

The City and County of Cardiff: Capital City of Wales



A trip to the capital of Wales is a chance to discover a completely different Britain, with a unique culture and even its own language. Croeso i Gaerdydd – welcome to Cardiff!

Travel north from Torbay and you will reach the sea at the Bristol Channel. Cross this busy waterway and you will be in Wales, one of the four nations which makes up the United Kingdom. Wales has always been fiercely independent, from the first accounts of the Romans fighting warriors in the first century, to modern moves towards a more independent country.

Cardiff is in the south of Wales on the edge of the Bristol Channel. The area has been lived in for thousands of years with the usual progression of Celtic and then Roman inhabitants. After William the Conqueror invaded England in 1066, he set out to conquer Wales as well. A castle was built in the area and a small settlement grew into a large town under the protection of the castle. By the end of the 13th century Cardiff was the only town in Wales with a population of more than 2,000. Cardiff became an important strategic area because it was between the lowland areas controlled by William's French invaders and the Welsh-controlled uplands. As a result Cardiff claims to have the largest concentration of castles of any city in the world.

During the Middle Ages local kings fought for control of Wales and eventually the kings of England decided that Wales needed to be brought under control. By 1284 King Edward I had defeated the Welsh rulers and so the

land came under English rule. Edward proclaimed his son, Edward, as Prince of Wales: this tradition of giving the eldest son of the monarch the title of Prince of Wales continues to the present day. Wales had become a principality.

In 1536, the Act of Union between England and Wales officially joined the two countries. Cardiff became a Free Borough and was given its first royal charter in 1581 by Queen Elizabeth I.

It wasn't until 1905 that Cardiff was given the official title of 'city' by King Edward VII and the Edwardian era saw a huge number of new public buildings. Finally, in 1955, Cardiff was proclaimed capital city of Wales by the Home Secretary Gwilym Lloyd George (a Welshman).

Over the past 50 years Cardiff has seen a lot of change. Industry declined in the 1970s, fewer ships came to the docks and the population fell. However, from the 1990s the fortunes of Cardiff have improved dramatically with massive redevelopment of the Tiger Bay docks, new industry and luxury housing as well as the creation of the Wales Millennium Centre as a venue for theatre and dance companies and the Millennium Stadium for sporting events and concerts. Wales's independence is still alive: in 1997 the people of Wales voted for more of a 'Welsh identity' and so the Welsh Assembly was built and located at Ty Hwel in Cardiff Bay.

A day trip to Cardiff can only give you a taste for the city: there's enough to see for several days. The most prominent features are the Cardiff Bay development, Cardiff Castle and impressive Edwardian buildings such as the National Museum. The shopping centre is full of diversions too.

MILLENNIUM STADIUM, WIKIPEDIA



J. KARANKA



Cardiff Castle (09.00 to 18.00, £9 Students/£10.50 Adults) has two very different parts: the original castle is from the 12th Century, and you can climb to the top for views of the city. The 'new' castle was extensively redeveloped in the 18th and 19th centuries to change it from a fort to a house, and the interiors feature extraordinary examples of Victorian Gothic architecture.

The National Museum in Cathays Park (10.00 to 17.00 except Mondays, free entry) features Wales's national collections of archaeology, art and natural history. The art gallery is particularly impressive, and is considered to be one of the best in Europe. There are paintings, sculptures, drawings and ceramics from Wales and around the world, including a fine collection of Impressionist paintings, which are currently featured in a special exhibition. Pictures from the international Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition are also on show at the gallery until September.

If you want to shop in Cardiff, there's plenty of choice. The city centre has all the big shops, many in a brand new shopping arcade. The city also has several markets offering more eclectic choices. The Central Market is well known for a wide range of foods but also offers clothes, gifts, music and much more. On Sundays the Riverside Market opens opposite the Millennium Stadium and is reckoned to be one of the best local food markets in Britain.

Cafés in Cardiff are concentrated in Mill Lane, which

has a wide range of places to eat at a wide range of prices. The Brewery Quarter, St Mary Street and Eastside are also great places to find somewhere to eat, and there are chic waterfront bars and restaurants in Cardiff Bay too.

Cardiff Bay was originally home to a huge area of docks which served the iron and coal trades. In the 1880s Cardiff docks handled more coal than any other port in the world. Coal prices for the whole world used to be set in Cardiff, and the world's first £1 million deal was struck for coal in Cardiff. By the 1980s Cardiff Bay was a neglected wasteland, but a major regeneration scheme began to change the area. A barrage (dam) was built across the bay to make a large freshwater lake, and the docks redeveloped to provide housing, business space and leisure facilities. You can find out about the Bay at the visitor centre, known as the 'Tube', by the waterfront, close to the striking Wales Millennium Centre (theatre and arts centre) and Pierhead Building. The Norwegian Church is a curiosity in Cardiff Bay, built for Norwegian sailors coming to the docks and now home to an arts centre with a cosy café.

» The next LAL Excursion to Cardiff is on Saturday, 26th June, price £30

You can travel to Cardiff by train. The journey takes 3 to 4 hours each way and a return ticket costs from £44.60. See www.nationalrail.co.uk for detailed times and prices.

For more information on Cardiff visit: www.visitcardiff.com



Welsh Dragon

You'll probably see this flag flying in Cardiff. The Red Dragon of Wales (y ddraig goch), although perhaps of Chinese origin, was introduced to Britain by the Romans some eighteen hundred years ago.

It is thought that the emblem was originally used as a military standard. In time this mythical beast developed into the flag of a nation. The Welsh may be the only people to have entered this millennium with the "same" flag as they entered the last one.

The Welsh flag is seen now more than ever before. Abroad you will see the Welsh flag still following the Welsh Regiments in the Falklands, in the Persian Gulf and in Bosnia. At home the Welsh flag can often be seen flying at Rugby matches and other national events.