder of the all-powerful Tudor dynasty of monarchs. The castle’s strength and secure setting meant that it is one of few never to fall to Welsh attacks. Thankfully, access is much easier these days. Climb the Great Keep for far-reaching views of the Pembrokeshire countryside, explore a labyrinth of passageways and descend into Wogan Cavern, a large limestone cave beneath the castle walls.

www.pembroke-castle.co.uk

Overnight: Pembroke or Haverfordwest
Day three
A sacred (mini) city and a castle reborn

Next stop is St David's in the western reaches of Pembrokeshire, the smallest city in the UK. This settlement of less than 2,000 people owes its oversized status to purple-stoned St David's Cathedral, our most iconic religious site. Founded by Wales's patron saint, a church has stood here since the 6th century. It retains its spiritual charge to this day, radiating a siren-like quality that attracts worshippers, pilgrims and aficionados of ecclesiastical architecture.

www.stdavidscathedral.org.uk

Rescued from ruin by a huge restoration project, Cardigan Castle recently opened its doors to the public for the first time in 900 years. While its fortified exterior remains unmistakably medieval, within the walls the castle tells the story of its entire multi-century history. Alongside a 9ft (3m) Eisteddfod Chair commemorating the very first national eisteddfod (held here in 1176), you’ll find lush Regency gardens and elegant Georgian architecture.

www.cardigancastle.com

Overnight: Cardigan (stay in Cardigan Castle's own luxury accommodation for a truly historic holiday)

Day four
Classic Ceredigion and an amazing archive

With the clear blue waters of Cardigan Bay at your side, strike a course for North Wales. On your way, stop off in the Victorian resort town of Aberystwyth and visit the Ceredigion Museum. The museum, in the town’s old music hall, tells the story of the region and its people through fascinating collections and artefacts, including a reconstruction of a Cardiganshire cottage from around 1850.

Also in town is the National Library of Wales, an incredible archive of documents, newspapers and photographs stretching back centuries. It’s a must-visit for amateur genealogists interested in tracking their Welsh heritage.

http://museum.ceredigion.gov.uk
www.llgc.org.uk

Drive on through Machynlleth, a handsome, historic coaching town where a 15th-century Welsh parliament was reputedly held, on into the Snowdonia National Park.

Overnight: Dolgellau or Porthmadog

Day five
Slate and stone

Like coal in the south, North Wales had its slate industry. The National Slate Museum at Llanberis revives a time when this part of Wales produced almost half a million tons of the stuff every year. It’s an authentic experience as you explore the Victorian workshops left just as they were when the workforce “clocked off” for the last time, and watch live slate-cutting demonstrations by quarrymen, many of whom worked here before the place became a museum.

www.museumwales.ac.uk/slate

Get to know a real historical heavyweight at Beaumaris Castle on the Isle of Anglesey. Even though this mighty fortress (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) was never fully completed, its unique concentric walls-within-walls layout was a high-tech innovation in 13th-century defensive design. With its sturdy round towers, deep moat and protected access to the sea, it’s still pretty awesome today.

www.cadw.gov.wales

Overnight: Llandudno

Day six
Wonderwalls – and a castle that kept growing through the ages

Another of North Wales’s World Heritage Site castles awaits in the historic harbour town of Conwy. Perched on a rock above the estuary, Conwy Castle is so well preserved you’d almost expect to see knights in armour patrolling its battlements. Ascend those battlements yourself for breathtaking views of the Snowdonia skyline. While you’re in town, take a walk with a difference along Conwy’s incredibly intact medieval walls. Stretching for around three-quarters of a mile (1.2km) and featuring 21 towers and three gateways, they encircle narrow streets crammed with centuries-old period buildings like Plas Mawr and Aberconwy House.

www.cadw.gov.wales

Complete your historical odyssey at Chirk Castle near Wrexham, close to the border between Wales and England. It’s the only one of Edward I’s 13th-century Welsh castles that is still lived in today. This long occupation makes it a fascinating time capsule, reflecting the evolution of castle design and centuries of changing styles. From the medieval fortifications, through the 17th-century Long Gallery, 18th-century saloon hung with tapestries and 20th-century Bow Room, Chirk’s evolution links the ancient past and the present day. Part of that stark, dark past is a hideous dungeon ventilated only by two tiny slits in the walls.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk-castle

Overnight: Wrexham

01—St Fagans National History Museum
02—Rhonda Heritage Park
03—Kidwelly Castle
04—National Slate Museum, Llanberis
05—Reading room, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
06—Telford’s Suspension Bridge, Conwy Castle
Grass routes

When it comes to gardens, our reputation just keeps growing. Our famously green and lush landscape is dotted with beautifully sculpted ornamental spaces and woodlands, parks and country estates. This seven-day trip focuses on some of our lesser-known and hidden gardens. For descriptions of some of our major gardens see pages 18/19.

Fertile history
Made up of seven gorgeous green spaces around South and West Wales (including timewarp Aberglasney and Dylan Thomas’s old stomping ground Cwmdonkin Park), the One Historic Garden project makes an excellent alternative itinerary for visitors on a tighter schedule.
www.onehistoricgarden.co.uk

Day one
Contemporary and classical garden styles

Start out close to the border between Wales and England at the cool, contemporary Veddw House Garden. Lush green is just one of the colours in award-winning Veddw’s dazzling palette – a multi-hued spread that includes rich purple and sparkling silver. Combining meticulously laid-out features with wildflower-strewn meadows and swaying collections of ornamental grasses, Veddw is an inspiring and endlessly inventive introduction to our glorious gardens.
www.veddw.com

Head west past capital city Cardiff and you’ll find Dyffryn Gardens, recently reborn following a multi-million-pound makeover. Covering more than 55 acres (22ha) in the fertile Vale of Glamorgan, its formal lawns, intimate garden rooms and seasonal beds are an extravagant example of classical Edwardian design. There’s also a fascinating arboretum housing trees from all over the world.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dyffryn-gardens

Overnight: Cardiff

Day two
Medicinal marvels and wild woodland

A few miles outside Cardiff lies the Cowbridge Physic Garden. Although only a comparatively small half an acre (0.2ha), this hidden gem is unusual enough to warrant a visit. Populated with plants and herbs valued for their medicinal uses, it’s a beautifully restored time capsule of an age when such gardens were a common feature in monasteries and large estates.
www.cowbridgephysicgarden.org.uk

Wild Penllergare offers a sharp contrast to its more sculpted peers. Set in a steep valley on the outskirts of Swansea, its 260 acres (105ha) of woodland and waterfalls are home to more than seven miles (11km) of paths and tracks. Despite its untamed appearance, Penllergare is a designed landscape, created in the 19th century and only recently restored from ruin. It’s also one of the seven Welsh gardens that form the One Historic Garden project (see “Fertile history” box).
www.penllergare.org

Overnight: Swansea

Day three
Towering trees and rare rhododendrons

Pushing on into Pembrokeshire, home to the UK’s first coastal National Park, you’ll reach Colby Woodland Gardens, Amroth. Along with tranquil walled gardens and woody walks amongst towering Japanese maples, you can glimpse some of the stunning sea views for which this area is famous.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/colby-woodland-garden

The 40-acre (16ha) grounds of 13th-century Picton Castle near Haverfordwest are home to one of the finest plant collections in Wales. Alongside rare conifers and roses are several species of rhododendron unique...
to Picton. Visit in late spring/early summer to see their striking colours in full bloom.
www.pictoncastle.co.uk

Overnight: Haverfordwest or Cardigan

Day four
Classic country life

Built in 1795, Llanerchaeron near Aberaeron is a rare example of a self-sufficient “gentleman’s estate”. Not much has changed here since the 18th century. Pick up fresh seasonal produce grown in the walled kitchen gardens, see pigs, lambs and cows on the working farm and spot wildlife on the banks of the ornamental lake.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/llanerchaeron

Inspired by the Picturesque landscape design principles of the Georgian era, Hafod Estate near Aberystwyth has been a tourist destination for more than 200 years. This spectacular 495-acre (200ha) landscape of exotic trees and country walks in an unlikely location on the shoulder of the Cambrian Mountains is one Wales’s most evocative hidden green gems.
www.hafod.org

Overnight: Aberystwyth

Day five
Inspired flights of fancy

The fantasy village of Portmeirion is famous for its out-of-this-world Mediterranean architecture, but its gardens are just as surprising. Despite being located in the shadow of alpine Snowdon, Portmeirion’s mild microclimate makes it the perfect home for a rich tangle of exotic plants and trees traditionally found in much warmer climes.
www.portmeirion-village.com

Not far away you’ll find Plas Brondanw. The home of Portmeirion’s architect Sir Clough Williams-Ellis for more than 70 years, it is every bit as spectacular as its more famous neighbour. Inspired by the gardens of renaissance Italy, its terraces, topiary and tree-lined avenues are a masterclass of creative landscape design. The views over Snowdonia are pretty good too.
www.plasbrondanw.com

Overnight: Portmeirion

Day six
On the waterfront

Head over to Plas Newydd on the Isle of Anglesey. Set on the banks of the Menai Strait, the grounds of this elegant stately home are a delight regardless of the season. You’ll find idyllic woodland walks, a spring garden, Australasian arboretum, Italianate-style summer terrace, rhododendron garden and massed hydrangeas that explode with colour during autumn.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/plas-newydd-house-and-gardens

OK, so it’s not really a garden, but Great Orme is undoubtedly one of our most striking green spaces. The limestone headland in the resort town of Llandudno has remained virtually unchanged since the last Ice Age and provides a vital habitat for a range of arctic flora. Ride the cable car (the longest in the UK) to the summit for a bird’s-eye view.
www.visitllandudno.org.uk

Overnight: Llandudno

Day seven
Time travelling historic gardens

Explore 1,200 acres (485ha) of park, woodland and formal gardens at Erddig near Wrexham. While you’re there, learn about the lives of the staff who once ran this impressive stately home – perfect for fans of Downton Abbey. For a different perspective, take a scenic carriage ride through Erddig’s extensive woodland (and get to know the horses Jerry and Claire).
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig

Wrap up your garden odyssey at Glansevern Hall, close to Welshpool on the border between England and Wales. There’s extraordinary variety packed into the 25-acre (10ha) site, with a Georgian walled garden split into separate “rooms”, a Victorian grotto and rockery hidden behind a heavy oak door and cascading water garden among its many attractions.
www.glansevern.co.uk

Overnight: Welshpool
Wales in a week

We’re a “little/big” country. Let us explain. Wales might only measure 150 miles (241km) from north to south, but it packs in a mighty big range of places to visit. Our 600-plus castles are just the start of it all. We’re full of seaside resorts and country towns, National Parks and nature reserves, and all kinds of visitor attractions. Not to mention some of the most scenic roads on the planet and an 870-mile (1,400km) continuous coastal path, a world’s first. Although you won’t see it all in a week, this itinerary is a full-flavoured taster.

Day one
An historic gateway

Drive into Wales via Chepstow. Wales, “the land of castles” starts here – in more ways than one. Chepstow Castle is reckoned to be Britain’s first stone-built fortress. Dating from 1067, it’s a model for the way in which military architecture evolved over the following centuries. The battlement views are something special too. www.cadw.gov.wales

They look over the lazy Wye, the river you follow northwards along the snaking, seductive Wye Valley – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – to Monmouth, another historic town with a rare fortified medieval bridge, ruined castle where Henry V was born, and statue to famous son Charles Rolls, co-founder of Rolls-Royce fame. www.wyevalleyaonb.org.uk

Overnight: Abergavenny (at the approach to the Brecon Beacons National Park – see the Beacons travel itinerary on pages 38/39)

Day two
Coal and cosmopolitan Cardiff

The South Wales Valleys are green again, but they have not forgotten their harsh, heroic past. They bore the full brunt of the tumultuous Industrial Revolution when iron and coal (“black gold”) poured out of their furnaces and mines. Blaenavon, a World Heritage Site, reveals the full picture. You’ll see how the workers lived and toiled at the town’s preserved Ironworks. More memorable still is Big Pit National Coal Museum, with underground mine tours. Like other National Museums in Wales, admission is free. www.cadw.gov.wales www.museumwales.ac.uk/bigpit

“Black gold” was responsible for Cardiff’s growth too, though nowadays our capital city is a gleaming, go-ahead place with a youthful vibe, reborn waterfront and generous swathes of green spaces. See the Cardiff itinerary on page 55.

Overnight: Cardiff
Day three
Beside the sea from Swansea

Swansea is a bright and breezy mix of traditional and modern. Its covered market – one of the best in Wales – sells all manner of local delicacies, including crumbly welshcakes and laverbread (a puréed seaweed that tastes much better than it looks – try it). It’s only a stone’s throw from the city’s redeveloped – and very smart – maritime quarter, marina and the sands of Swansea Bay.

The city’s many highlights include plentiful memories of poet Dylan Thomas, its most famous son. There’s also the National Waterfront Museum, which focuses on innovation and industry in Wales over the last 300 years. It’s innovative in its own right by using cutting-edge interactive technology to tell the tale. www.visitswanseabay.com
www.museumwales.ac.uk/swansea

Drive on to the Gower Peninsula, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Go to Rhossili, its dramatic “land’s end” where cliffs (and hang-gliders and paragliders) soar above a vast beach. Then drive via Carmarthen to the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, one of Europe’s finest stretches of coastal natural beauty. As you would imagine, both Gower and Pembrokeshire are brimming with water-based activities – sailing, swimming, kayaking, surfing, etc. For more details see the dedicated coastal-based itinerary on pages 42/43.
www.visitswanseabay.com/destinations/gower-peninsula
www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk

Overnight: Saundersfoot

Day four
Into the heart of Wales

Head up to St David’s then along the rugged north coast, calling in at Porthgain, a quaint, quirky, rock-bound harbour where The Sloop Inn has been serving drinks for centuries. Pembrokeshire isn’t just about untouched coastline. Venture inland to the Preseli Hills, a smooth, grassy upland dotted with haunting prehistoric sites. Don’t miss Pentre Ifan Cromlech, a skeletal burial chamber near Newport, constructed from the same Preseli “bluestones” that were inexplicably transported to Stonehenge nearly 200 miles (320km) away.
www.visitpembrokeshire.com

Stay on the Cardigan Bay coast road to Aberaeron, then head for the hills and Tregaron. You’re in the Welsh heartlands now (our version of Deep France, La France Profonde) amongst the untamed Cambrian Mountains. This is the “Wild Wales” that travel writer George Borrow described centuries ago – and it hasn’t changed much since. Call in at the Welsh Gold Centre to discover why the ore from Wales is so prized, then visit Cors Caron Nature Reserve, a rare example of water and marsh with an eerie beauty and rich wildlife. And look out for the Tregaron Walking Festival held in May.
www.rhiannon.co.uk
www.naturalresources.wales

Overnight: Tregaron

Day five
Wales meets Italy

Pontrhydfendigaid is home to Strata Florida Abbey, the medieval “Westminster Abbey” of Wales. Serene and secluded, it resonates with the spirit of Wales. Then take the Cwmystwyth mountain road, a spectacular ribbon of tarmac, to the lovely Elan Valley lakelands.
www.cadw.gov.wales
www.elanvalley.org.uk

Pass through Dolgellau at the southern gateway to the mountainous Snowdonia National Park, then on to Portmeirion, the unique village created by Sir Clough Williams-Ellis in the last century. An intoxicating mix of medieval England, the Far East and Italy, it’s a riot of colour, humour and unreal, rub-you-eyes-in-disbelief sights. Quite what it is doing here in North Wales only Sir Clough knows, but we’re very glad he built it. What’s more, you can stay here too – and, if you are here in September, chill out at the funky Festival No. 6, a unique mix of music, arts and culture.
www.eryri-npa.gov.uk
www.portmeirion-village.com

Overnight: Portmeirion

For days six and seven see overleaf

†

01—Sea level traversing, near Penmaen, Gower
02—Chepstow Castle and River Wye
03—National Waterfront Museum, Swansea
04—Cors Caron National Nature Reserve, near Tregaron
05—Strata Florida Abbey, Pontrhydfendigaid
Day six
Castles, caverns and gardens

A few options today. You can take the train – not any old train but the charming narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway – that climbs from Porthmadog to the former “slate capital” of Blaenau Ffestiniog (visit the old mines or get an adrenaline rush on zip wires and mountain bikes). Plas Brondanw at Llanfrothen is your second option. It’s another place that sprang from the fertile imagination of Sir Clough Williams-Ellis. Here, he created gardens full of drama and romance, inspired (as was much of Portmeirion) by scenes from Renaissance Italy.

www.festrail.co.uk
www.blaenauffestiniog.org
www.plasbrondanw.com

Caernarfon’s world-famous castle is a must-visit (for others see our castles and historic places itinerary on pages 48/49). Then make for the highest mountains in Southern Britain, climbing up the boulder-strewn Llanberis Pass to Betws-y-Coed.

www.cadw.gov.wales

Overnight: Betws-y-Coed

Day seven
All the “Lls” – Llandudno and Llangollen

The verdant Vale of Conwy takes you to the sea and Llandudno, the “Queen” of the Welsh resorts. Well-preserved and dignified, Llandudno has a rare sense of harmony, aided by a splendid location framed between two headlands. It’s entirely fitting that the Victorian Alice in Wonderland story is closely associated with this period-piece resort – follow Alice’s adventures on a new audio-visual tour, bumping into characters like the White Rabbit and Mad Hatter. Don’t forget to walk the pier, the longest in Wales.

www.visitllandudno.org.uk

Another green vale – the Vale of Clwyd – leads southwards alongside the Clwydian Range (an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to castle-crowned Denbigh and medieval Ruthin. Then it’s over the lofty Horseshoe Pass (your final mountain climb) to Llangollen, home of a famous International Musical Eisteddfod and idyllic canal (boat trips available), and the end of your week in Wales.

www.clwydianrangeanddeevalleyaonb.org.uk

01—Zip World, Blaenau Ffestiniog
02—Caernarfon Castle
03—Blaenau Ffestiniog
04—Llandudno pier
05—Moel Fenlli, Clwydian Range
City life

Get ready for two days of urban adventures in Cardiff, our cosmopolitan, warm-hearted capital.

www.visitcardiff.com

Day one

Arty ambles and sporting superstars

Get to know our wonderfully walkable capital by exploring the city centre on foot. Stroll through the neo-classical Civic Centre, a gleaming complex of white Portland stone known as the "Washington of Wales". It’s home to our National Museum, an unmissable stop for culture vultures and science lovers. Highlights include one of Europe’s finest collections of Impressionist art (featured superstars include Monet, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Degas) and an interactive journey through 4.6 billion years of natural history. Best of all, entry is absolutely free.

www.museumwales.ac.uk/cardiff

Cross the road for a stroll through Bute Park, a green oasis in the heart of the city. If you’re feeling peckish, stop for a hot drink and some delicious hand-made cake at Pettigrew Tearooms, housed in the Victorian gatehouse at the park’s edge. From here it’s a short hop to Cardiff Castle. Explore the fairytale interior, each room more opulent and ornate than the last, then climb the Norman keep for a high-level view of the city. The mighty Principality Stadium, towering over the banks of the River Taff, is your next stop. It’s the shrine of rugby, our national sport. A tour takes you from the players’ locker room to the President’s Box.

www.cardiffcastle.com
www.principalitystadium.wales

Round things off with a drink or two. Try the famous City Arms for some of Cardiff’s best real ale, or enjoy continental café culture along lively Mill Lane.

Overnight: Cardiff

Day two

Bayside

Take a short trip (by train, bus or water taxi) to Cardiff Bay. This waterfront companion to the city centre is a buzzing playground of bars, restaurants, shops and visitor attractions including the Wales Millennium Centre, a major arts and entertainment complex. Explore the Bay’s past and present with tours of the historic Pierhead Building – once the epicentre of trade in Cardiff’s busy docks – and the modern glass-fronted Senedd, home to Wales’s governing National Assembly.

www.cardiffbay.co.uk
www.wmc.org.uk
www.pierhead.org
www.assembly.wales/en-visiting/senedd

Make a snack stop. Cool off with delicious Welsh ice-cream from Cadwaladers or indulge your sweet tooth with a local treat from the aptly named Fabulous Welshcakes.

Hop on a boat for a trip across the Bay (or walk across the Cardiff Bay Barrage if you’re feeling energetic) to Penarth, an attractive seaside suburb complete with modern marina. Take a stroll on the historic pier (voted Pier of the Year in 2014), before returning to watch the sun go down over dinner in one of Cardiff Bay’s many waterfront restaurants.

Overnight: Cardiff

The write stuff

Cardiff is set for big adventures in 2016 when the city celebrates the centenary of one of its most famous sons, children’s author Roald Dahl, with a number of special events planned. The wooden Norwegian Church where Dahl was baptised now stands in Cardiff Bay, while the huge decked plaza in front of the Wales Millennium Centre bears his name. Fans should also make the pilgrimage to the leafy suburb of Llandaff to see the former sweet shop that featured in one of the most memorable stories from his autobiography, Boy.

www.literaturewales.org/roalddahl100
Wild
Mid Wales

The welcoming, compelling wilderness at Wales’s heart is a magnet for wildlife enthusiasts. Follow our three-day itinerary on safari, Mid Wales-style.

Day one
Marvellous marshes and a famous bird of prey

Begin your expedition at the Welsh Wildlife Centre near Cardigan. Perched on the banks of the River Teifi, this striking wood-and-glass building is the perfect base camp for exploring the diverse natural habitats of the Teifi Marsh Nature Reserve. Four themed trails through the reserve offer ground-level views of an abundant population of birds, bugs and other wetland creatures (it’s one of the few places in the UK where you can come face to face with a water buffalo). Keen (and patient) spotters can hire binoculars and make use of bird hides. www.welshwildlife.org/visitor-centres/the-welsh-wildlife-centre

Red kite sightings are guaranteed at Gigrin Farm Red Kite Feeding Centre near Rhayader. Less than 100 years ago, these charismatic birds of prey were close to extinction in the UK. Thanks to concerted conservation efforts, their distinctive fork-tailed shape is now a frequent sight in the skies of Mid Wales – so much so that we like to think of them as our “unofficial” official bird. You’ll see as many as 600 kites dropping in for a meal at Gigrin’s daily feeding session. www.gigrin.co.uk

Overnight: Rhayader
Day two
Down in the valley

Get back to nature in the impossibly picturesque Elan Valley, just west of Rhayader. Sometimes referred to as the “Welsh Lake District”, this 72 square miles (186 square kilometres) of scenic reservoirs, rivers, hill country and woodland is home to a wild cast of thousands that includes otters, polecats, badgers, woodpeckers, goshawks and (of course) red kites. The Elan Valley Visitor Centre is the ideal starting point for a full day of adventures. Get your bearings (along with some refreshments in the welcoming tea room), before exploring miles of walks and cycle routes.

www.elanvalley.org.uk

Overnight: Machynlleth

Day three
Away with the birds

The magical Mawddach Valley and Estuary near Dolgellau is a spectacular canvas for wildlife spotters. It’s home to two Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Nature Reserves – Coed Garth Gell (“one of the best places for wildlife in the UK”) and Arthog Bog. And there are also some of the most seductive views on the planet, from the shifting sands of the estuary to the looming peak of Cader Idris. Housed in the former signal box at the old Penmaenpool railway station, the RSPB information centre provides the perfect vantage point from which to see birds like pied flycatchers, redstarts and wood warblers.

www.rspb.org.uk

Round things off on the banks of dramatic, mountain-ringed Lake Vyrnwy. Created in the 19th century to provide water for the city of Liverpool, it has become a haven for wildlife with a cornucopia of credentials to prove it (it’s a National Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation – so it’s pretty special, then). Explore the walking trails around the lake to catch a glimpse of a thriving animal population that includes hen harriers, woodpeckers, otters and sparrow hawks.

www.lake-vyrnwy.com

Overnight: Lake Vyrnwy (the luxurious Lake Vyrnwy Hotel and Spa occupies a prime position at the water’s edge) or Welshpool
It's a fact

01—Snowdon Mountain Railway
02—Spectators with Welsh flag, Cardiff Half Marathon
03—Young boy carrying rugby ball, National Eisteddfod
04—We’re outnumbered by sheep
05—Hay Festival, Hay-on-Wye
06—Festival-goer with daffodils, Green Man Festival, Crickhowell
07—Smallest House in Great Britain, Conwy
08—Pendine Sands, Carmarthenshire
09—Haunted Bodelwyddan Castle
10—Station sign, Llanfair PG, Anglesey

This is Wales | It's a fact
All aboard for the Summit Special.
Snowdon, Y Wyddfa in Welsh, is Britain's highest summit accessible by train, the narrow-gauge Snowdon Mountain Railway. So there's no need to break into a sweat to climb 3,560ft (1,085m) to the top.

Flying the flag. Our national flag is The Red Dragon, Y Ddraig Goch in Welsh.

It's not only a game. We're talking rugby and religion. It's something of a religion in Wales, as you'll see if you watch us in action at the Principality Stadium, Cardiff. Especially if we are playing England.

Outnumbered three-to-one.
Wales: Population 3,000,000 (people), 9,000,000 (sheep).

A good read. Tales passed on by word of mouth in Wales during the Dark Ages were written down in the 12th and 13th centuries. The collection, known as The Mabinogion, is the earliest prose literature in Britain.


Almost a quarter. Between them, our three National Parks and five Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cover 23 percent of the country.

Leek versus daffodil. We have two national emblems, worn on 1 March, St David's Day. Please don't ask us to choose a favourite.

Going underground. Ogof Ffynnon Ddu in the Brecon Beacons is Britain's deepest cave, descending 1,010ft (308m). It's a huge subterranean world, a part of which is accessible to visitors at the National Showcaves Centre for Wales.

Let's get together. The National Eisteddfod of Wales is a unique Welsh festival celebrating art, culture and language. The first eisteddfod took place at Cardigan Castle in 1176.

Hate housework? Then you'll love Britain’s “Smallest House”, as recognised by the Guinness Book of Records. It's a dinky fisherman's cottage on the quay at Conwy measuring just 9ft (2.7m) by 6ft (1.8m). It was once home to a fisherman over 6ft tall.

Old stones, haunted houses. Chepstow in South Wales boasts the oldest stone castle in Wales, possibly Britain. Bodelwyddan Castle in the north, a splendid Victorian mansion, has its spooky side. It regularly sends shivers down the spine on ghost tours and paranormal sightings.

O Little Town of Bethlehem. We have one too, in Carmarthenshire. But it's a hamlet, not a town. Its tiny population swells at Christmas when people come from far and wide to have their Christmas cards stamped at the post office.

Walk this way. The 870-mile (1,400km) Wales Coast Path, opened in 2012, is the world's longest continual coast path. If you add in the 177-mile (285km) Offa's Dyke Path along the Welsh border you can walk all the way around Wales.

Non-stop. Amy Johnson and Jim Mollison made the first non-stop transatlantic flight from Britain to the USA in 1933, taking off from Pendine Sands on Carmarthen Bay. It took 34 hours.

You cannot be serious. Tennis was invented in Wales – yes, honestly. Major Walter Clopton Wingfield came up with the rules in 1873 when he played the first version in the grounds of Nantclwyd House near Ruthin.

And finally. We can't finish without reminding you that Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch, the tongue-twisting village on the Isle of Anglesey, boasts the world's second-longest placename. In case you are wondering, it means: “St Mary's (Church) by the white aspen over the whirlpool, and St Tysilio's (Church) by the red cave”.

Hollywood star Naomi Watts recently stunned audiences on a top US chat show by pronouncing it perfectly. Mind you, she did spend some time on Anglesey as a child where she learned Welsh. It then went viral on YouTube with millions of hits: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwYAuvBcQ1Y

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What travel documents do I need?
On arrival in the United Kingdom, visitors must show a valid national passport or other document satisfactorily establishing his/her identity and nationality. Entry clearance and visa requirements for Wales are the same as for the UK as a whole. Details from the UK visas website: www.gov.uk/visas-immigration.

Do I need medical insurance?
You are strongly advised to take out adequate insurance cover before travelling. Your tour operator will be able to suggest a suitable policy. For further information, see the travel tips page on www.visitbritain.com.

Information for visitors with disabilities?
“Tourism for All” is a free information service promoting accessible tourism. It offers specialist information on travel planning, transport, accommodation and booking. www.tourismforall.org.uk/visitors-to-the-UK.html

Accommodation advice?
When choosing your holiday accommodation look for the Cymru/Wales quality mark of Wales’s official, nationwide quality assessment scheme. You can then be confident that the accommodation has been checked out before you check in. The UK’s various national assessing bodies now grade holiday accommodation to the same criteria and award one to five stars based on the facilities and overall quality of the experience. More details from: www.visitwales.com/grading.

Driving in Wales?
For a handy route planning facility giving driving directions, distances and detailed maps go to www.theaa.com or www.rac.co.uk. For additional information on UK road and driving regulations, see the transport page on www.visitbritain.com.

Information when I’m out and about in Wales?
For information – both local and further afield – call into one of our Tourist Information Centres (TICs). Highly trained, knowledgeable staff will be happy to help with booking your accommodation and suggesting places to eat, things to see and do, routes to take and so on. TICs also stock a comprehensive range of free and saleable maps and guides. Offices are normally open between 10am (10.00) and 5pm (17.00). For a list go to the contact us page on www.visitwales.com.

Opening hours?
Shops are generally open from 9am (09.00) to 5.30pm (17.30) Monday to Saturday and (in larger towns and cities) from 10am (10.00) to 4pm (16.00) on Sundays. Having said that, even in smaller rural towns and villages convenience stores will often have longer opening hours. Supermarkets tend to be open later (until around 8pm/20.00), and some of the larger superstores are open 24 hours during weekdays. Banks tend to open from 9am (09.00) to 5pm (17.00) Monday to Friday, and 9am (09.00) to 12 noon (12.00) on Saturday.

How can I get a value added tax (VAT) refund on my shopping?
VAT is applied to goods and services. Overseas visitors to the UK can reclaim VAT only by using the foreign exchange tax-free shopping arrangements at participating shops and stores. Ask for the tax-free shopping form at the shop, complete it and show your passport. The form must then be presented to Her Majesty’s Customs and Excise when you leave the UK. www.hmrc.gov.uk/vat/sectors/consumers/overseas-visitors.htm
Any guidelines on tipping?
There are no definite rules for tipping. If you feel that you have received good service you may wish to leave a tip. This is most common in restaurants, where the tip can be up to 10–15 percent of the bill – but you should always check to see if a service charge has already been included. Tipping in hotels is also at your discretion. It is not normal to tip bar staff, although they may be offered a drink. Taxi drivers are often given a small tip, particularly on longer journeys and if they have carried your luggage.

When are the 2016 public holidays?
1 January, 25 & 28 April, 2 & 30 May, 29 August, 26 & 27 December (Christmas Day, 25th, falls on a Sunday).

When are the school holidays?
The main summer holiday is from mid-July to early September in England and Wales. Schools also have two to three weeks' holiday at Christmas and Easter, plus a week in mid-February, end of May and mid-October. Exact dates vary between each education authority.

How do I call Wales?
The UK’s international dialling code is +44. Dial this, then omit the "0" from the town/city code when dialling the rest of the UK number. In Wales, the emergency number for the fire brigade, police or ambulance is 999 from any phone.

Free brochures
Find out more about Wales by choosing some of the FREE guides available. Check them out, and order or download them from www.visitwales.com/brochures.

More information on Wales
For up-to-date information on short breaks, longer holidays or a full range of activity breaks in Wales, go to the official website – www.visitwales.com or www.visitbritain.com.

Selling Wales to your clients
If you work in the leisure travel trade or business tourism sectors, we have a dedicated website to help you sell Wales to your clients. You can enhance their existing tours to Wales or introduce Wales into UK programmes for the first time.

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

Wales is easy to get to. It’s only a few hours by motorway from London. By train it’s even quicker – just two hours from London to Cardiff. It’s the same from Britain’s major airports with speedy road and rail links from Heathrow, Gatwick, Birmingham and Manchester.

By road
Mileage and journey times by car
- Birmingham – Aberystwyth
  123 miles (198km), 2hrs 44mins
- Bath – Newport
  42 miles (68km), 52mins
- Canterbury – Cardiff
  214 miles (344km), 3hrs 51mins
- Coventry – Barmouth
  138 miles (222km), 2hrs 56mins
- Exeter – Swansea
  144 miles (232km), 2hrs 35mins
- Leeds – Llandudno
  126 miles (208km), 2hrs 31mins
- London – Cardiff
  151 miles (243km), 2hrs 53mins
- London – Tenby
  238 miles (383km), 4hrs 29mins
- Manchester – Caernarfon
  105 miles (169km), 2hrs 19mins
- Nottingham – Swansea
  204 miles (328km), 3hrs 41mins
- Newcastle-upon-Tyne – Llandudno
  221 miles (356km), 4hrs 20mins
- Reading – Carmarthen
  172 miles (277km), 3hrs 02mins
- York – Welshpool
  152 miles (245km), 3hrs 7mins
- Edinburgh – Cardiff
  393 miles (632km), 7hrs 03mins
- Glasgow – Aberystwyth
  331 miles (533km), 6hrs 04mins

Mileage/times supplied by www.theaa.com

By air
Cardiff Airport is situated on the outskirts of the capital.

For detailed information on flights and how to get to and from the airport by road, rail, bus and taxi go to www.cardiff-airport.com/en/airport

Airlines from all over the world fly into the London airports, so check with your travel agent or tour operator to find the best option for your journey. Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool also have a number of international flights, and Bristol Airport is very conveniently located for access to Wales.

UK airports that offer easy access to Wales:
- Birmingham International Airport
  www.birminghamairport.co.uk
- Bristol Airport
  www.bristolairport.co.uk
- Liverpool John Lennon Airport
  www.liverpoolairport.com
- London Gatwick Airport
  www.gatwickairport.com
- London Heathrow Airport
  www.heathrowairport.com
- London Luton Airport
  www.london-luton.co.uk
- London Stansted Airport
  www.stanstedairport.com
- Manchester Airport
  www.manchesterairport.co.uk

01—Road sign, Cardiff Airport
02—Second Severn Crossing
03—Cardiff Airport
04—British Airways plane, Cardiff Airport
05—Cardiff Central train station
06—Ferry at port of Holyhead, Isle of Anglesey
07—Crown Princess cruise ship berthed at Holyhead, Isle of Anglesey
By rail
In the UK, fast and frequent rail services run between London Paddington and Cardiff, taking just over two hours. There is a half-hourly departure to Cardiff Central, with an hourly continuation to Swansea and onward connections to West Wales.

There are also direct trains from London Euston and Manchester to Llandudno, Bangor and Holyhead; from Birmingham, Shrewsbury and Crewe to the North Wales coast and the Llŷn Peninsula; from Manchester and Shrewsbury to Newport; and from Portsmouth, Southampton and Salisbury to Cardiff.

From London Heathrow Airport there’s a fast, direct rail service to Paddington, where you can change onto a direct train to Wales. From London Gatwick Airport, you can travel direct to London Victoria, then take the tube to Paddington or Euston to continue your journey. For general rail enquiries visit:
www.nationalrail.co.uk
www.thetrainline.com

By sea
Ferry crossings from Ireland to Wales:

**Irish Ferries**
Dublin Port to Holyhead
Journey time: 1hr 49mins (Fast ferry)
Journey time: 3hrs 15mins (Cruise ferry)

**Rosslare to Pembroke**
Journey time: 4hrs (Cruise ferry)
www.irishferries.com

**Stena Line**
Dublin Port to Holyhead
Journey time: 3hrs 15mins (Superferry)

Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead
Journey time: 2hrs 20mins (Fastcraft)

Rosslare to Fishguard
Journey time: 3hrs 30mins (Superferry)
www.stenaline.co.uk

Ferry crossings from mainland Europe to Great Britain:

**Brittany Ferries**
www.brittany-ferries.co.uk

**Condor Ferries**
www.condorferries.co.uk

**DFDS Seaways**
www.dfdsseaways.co.uk

**LD Lines**
www.ldlines.co.uk

**P&O**
www.poferries.com

**Stena Line**
www.stenaline.com

By cruise ship
Cruise ships dock at the port of Holyhead on Anglesey almost every week between May and September. Cruise lines calling in include Crystal, Hapag Lloyd, Oceania, P&O, Silversea, Swan Hellenic, Thomson, Tui, Voyages of Discovery and Windstar.

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

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

By road

The most scenic drives in Wales count among the best in Britain. Some favourite routes with fantastic views include the north–south A470 through the heart of Wales, the A466 along the Wye Valley, the B4574 from Rhayader to the Vale of Rheidol, the A4069 across the Black Mountain range, the A4086, A498 and A4085 around Snowdon and Marine Drive around Great Orme in Llandudno.

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

You can hop on and off the National Express network with a Brit Xplorer pass. Passes can be purchased online at www.nationalexpress.com/waystosave/brit-xplorer.aspx

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

For a handy route planner: www.theaa.com or www.rac.co.uk

For information on UK road regulations: www.gov.uk/browse/driving/highway-code

By rail

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

www.thecambrianline.co.uk
www.scenicwales.co.uk
www.heart-of-wales.co.uk
www.nationalrail.co.uk
www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk

For pure pleasure why not take a ride on some of the 14 narrow-gauge and steam railways? Many are members of the Great Little Trains of Wales.

www.greatlittletrainsofwales.co.uk

Discounted rail and bus travel

The Explore Wales Pass offers unlimited travel on all mainline rail services in Wales plus most scheduled bus services. Holders will also benefit from discounted entry to many tourist attractions and selected accommodation. The Explore Wales Pass (£94) allows four-day train and eight-day bus travel. The Explore South Wales, North Wales and Mid Wales Passes (£64 each) allow four-day train and eight-day bus travel within each regional area. There are also a number of Rover and Rangers tickets available, which all offer unlimited train travel for one day on specific areas of the Arriva Trains Wales network. They can be purchased from the station booking office or on board the train.

www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/explorewalespass

Additional information

For up-to-date and reliable public transport information:

www.traveline-cymru.info

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

01—Road to Conwy Tunnel at night
02—Local public bus, Newgale, Pembrokeshire
03—Arriva Trains Wales, Conwy Castle
04—Fairbourne Steam Railway with Barmouth Bridge in background
05—On the beach at Llandudno
06—Ceredigion Coast Path signs, near Llanrhystud
07—Llanddewi Brefi, old AA road sign
Language ... with a double “ll”

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

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

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

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<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>aber</td>
<td>mouth or confluence of river</td>
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<tr>
<td>afon</td>
<td>river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bryn</td>
<td>hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bwlch</td>
<td>pass or gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coed</td>
<td>wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glyn</td>
<td>valley or glen</td>
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<tr>
<td>llan</td>
<td>church or parish</td>
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<tr>
<td>llyn</td>
<td>lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mynydd</td>
<td>mountain</td>
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<tr>
<td>pen</td>
<td>top or end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pont</td>
<td>bridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tre</td>
<td>homestead or town</td>
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And here are a few greetings:

<p>| | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>crosa</td>
<td>welcome (as in Creso i Gymru, Welcome to Wales)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diolch</td>
<td>thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iechyd da!</td>
<td>cheers!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nos da</td>
<td>good night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shwmae</td>
<td>hello (no problems with double ‘ll’ here)</td>
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To find out more about one of Europe’s oldest living languages go to: [www.bbc.co.uk/wales/learning/learnwelsh](http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/learning/learnwelsh)

And learn more at Nant Gwrtheyrn Welsh Language and Heritage Centre on the Llŷn Peninsula in North Wales: [www.nantgwrtheyrn.org](http://www.nantgwrtheyrn.org)
This is Wales.