

South Wales



Take a clutch of scarred medieval castles. Add a twist of Unesco World Heritage industrial history. Squeeze in some of Britain's wildest coast. Sprinkle liberally with sleepy villages, secret coves and surfing hotspots and throw in some rolling hills for good measure. Smother with local pride and, hey presto, this is a microcosm of Wales. Welcome to the south, where the Welsh Dragon breathes as strongly as ever.

Stretching over 100 miles from historic border-town Chepstow in the east to the big sky and sea views of the jagged coast in the west, south Wales packs it in. The big draw is Pembrokeshire, the Welsh Land's End where the winds of outdoor life blows year-round. Almost 200 miles of magical shoreline has been defined a national park, delineated by craggy cliffs, golden sands, chocolate-box villages and traditional seaside resorts. St David's, Britain's smallest city, nestles at its westernmost tip and is home to Wales' holiest site. For budding hikers, the Pembrokeshire Coast Path is one of Britain's most celebrated long-distance walks.

At the eastern extremity, Chepstow's striking castle welcomes visitors to Wales, and the Wye Valley is a beguiling place to paddle the waters. In between, things get gritty, with Blaenafon and Big Pit providing stark reminders of a collapsed industrial heritage. Dropping down to the coast, modern Swansea is emerging as a serious rival to Cardiff, and the tiny, beach-rich Gower Peninsula is one of Wales' loveliest corners.

SOUTH WALES

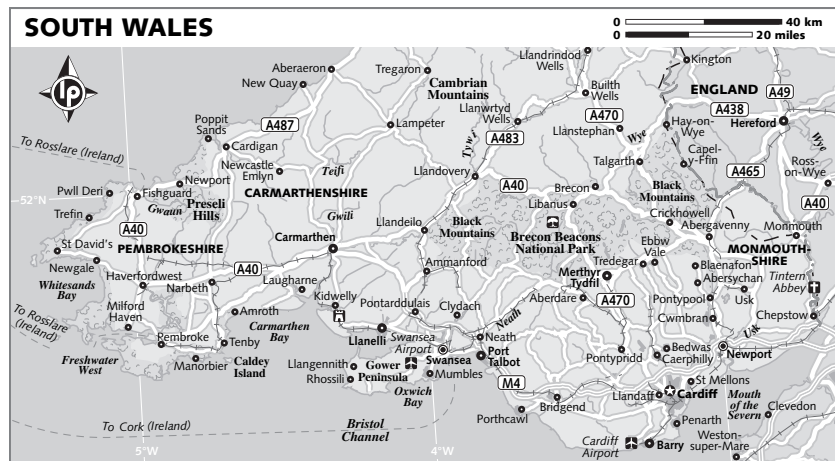
HIGHLIGHTS

- Hiking to Wales' most spectacular fortress, **Carreg Cennen Castle** (p674)
- Discovering World Heritage steel and coal history at Big Pit in **Blaenafon** (p666)
- Surfing at the stress-dispelling **Gower Peninsula** (p672)
- Charting Wales' industrial past at Swansea's **National Waterfront Museum** (p668)
- Embracing rugged cliffs, secluded beaches and adrenaline thrills in **Pembrokeshire** (p675)
- Chilling out at **Laugharne** (p673), Dylan Thomas' seaside hideaway



■ POPULATION: 1,741,443

■ AREA: 2911 SQ MILES



Activities

Outdoor activities abound across south Wales. The main draw is Pembrokeshire, with excellent canoeing, surfing, fishing and, most thrilling of all, coastering. Craggy cliffs also offer superb rock climbing all around the wild coast.

Landlubbers can take pony rides on the beach or inland through the Preseli Hills, which is also fine mountain-biking territory. Walkers flock to the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, a 186-mile jaunt through some of Britain's most spectacular scenery.

In the valleys of southeast Wales canal towpaths, forest tracks and former railway lines provide good cycling and mountain biking. Canoeing is possible on the River Wye and surfers dig the breaks on the Gower Peninsula, where there are also beautiful day-walks. Hikers love Offa's Dyke Path and the Wye Valley Walk.

For more information see Southeast Wales (opposite) and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (p675).

Throughout this chapter, short local walks are suggested, while further details can be found in the Outdoor Activities chapter (p83). Tourist offices provide maps and guides.

Getting There & Around

Frequent train and bus services run from England, especially to Cardiff and Swansea. The further west you venture, beyond Carmarthen into Pembrokeshire, the less frequent the public transport.

The South Wales main-line railway runs east-west from Bristol in England via Cardiff

to Swansea, continuing on the West Wales line via Carmarthen to three west-coast terminals – Fishguard, Pembroke Dock (both ports for Ireland) and Milford Haven. The famously scenic Heart of Wales line (p694) terminates in Swansea.

The Arriva Cymru X40 bus runs daily from Cardiff to Swansea and Carmarthen. National Express has daily services from Bristol to Haverfordwest, via Swansea.

Tourist offices keep detailed bus timetables. For more details contact **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk) and **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk).

Several travel passes from **Arriva Trains** (☎ 0870 9000 777; www.walesflexipass.co.uk) are good value. The Freedom of South Wales Flexi-Rover (peak/off-peak £35/30) allows three days of train and seven days of bus travel in a seven-day period. The 4 in 8 Pass (peak/off-peak £55/45) offers four days' train and eight days' bus travel in an eight-day period, and the 8 in 15 Pass (peak/off-peak £92/75) gives eight days train and 15 days bus travel in a 15-day period. Buy them over the phone, online or at most train stations.

SOUTHEAST WALES

Southeast Wales is industrialised, home to half the country's population and much of its big business. But strike out beyond the urban sprawl and there's much to admire amongst the sweeping, history-rich uplands.

In keeping with the industrial theme, there's classic heritage here. The sombre valleys of Taff, Rhymney and Rhondda were once the heartbeat of the iron and coal trades, which brought wealth and, later in the 1980s, despair in equal measure. Gradually, tourists are discovering that areas such as Blaenafon, a World Heritage Site, and Big Pit are crucial in uncovering the true Wales.

To the east, the Wye Valley stretches north-south from the market town of Monmouth to Chepstow's moody castle and celebrated horse-racing track. In between, the ethereal riverbank ruins of Tintern Abbey are always popular.

On the southern coast, Swansea is stirring. The childhood home of poet and writer Dylan Thomas is a fitting second city and gateway to one of Wales' true gems, the windswept beach-and-cliff hideaway of the Gower Peninsula.

Activities

Despite its high population, the southeast offers picturesque walking and cycling through rolling valleys or on the wild, sandy Gower Peninsula, which is also the place to catch a wave.

CYCLING

Two national road-cycling trails transect the region. The national Lôn Las Cymru (p651) has two southern spurs, one from Cardiff along the Taff Vale to the Brecon Beacons, the other from Chepstow up the charming Vale of Usk to Abergavenny.

Exclusive to south Wales, the 220-mile Celtic Trail (p668) spans the width of the country through changing landscape, from Chepstow in the east to Fishguard on the Pembrokeshire coast.

Afan Argoed Forest Park, northeast of Swansea, is an excellent place for dedicated mountain biking.

Bicycle Beano (☎ 01982-560471; www.bicycle-beano.co.uk) runs vegetarian cycling holidays in the Wye Valley. Tours are popular and irregular, so book well ahead.

WALKING

One of Britain's best-known, most challenging long-distance routes is the 177-mile **Offa's Dyke Path** national trail. Following the English-Welsh border between Chepstow in the south and the resort of Prestatyn on the north coast, the path follows the line of the 8th-century embankment built by Offa, king of Mercia, and crosses moorland, wide valleys and ancient forest.

Less strenuous is the 136-mile **Wye Valley Walk**, which crisscrosses the Welsh-English border as it follows the beautiful River Wye to Hafren Forest in Plynlimon. Pick up the *Wye Valley Walk Official Guide* (£7.95) from the tourist offices in Chepstow and Monmouth, together with details on shorter town, valley and coastal walks.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The River Wye is a great canoeing venue and Monmouth makes a good base town. Pick up *The Canoeist's Guide to the River Wye* (£5) from **Monmouth Canoe & Activity Centre** (☎ 01600-713461; www.monmouthcanoehire.20m.com; Castle Yard, Monmouth).

Reliable surfing can be found year-round on the Gower Peninsula (see p672).

Getting There & Around

Southeast Wales has an extensive transport network. Regular bus and train services from England connect London, Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol with Cardiff and Swansea, while frequent provincial routes serve the towns of Monmouth and Chepstow.

Detailed timetable and fare information is available from **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk). For details of multiday travel passes, see opposite.

Local services include **Valley Lines** (www.arivatrainswales.co.uk) from Cardiff to the Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and Rhymney Valleys. A Valley Lines Day Explorer (£7) covers all travel on Valley Lines trains and Stagecoach and Rhondda buses in the area.

First Cymru bus company has a South & West Wales FirstDay ticket (£5.50) covering all buses except the fast Cardiff-Swansea Shuttle. Enquiries are handled by Traveline Cymru.

A South Wales Network Rider (£6) is a day ticket for buses in southeast Wales that aren't operated by First Cymru.

WYE VALLEY

Flowing 154 miles from its mountainous source at Plynlimon in Mid Wales to Chepstow, where it joins the River Severn, the River Wye typifies British countryside beauty. Between Monmouth and Chepstow the picturesque 16-mile stretch runs through a steep-sided wooded vale and is excellent walking country.

Serving the valley between Chepstow and Monmouth, buses 65 and 69 run daily (50 minutes, every two hours, four on Sunday).

Monmouth (Trefynwy)

☎ 01600 / pop 8547

Advantageously positioned at the confluence of the Rivers Wye and Monnow, bubbly Monmouth mixes staunch Georgian architecture with modern-day prosperity to make an agreeable base from which to explore the Lower Wye Valley.

The town's medieval castle was the birthplace of King Henry V, who conquered Normandy at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Many parts of Monmouth, including the main Agincourt Sq, are named after the battle.

The settlement has switched countries over the centuries but is now fixed in Wales. Despite this, an English feeling pervades and little Welsh is spoken.

The **tourist office** (☎ 713899; Agincourt Sq; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) is centrally located, inside the slightly shabby 1724 Shire Hall. From here Monnow St descends to the Monnow Bridge. Heading northeast, short, narrow Church St contains craft shops, galleries and eateries.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Monmouth Museum & Local History Centre (☎ 710630; Priory St; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) houses a collection of 'Nelsoniana', artefacts related to Admiral Nelson, who visited Monmouth several times en route to Pembrokehire.

Britain's only intact late-13th-century fortified crossing, the **Monnow Bridge**, was pedestrianised in 2004. Close to Agincourt Sq are the stumpy remains of **Monmouth Castle**.

Monmouth Canoe & Activity Centre (☎ 713461; www.monmouthcanohire.20m.com; Castle Yard) runs river trips by canoe (per half-/full-day £25/30) and kayak (£18/20), together with climbing and caving trips.

SLEEPING & EATING

Monnow Bridge Caravan & Camping (☎ 714004; Drybridge St; 2-person tent sites £7-8.50) Comfortable riverside location near the Monnow Bridge.

Queen's Head (☎ 712767; Church St; s/d/tr £35/45/60) Reputedly the third-most-haunted pub in Wales, the Queen's Head is a community-run place with live folk music and six clean, tidy en suite rooms. The restaurant opens irregularly for theme nights, with tasty food ranging from Russian to Arabic.

Pilgrim's Bistro (☎ 727744; 24 Church St; mains £11-17; ☎ lunch Fri & Sat, dinner Wed-Sat) An ex-London

policeman is the improbable chef at this award-winning, cosy bistro specialising in local and Fairtrade produce. Try the succulent Raglan lamb.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses 65 and 69 ply the Wye Valley to Chepstow (50 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday); bus 60 serves Newport (one hour, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday); and bus 83 serves Abergavenny (40 minutes, about every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday).

Raglan Castle

Britain's final medieval fortress was **Raglan Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 01291-690228; adult/child £2.90/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) and it remains a prime example of late-medieval grandeur. The dusky-pink hexagonal towers lend a stout, angled appearance that contrasts with the elaborate flourishes. Halfway up the walls, fireplaces float where floors have long since disappeared.

Built in the 15th and 16th centuries, the castle was a military success and endured one of the longest sieges of the Civil War before being wrecked and abandoned shortly afterwards.

Raglan Castle lies 7 miles west of Monmouth on the A40 to Abergavenny. Bus 60 runs from Monmouth to Raglan village (20 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday), then it's a five-minute walk.

CHEPSTOW (CAS GWENT)

☎ 01291 / pop 14,195

Long-distance walking and prime horse racing are reasons to come to the historic border town of Chepstow, once made wealthy by the medieval trade in wine and timber. There's also an eye-catching castle to explore but, unless you plan to hike either the Wye Valley Walk or Offa's Dyke Path, an afternoon is plenty to discover the clutch of attractions. Allow a full day if you want to visit nearby Tintern Abbey.

Chepstow lies on the border with England; down by the Boat Inn you can see a patriotic St George's Cross daubed on the rocks on the far (English) side of the river, defiantly on show for the old enemy to see.

Orientation & Information

Entering Chepstow from the A48 go left on Moor St, heading downhill to proceed

through the Gate House in the Port Wall. Follow sloping High, Middle and Bridge Sts to find the castle, tourist office and River Wye. The bus station is on Thomas St, outside the Gate House, and the train station lies south of the castle and town centre – cross the A48 and head 200m down Station Rd.

The **tourist office** (☎ 623772; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Oct-Easter) is in the castle car park.

Sights

Built by the English in a superb riverside location, **Chepstow Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 624065; adult/child £3.50/3; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar) is a large fortress best viewed from the opposite English riverbank. Construction began in 1067, one year after the Norman Conquest; it is one of the oldest castles in Wales and one of the first built of stone. Its purpose was twofold – to defend the river crossing and daunt the locals.

The structure demonstrates prime examples of how medieval military architecture evolved. It was besieged twice during the Civil War before falling out of use in 1690.

Near the castle, **Chepstow Museum** (☎ 625981; Bridge St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Jul-Sep, 11am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat & 2-5pm Sun Oct-Jun) has good social and industrial history displays. Prints of the castle and Wye Valley through the ages mix with eclectic exhibits, such as a horrific-looking 1950s perm machine.

Built to control the flow of mercantile traders in Chepstow's medieval heyday, the 13th-century **Port Wall** (Customs Wall) can still be seen running through the town.

Just north of town, the **racecourse** (☎ 622260; www.chepstow-racecourse.co.uk; admission £12-28) is Wales' foremost horse-racing venue and home to the Welsh National.

Sleeping

Upper Sedbury House (☎ 627173; Sedbury Lane; 2-person tent sites £9, d £54, s/d without bathroom £32.50/48; ☎) Near Offa's Dyke Path in rural Sedbury, this farm has comfortable rooms and a swimming pool in large gardens, together with a camping meadow, 1 mile from Chepstow across the Wye. Ask about the farm's role in both WWI and WWII.

First Hurdle (☎ 622189; www.firsthurdleguesthouse.co.uk; 9-10 Upper Church St; s/d £35/50; ☎) Comfortable if unspectacular, this centrally located

guesthouse is friendly and serves vegetarian and traditional cooked breakfasts. It's a five-minute walk from the tourist office, near St Mary's church.

Castle View Hotel (☎ 620349; www.hotelchepstow.co.uk; Bridge St; s/d incl continental breakfast from £55/77) The fact that this old coach inn is probably the best hotel in town speaks volumes about the competition. Unspectacular but fine for a night, and directly opposite the castle.

Eating & Drinking

Two riverside places continue to serve good grub, round the corner from the tourist office.

Wye Knot (☎ 622929; The Back; lunch mains £3.50-10, dinner mains £10-16; ☎ lunch Wed-Sun, dinner Wed-Sat; closed Mon & Tue) Enjoy the likes of grilled red mullet or char-grilled swordfish in this contemporary restaurant. If you just want afternoon cream tea, it's yours for £3.95.

Boat Inn (☎ 628192; The Back; mains £6-16.25, 2-/3-course meal £11/13; ☎ lunch & dinner) Looking across to England, Chepstow's well-liked pub-restaurant tickles the tastebuds with classy platters specialising in fish.

Mamma Mia (☎ 622929; 29 High St; mains £7-17; ☎ dinner) It's modern styling for this pizza and pasta joint near the Gate House.

Getting There & Away

Regular National Express coach services visit Chepstow; coaches 508/509 to London (£18.50, three hours) and coach 201 to Cardiff (50 minutes) and Swansea (£9.40, two hours). Bus services include bus X14 to Bristol (£5.75, 50 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) and bus 69 to Monmouth via Tintern (50 minutes, two hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday).

Trains serve Cardiff (£5.80, 40 minutes, at least every two hours) and Gloucester (£5.90, 30 minutes, at least every two hours).

AROUND CHEPSTOW

Tintern Abbey

On the banks of the River Wye sits this kaleidoscopic vision of a 14th-century **abbey** (Cadw; ☎ 01291-689251; adult/child £3.50/3; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). With soaring walls, vast empty window frames and the huge space of the presbytery, all mottled in grey, pink and gold, it's easy to see how this former Cistercian house inspired both Turner and Wordsworth.

Founded in 1131 by Walter de Clare, the present building dates largely from the 14th century and functioned as an abbey until the Dissolution in 1536–40. Compared with other religious sites destroyed at the same time, a considerable amount remains.

The abbey gets oppressively busy so visit either early or late in the day to savour the peaceful atmosphere.

One mile upstream, the **tourist office** (☎ 01291-689566; 🕒 10am–5.30pm Easter-Oct, 10am–4pm Oct–Easter) is housed in old railway carriages. It can provide details of tranquil local walks.

Bus 69 makes the scenic journey from Chepstow (15 minutes) and Monmouth (35 minutes), every two hours (four on Sunday).

THE VALLEYS

South Wales is chock-full of attractions, but it's not all medieval castles and untouched coastline. North of Cardiff, and for decades a tourist no-go zone, the upland valleys tell of a time when a quarter of a million men were employed in iron and coal production.

Today, the only remnants of the 18th- and 19th-century Industrial Revolution are a few heritage sites (two not to be missed) and a collection of gruff towns and villages where populations still carry the burden of a shat-

tered past. These are the places to discover Wales' most important recent history.

Blaenafon

☎ 01495 / pop 5626

In 2000 Unesco awarded World Heritage status to the village of Blaenafon, together with a large area of surrounding upland that was key to the iron trade.

Constructed in 1789, the **ironworks** (Cadw; ☎ 792615; adult/child £2.50/2; 🕒 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm Sat, 10am–4.30pm Sun Apr–Oct, guided tours only Nov–Mar) were the largest and most advanced in the world. The scale of the works is mind-boggling, but the site is equally sobering as a graphic depiction of Wales' (and Britain's) lost industrial power; restoration continues slowly due to limited financial support. The **tourist office** (☎ 792615; www.blaenavontic.com) is based on-site – this is the place to arrange guided tours.

Ten minutes' walk away, **Big Pit Mining Museum** (☎ 790311; admission free; 🕒 9.30am–5pm mid-Feb–Nov) is essential. Operational from 1880 to 1990, it's hard to call this an attraction in the traditional sense; what you see on the trip down the 90m shaft is the censored version of one of history's toughest occupations, and it's sure to leave an impression.

COOL CYMRU

For a nation dwarfed by its English neighbour, Wales has produced plenty of musical maestros who have hit the big time. Everyone knows perma-tanned warbler Tom Jones, who's been crooning to the ladies since the 1960s. Together with the likes of Shirley Bassey, he kept Welsh pop on the map for many a year.

In the 1980s the Alarm emerged as Wales' leading act, with a string of U2-inspired rock ballads to its name. More credible is John Cale, who split from the Velvet Underground to become a respected solo performer and producer.

Today it's guitar-driven bands that mainly rule the roost. Major chart names are indie-faves Stereophonics and nu-metallers Lostprophets, whilst the genre-defying Super Furry Animals are a gem. Not only did they produce the biggest-selling Welsh-language album of all time, the dreamy *Mwng*, they also recorded the most profane song ever to hit the British charts with 1996's disco-heavy stomp 'The Man Don't Give A Fuck' – the radio edit was a joy to behold. One exception to the guitar rule is Goldie Lookin' Chain, a group of foul-mouthed comedy-rappers from Newport who are the toast of teenage boys up and down the land.

Latterly, while syrupy poplets Charlotte Church and Jem have been clogging the airwaves, the newest feisty wave of energetic resistance is gathering pace. The Automatic are causing a storm with their brand of electro-disco-punk, while Bridgend quartet Bullet For My Valentine plays supercharged rock. Less full on, multi-instrumentalist Christopher Rees carries the troubadour torch with songs of loss and regret, and Euros Childs has shifted his unique folk sound from the sadly defunct Gorky's Zygotic Mynci into the solo arena.

Other much-loved bands now defunct (but still worth discovering) include Catatonia, the Pooh Sticks, Helen Love, 60ft Dolls, Big Leaves, Dub War and the Keys.

Blaenafon lies 15 miles north of Newport; catch bus 30 (40 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday), bus 23 (55 minutes, hourly on Sunday), or bus X24 (50 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday).

The town is 8 miles from Abertaveny but there is no direct bus service.

Merthyr Tydfil

☎ 01685 / pop 35,488

At one time the epicentre of iron manufacture, depressed Merthyr Tydfil sits at the head of Taff Valley.

Poorly treated by concrete-obsessed town-planners and burdened with some of the worst unemployment figures in the country, Merthyr carries an ongoing legacy of the industrial collapse. As if to highlight its tough existence, memorial sculptures commemorate Johnny Owen, the heralded bantamweight boxer. Known as 'The Matchstick Man', the 24-year-old Owen died in 1980 after slipping into a coma following a fight in Los Angeles.

Several outlying industrial heritage sites deserve an afternoon visit, but there's no reason to stay overnight.

Merthyr's story unfolds in the museum at lavish **Cyfarthfa Castle** (☎ 723112; admission free; 🕒 10am–5.30pm Apr–Sep, 10am–4pm Tue–Fri & noon–4pm Sat & Sun Oct–Mar), ex-home of the ironworks-owning Crawshay family, near the A470/A465 junction. Conversely, **Joseph Parry's Cottage** (☎ 723112; 4 Chapel Row; admission free; 🕒 2–5pm Thu–Sun Apr–Oct, by appointment with Cyfarthfa Castle museum Oct–Mar) is one of a line of tiny workers' cottages. Birthplace of the famous composer, it remains furnished with 1840s décor.

The **tourist office** (☎ 397884; 14a Glebeland St; 🕒 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Sat), by the bus station, has details on further sights and local walks. If you're feeling active, the **Taff Trail** (from Cardiff to Brecon) runs the length of the valley and is excellent for walking and straightforward biking.

Buses X4 and X40 link Merthyr to Cardiff (50 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday). The **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) runs on summer Sundays; see p697.

SWANSEA (ABERTAW)

☎ 01792 / pop 270,506

Like many other 19th-century British towns, Swansea rose to prominence during the Industrial Revolution, when money flowed

from local copper-smelters like water from the River Tawe to Swansea Bay.

But the money didn't flow forever and Swansea, Wales' second-largest city, tumbled towards stagnation – 'ugly lovely' was how Dylan Thomas characterised his childhood hometown. Today, bar a handful of ill-conceived concrete eyesores, things have changed as the city heads full-speed into the 21st century. Admittedly Parisians, New Yorkers and Romans can sleep easy, but it's now perfectly possible to stay in the city and have a good time.

Mooch through thought-provoking galleries, enjoy international cuisine, take in a game at the impressive new football stadium, admire quayside museums or go bananas with the riotous Wind St party crowd. And when you've done all that, the gorgeously wild Gower Peninsula is just on your doorstep.

Demonstrating this resurrection, 2006 saw two significant milestones. First, work started on an ambitious two-year overhaul of the public transport system. An extensive (and disruptive) programme of roadworks is preparing a streetcar network that will run between the city and Mumbles. Concurrently, the shabby bus terminal will receive a much-needed overhaul. Of more cultural interest was the prestigious National Eisteddfod, which came to town and showed that Swansea's artistic star continues to ascend.

Orientation & Information

The city centre is a half-mile walk southwest from the train station, along High St and the Kingsway. The bus station and tourist office are by the Quadrant shopping centre. Swansea University is 2 miles west along the seafront, while Irish ferries from Cork disembark across the Tawe to the east.

INTERNET ACCESS

Central Library (☎ 516750; Alexandra Rd; free internet access; 🕒 9am–6pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am–8pm Wed & Fri, 9am–5pm Sat) Bookings recommended.

LAUNDRY

Lendart Laundrette (☎ 644682; 91 Bryn-y-Mor Rd; 🕒 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 8am–6pm Sat & Sun)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Morrison Hospital (☎ 702222; Heol Maes Eglwys, Morrison) Accident & emergency department, 5 miles north of centre.

MONEY

Banks and ATMs abound along the Kingsway and Oxford St shopping area.

POST

Main post office (☎ 464140; 35 The Kingsway; 🕒 9am–5.30pm Mon & Wed–Sat, 9.30am–5.30pm Tue)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Central Tourist Office (☎ 468321; www.visitswansea bay.com; Plymouth St; 🕒 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat year-round, plus 10am–4pm Sun Jun–Sep) Books accommodation. **Mumbles Tourist Office** (☎ 361302; 🕒 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, plus 12–5pm Sun Jun & Jul) Books accommodation on the Gower Peninsula.

Sights**MARITIME QUARTER**

This area is converted from tired docks and re-branded in the style of wannabe waterside-club. You can take a pleasant stroll here amid several worthwhile sights.

Ultramodern and unmissable, the **National Waterfront Museum** (☎ 638950; www.waterfrontmuseum.co.uk; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm) navigates Wales' industrial history and the impact of industrialisation on its people, from 1750 to the present day. Learn about the rise of coal, see how trade unions evolved and gauge the environmental impact of the Industrial Revolution in 15 innovative galleries that allow you to experience the ruthless realities of the time.

In contrast, elegant **Swansea Museum** (☎ 653763; Victoria Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), founded in 1834, is Wales' oldest museum. Exhibiting both the extraordinary and (very) ordinary aspects of Swansea's history, the muddled artefacts also include an Egyptian mummy.

The interesting **Dylan Thomas Centre** (☎ 463980; Somerset Place; 🕒 10am–4.30pm summer), off Somerset Place, charts the poet's enjoyable work, turbulent life and premature death. The small second-hand bookshop–café enhances the visit.

GLYNN VIVIAN ART GALLERY

Italianate in style, this inspirational gallery (☎ 655006; Alexandra Rd; admission free; 🕒 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) showcases Welsh talent, from the landscapes of Richard Wilson to the more contemporary work of Ceri Richards, plus international works and multimedia installations.

MUMBLES

Famous as the childhood home of actress Catherine Zeta Jones, the quaint seaside resort

of Oystermouth lies at the far end of Swansea Bay. Known as Mumbles (after the French mariners' name for the headland's bosomy rocks, *mamelles*) the town has a popular ice-cream parlour, pier and the Mumbles Mile, a pub crawl starting here and taking in 11 boozers from the White Rose to the Pier.

A 1-mile trek over the headland leads to the sandy beaches of **Langland** and **Caswell Bays**.

Cycling

The national **Celtic Trail** route runs past Swansea's marina, heading around Swansea Bay to Mumbles. For a gentle trundle around the bay, hire bikes at **Action Bikes** (☎ 464640; 5 St David's Sq, St David's Shopping Centre).

Top-quality, purpose-built mountain-bike trails can be found at **Afan Argoed Forest Park** (☎ 01639-850564; www.mbwales.com), 12 miles north-east of Swansea off the A4107 (M4 J40).

Festivals & Events

Swansea Film Festival (www.swanseafilmmfestival.com)

'Like Cannes...only closer' is the unconvincing tagline of this small but well-received bash, held in early June.

Swansea Fringe Festival (☎ 474051; www.swanseafringe.com) Open arts shindig with established names and unknowns alike. Enjoy music, theatre, comedy and film between September and early October.

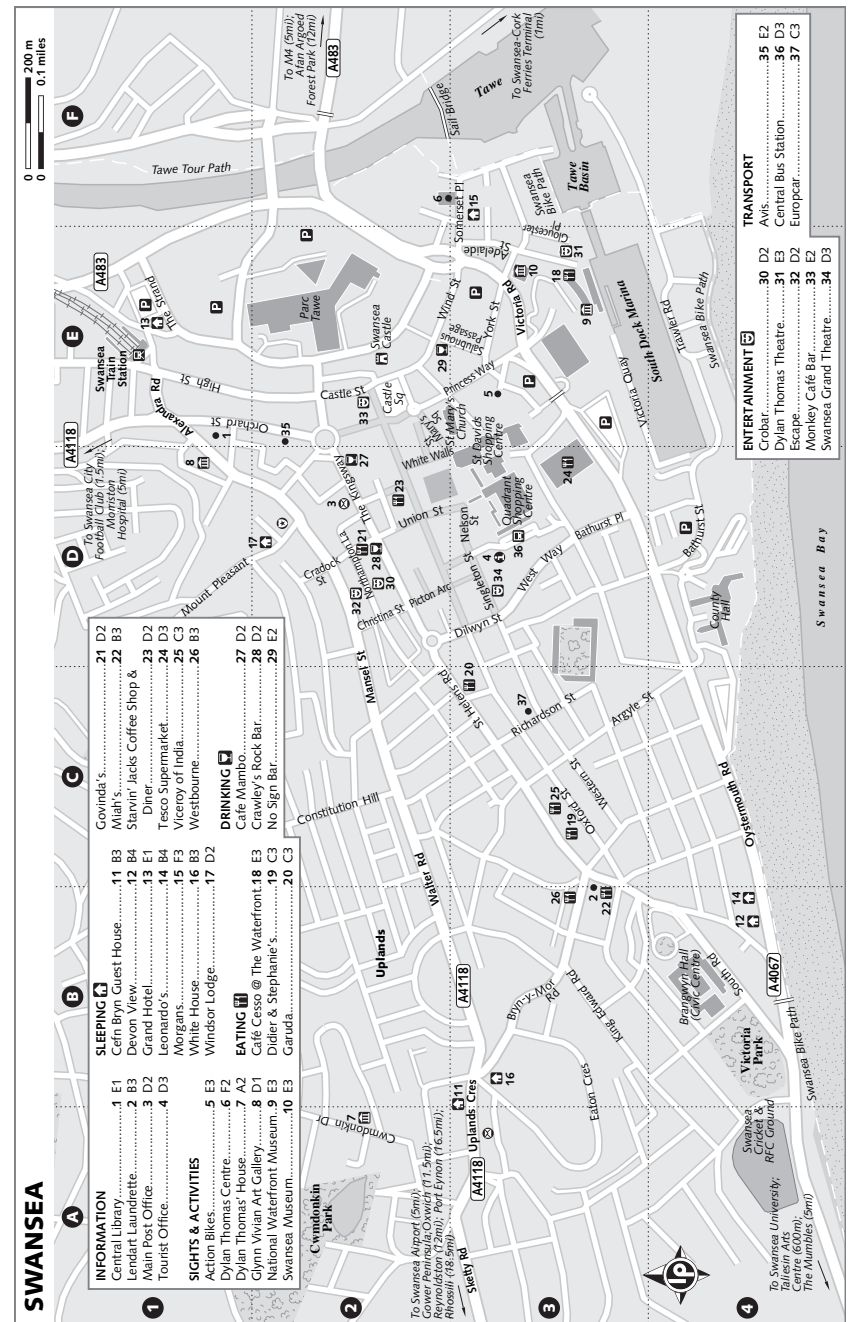
Dylan Thomas Festival (☎ 463980; www.dylanthomasfestival.org) Held every 27 October to 9 November (Thomas' dates of birth and death), this celebrates Dylan Thomas' life through poetry and organised talks.

Sleeping**CENTRAL SWANSEA**

Windsor Lodge (☎ 642158; Mt Pleasant; s/d weekday £65/75, weekend £50/65) Nothing much changes at 18th-century Windsor Lodge. It's still full of character, still close to the city centre and still a decent place to stay.

Grand Hotel (☎ 645898; www.thgrandhotelswansea.co.uk; lvey Pl; d £75–155) Directly opposite the train station, the 1930s Grand has been renovated into a sleek four-star hotel boasting rooms with DVD player and power shower.

ourpick **Morgans** (☎ 484848; www.morganshotel.co.uk; Somerset Pl; townhouse/hotel d from £75/125; 🕒 wi-fi) Stained glass, wood panelling, Egyptian linen, goosedown duvets, flat-screen TVs, luxury bathrooms – the list goes on. Unshamedly Swansea's plushest residence, five-star Morgans opened the adjoining Townhouse in 2006, with contemporary rooms set in an extended Regency property.



UPLANDS

The university neighbourhood of Uplands, a mile west of the centre, has a couple of cheaper recommendations.

Cefn Bryn Guest House (☎ 466687; www.cefnbryn.co.uk; 6 Uplands Cres; s/d from £35/70) Classic elegance meets modern design concepts in this imposing guest-house set back from the road. With four single rooms, it's a good bet for the solo traveller.

White House (☎ 473856; www.thewhitehousehotel.co.uk; 4 Nyanza Tce; s/d from £42/72; 📺) Friendly, family-run hotel with a real homey feel and a restaurant that's commended for its use of Welsh produce.

OYSTERMOUTH ROAD

Oystermouth Rd is chock-full of seafront B&Bs, of which the following are the safest bet.

Devon View (☎ 462008; joseph@devonview.co.uk; 394 Oystermouth Rd; s/d £40/60, without bathroom £25/50) The kaleidoscopic décor might make your head spin but there's a friendly welcome and a good range of rooms to suit most budgets.

Leonardo's (☎ 470163; www.leonardoguesthouse.co.uk; 380 Oystermouth Rd; s/d from £43/56) The rooms at Leonardo's are less fussy, mixing soft pastel tones with the standard seaside chintz. If you're staying over the weekend, there are some great rates for Friday-to-Sunday stays.

MUMBLES

Mumbles has several places handy for both beach and nightlife.

Coast House (☎ 368702; www.thecoasthouse.co.uk; 708 Mumbles Rd; s/d £35/50) Traditional British B&B with great seafront aspect and big welcome.

Hillcrest House Hotel (☎ 363700; www.hillcresthousehotel.com; 1 Higher Lane; s/d £55/77.50) Has an excellent restaurant and themed rooms – from Scottish to safari – with leafy outlooks.

Patricks With Rooms (☎ 360199; www.patrickswithrooms.com; 638 Mumbles Rd; d £105; 📺) Beautiful sea-view rooms with individual themes – from breezy sea-blues to full-on brilliant reds. There's also the recommended Patricks With Rooms Restaurant (see opposite).

Eating

Swansea's culinary scene is surprisingly rich.

CENTRAL SWANSEA

Café Cesso @ The Waterfront (☎ 456100; National Waterfront Museum; dishes £3-5; 📺 10am-9pm) A large and airy addition to Swansea's café scene, Cesso serves the finest teas and coffees, and fresh smoothies. Kick back on the quayside terrace with a toasted panini away from the bustle of the city centre.

Govinda's (☎ 468469; 8 Craddock St; mains £4-10; 📺 noon-3pm Mon-Thu, noon-6pm Fri & Sat) Wonderful vegetarian restaurant offering traditional dishes (lasagne, moussaka) with an Indian twist. It also does takeaway and you can even take a yoga class or learn about Indian scriptures.

Starvin' Jacks Coffee Shop & Diner (☎ 457453; 21 Park St; dishes around £4) Friendly no-frills café offering good portions of healthy grub. If you want a jacket potato or baguette with a twist (chicken tikka, mayo and melted cheese?), then this popular student fave is a good bet.

Tesco (☎ 0845 677 9662; Oystermouth Rd; 📺 8am Mon-midnight Sat; 10am-4pm Sun) A 24-hour supermarket on Oystermouth Rd.

ST HELEN'S ROAD

Multicultural St Helen's Rd has several worthwhile eateries.

Miah's (☎ 466244; St Paul's Church, St Helen's Rd; mains around £5-9; 📺 lunch & dinner) This converted

church hall takes the award for the most spectacular Indian restaurant, but the food is absolutely deserving of the grand venue.

Westbourne (☎ 476637; 1 Bryn-y-Mor Rd; mains around £5-11; 📺 lunch & dinner) This old pub recently underwent a dramatic face-lift, resulting in Swansea's first self-styled gastropub. The food isn't a revelation, focusing on honest staple dishes, but it's a good option if you don't want the formality of a restaurant.

Viceroy of India (☎ 466898; 50 St Helen's Rd; mains around £7-10; 📺 to midnight) Another place with respected subcontinental dishes, the Viceroy might lack the grandeur of Miah's, but with your face buried in a steaming curry you won't notice at all.

Garuda (☎ 653388; 18 St Helen's Rd; mains £8-11; 📺 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat; 📺) Tiny shack of a place infused with Eastern scents and brimming with Indonesian delights cooked with coconut milk and chillies. Bring your own wine. Bookings recommended.

Didier & Stephanie's (☎ 655603; 56 St Helen's Rd; mains around £12; 📺 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat) D&S consistently comes near the top of polls for good local restaurants, offering a range of French-themed dishes and a good-value lunch menu that's as tasty as the evening selection.

MUMBLES

In the Mumbles area, one place merits special mention.

Patricks With Rooms (638 Mumbles Rd; 📺 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch only Sun; mains £14.50-19.20) Pleasantly situated by the bay, Patricks creates a casual bar-restaurant ambience but serves top-quality food such as honey-roasted duck, fresh fish, and tandoori vegetable pancakes. For pud, the knickerbocker glory is an old-school wonder.

Drinking

Wind St is where it all happens. Amid the bedlam there are one or two jewels, but you may have to look harder for real quality.

No Sign Bar (☎ 465300; 56 Wind St) Old wine-bar institution that's managing to survive amid the modern throng, although the atmosphere can suffer as a result.

Cafe Mambo (☎ 456620; 46 The Kingsway) Funky and colourful, Mambo breathes Latin spirit into Swansea. Open-sided in summer and with good tequila.

Crawley's Rock Bar (Craddock St) Low-down and mean, this dark place is popular with the hard-rock crowd.

The Mumbles Mile is an oft-messy and perennially popular student pub crawl, starting in Mumbles and taking in 11 boozers from the White Rose to the Pier.

Entertainment

Buzz magazine (free from the tourist office or bars) has club and live music listings.

LIVE MUSIC

Monkey Café Bar (☎ 480822; www.monkeycafe.co.uk; 13 Castle St; admission up to £5; 📺 to 2am Sun-Thu, to 3am Fri, Sat & Sun) Student hang-out Monkey has two floors of independent sounds, live bands and DJs covering all musical bases.

NIGHTCLUBS

Crobar (☎ 477929; 1 Northampton Lane; admission £5; 📺 9pm-3am Fri & Sat, 9pm-1am Sun) Hard house and rave classics draw a pumped-up townie crowd.

Escape (☎ 652854; Northampton Lane; admission £6-12; 📺 10pm-3am Thu-Sat) Trance, house and urban choons spread through three rooms. Resident DJs, as well as big-name guests.

THEATRE

Swansea Grand Theatre (☎ 475715; www.swansea.gov.uk/grandtheatre; Singleton St) Council-operated auditorium presenting everything from ballet to pantomime.

Dylan Thomas Theatre (☎ 473238; www.dylanthomas-theatre.org.uk; Gloucester Pl) Not surprisingly, this place specialises in performances of Thomas' work.

Taliesin Arts Centre (☎ 296883; www.taliesinartscentre.co.uk; Singleton Park) Theatre, dance, live music and film at the university campus, 2 miles west of the city down Mumbles Rd.

SPORT

Swansea City Football Club (☎ tourist tickets 08700 400 004; www.swanseaacity.premiumtv.co.uk; Liberty Stadium; adult £13-18, child £7-10) This impressive stadium in Morfa opened in 2005, and also hosts rugby matches and international fixtures.

Getting There & Away**BOAT**

Swansea Cork Ferries (☎ 456116; www.swansea-corkferries.com) sails to Cork (Ireland) four to six times weekly from mid-March to January. Fares are seasonal: foot passengers £46 in low season to £68 in high season; five-day return for car, driver and five passengers is £170 to £270. The terminal lies a mile east of the centre.

DYLAN THOMAS IN SWANSEA

'If I had been born and brought up in an igloo and lived on whales, not in it...it would have been extremely unlikely I become a writer' wrote Dylan Thomas in 1952, a year before his death at age 39. The wit and wisdom of Wales' foremost 20th-century poet gained international accolades; his best-known work was the rhythmic, comic radio-play of affectionate characters, *Under Milk Wood*.

Dylan Thomas' birthplace and home at 5 Cwmdonkin Dr in Uplands is being refurbished privately, but the leaseholders (muddy@clynefarm.com) will occasionally open it by arrangement.

Both the tourist office and the Dylan Thomas Centre have plenty of Thomas material; there's even a Dylan trail (see www.dylanthomas.org) and Dylan Thomas Festival (p668), during which you may catch a performance of *Under Milk Wood*. If you want more, head to Laugharne (p674) to see the boathouse where Thomas spent his final years.

BUS

All local and long-distance bus services start and terminate at the central bus station. The First shuttle bus 100 (£6, one hour, half-hourly Monday to Friday, hourly on Saturday, four on Sunday) serves Cardiff. National Express coach NX508 runs regularly from London (£22, five hours), continuing to Haverfordwest (£7.30, 2¼ hours, three daily).

TRAIN

Trains from Swansea serve Cardiff (£7.70, 50 minutes, half-hourly) and London Paddington (£58, three hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday), and to Fishguard (£9.30, 1½ hours, twice daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday), connecting with Irish ferries.

The famous Heart of Wales line (p694) terminates in Swansea.

Getting Around

The First Swansea Bay Tourist ticket (daily/weekly £3.60/14.40) covers bus journeys in and around Swansea, the Gower Peninsula and a way up the Swansea Valley. Buy it on the bus.

For car hire, try **Avis** (☎ 460939; NCP Car Park, Orchard St) and **Europcar** (☎ 0870 607 5000; 187-189 Lower Oxford St).

GOWER PENINSULA

☎ 01792

Precipitous cliff-top walks, sweeping golden sands, untamed uplands and top surfing mean this 15-mile spit is perennially popular. Wild and windswept, it sometimes feels more like an island than a peninsula, and seems a million miles removed from Swansea's urban life.

Its proximity to the city means that the more popular areas get crowded during summer, and accommodation should be booked in advance. Despite this, it's usually possible to escape the hordes and find solitude amid beautiful scenery.

Use the tourist offices at Swansea or Mumbles (p668) for information, brochures and accommodation options.

The National Trust (NT) owns 26 miles of Gower coast and operates a **visitor centre** (☎ 390707; Rhossili; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm mid-Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Nov-mid-March).

Sights

On the south coast, sandy **Oxwich Bay** adjoins Oxwich Nature Reserve. Further west is the family-magnet beach of **Port Eynon**.

At the tip of the peninsula the village of Rhossili looks north along 3-mile long **Rhossili Bay**, the Gower's best beach and surf spot (below). Access and facilities lie at the northern end at **Llangennith**. Further north around Bluepool Corner are **Whitfords Sands**.

From Rhossili village it's possible to walk the tidal causeway to rocky, wave-blasted **Worm's Head** (from Old English *wurm*, meaning dragon) but *only* for a two-hour period at low tide. A **sea-bird colony** on the Outer Head includes razorbills, guillemots, kittiwakes, fulmars, puffins and oystercatchers, while seals often bob in the swell.

Above the village of **Reynoldston**, a colossal 25-ton quartz boulder is the fallen capstone of a Neolithic burial chamber known as **Arthur's Stone**. **Cefn Bryn** (185m) in the central uplands affords sweeping 360-degree views of the Gower.

Surfing

Some of Britain's best surf is at Rhossili Bay. For surfing tuition try the **Surf School** (☎ 386426; www.wfsurfschool.co.uk; 2hr class £20) at Llangennith.

Gower Surfing Development (☎ 360370; www.gowersurfing.com; 2hr class £30) does beginner courses at Caswell Bay and Llangennith. For local surf conditions check **Surflife** (☎ 0901 603 1603; www.llangennithsurf.com).

Surfers also head for Rotherlade and Langland Bays and Caswell Bay, near Mumbles.

Sleeping

The Gower isn't blessed with copious accommodation, but there are worthwhile options.

PORT EYNON

Carreglwyd Park (☎ 390795; www.carreglwyd.com; 2-person tent sites £15-17; ☎ Mar-Dec) For camping close to the beach, try this spot.

Port Eynon YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5998; porteynon@yha.org.uk; dm £14) One rung further up the ladder, this hostel occupies an old lifeboat house by the broad sands.

Highhead (☎ 390300; www.highhead-gower.co.uk; s/d from £27/55) Has crisp rooms with great sea views.

OXWICH VILLAGE

Oxwich Bay Hotel (☎ 390329; www.oxwichbayhotel.co.uk; s/d from £55/66, d with sea view from £72) With decent-size en suite rooms offering big sea views, this hotel is a bit floral but perfectly comfortable. It has a pleasant garden.

LLANGENNITH

Hillend Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 386204; 3-person tent sites £12-18; ☎ Apr-Oct) Hillend is a surfer's haunt behind the beach; it gets packed-out when the weather and/or surf's good and doesn't take advance bookings.

Hardingsdown Bunkhouse (☎ 386222; www.bunkhousegower.co.uk; dm £15) A beautifully renovated stable on a working farm.

Western House (☎ 386620; www.llangennith.free.serve.co.uk; d £40) This is a bright, colourful and busy family home.

College House (☎ 386214; s/d £35/50) Backs onto the village church and contains interesting sculptures.

OTHER AREAS

Kennexstone Campsite (☎ 386790; www.gowercamping.co.uk; 2-person tent sites £10; ☎ Easter-Sep) Kennexstone is located slightly inland at Llanmadoc.

King Arthur Hotel (☎ 390775; d £65-90) Also inland, at Reynoldston, this hotel is a traditional pub with log fires, en suite rooms and decent grub.

Getting There & Around

Buses run from Swansea station to Gower destinations every hour or two (fewer services on Sunday). Buses 116 and 118 serve Oxwich, Port Eynon, Reynoldston, Rhossili and Llangennith. Take bus 119 on Sunday.

The First Swansea Bay Tourist ticket (daily/weekly £3.60/14.40) covers multiple journeys. Buy it on the bus.

CARMARTHEN (CAERFYRDDIN)

☎ 01267 / pop 14,648

Carmarthenshire's county town is the alleged birthplace of Arthurian legend Merlin the Magician. Unfortunately that's the only legendary thing about this otherwise uninspiring place.

There are several worthwhile excursions in the immediate area, including the National Botanic Garden, Dylan Thomas' old haunt Laugharne and the spectacular Carreg Cennen Castle. Carmarthen's own castle, long dilapidated, is currently undergoing an enhancement scheme and is closed to the public. The **tourist office** (☎ 231557; 113 Lammas St; ☎ 10am-5.15pm Easter-Sep, 10am-4.15pm Oct-Easter) is in the centre of town.

Getting There & Away

Bus X11 links Carmarthen with Swansea (1½ hours, half-hourly, every two hours on Sunday); and bus 322 serves Haverfordwest

(£3.85, one hour, twice daily Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday).

The summer **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) links Carmarthen with Brecon, via the National Botanic Garden; see p697 for more information.

TrawsCambria coach X40 (Cardiff to Aberystwyth) stops several times daily in Carmarthen, as does National Express coach 508 or 528 (Haverfordwest to Swansea).

Trains to Carmarthen run from Swansea (£5.70, 45 minutes, hourly, daily) and Cardiff (£11.90, 1¼ hours, at least hourly).

AROUND CARMARTHEN
National Botanic Garden (Gardd Fotaneg Genedlaethol)

You don't need to have a green thumb to enjoy Wales' foremost **garden** (☎ 01558-668768; www.gardenofwales.org.uk; adult/child Easter-Oct £7.50/3, Nov-Easter £5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov-Easter), set in the rolling Georgian estate of Middleton Hall and twice the size of London's Kew Gardens.

Contemporary architecture and ingenious landscaping blend with plants that are displayed with a delicate flair. Impressive features include a 200m rivulet and fountain, while the centrepiece is the 100m-wide **Great Glasshouse**. Recessed in the hillside, the temperate dome houses endangered plants from exotic climes, including South Africa and Australia. Child-friendly attractions include a maize maze and tempting willow dens.

The garden is 7 miles east of Carmarthen, 1.5 miles north of the A48 on the B4310. Take bus 166 from Carmarthen (25 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday). **Beacons Bus** (☎ 01873-853254; www.breconbeacons.org) runs on Sundays during summer months; see p697.

LAUGHARNE (LACHARN)

☎ 01994 / pop 2940

Dylan Thomas is a name synonymous with south Wales and one of the tourist industry's greatest assets. The poet and writer spent his final years in this good-looking coastal town.

Stroll along the Taff Estuary to Thomas' seafront home, check out his gorgeously located summer house and visit St Martin's churchyard, his final resting place. It is believed that Laugharne inspired the fictional town of 'Llareggub' (say it backwards), which was the setting for *Under Milk Wood* (1954).

WORTH THE TRIP

Remote **Carreg Cennen Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 01558-822291; adult/child £3.50/3; ☹ 9.30am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Mar) is Wales' most spectacular fortress, perched high on a limestone bluff near the pretty town of Llandeilo. Visible for miles around, this is the ultimate romantic ruin.

So isolated that its military role was minimal, the castle was a consummate symbol of power and pride. It is believed that a stronghold existed here in the time of Rhys ap Gruffydd, who as 12th-century ruler of the Kingdom of Deheubarth overturned many of the territorial gains of the Normans. The castle you see today is 13th-century, built during the course of Edward I's conquest of Wales. Yorkist troops contesting the Wars of the Roses largely dismantled the stronghold in 1462.

It sits 100m above the valley floor and there's a lung-bursting climb to reach the summit, but the panoramic views across wild, pea-green hills justify the effort. The other major attraction is the spooky **Cliff Gallery**, a dark and lonely corridor tracing the southern cliff face to a natural cave. It was thought to be part of the castle defences, and you can test your bravery by inching in as far as you dare. Bring a torch (or hire one from the farm shop) but check the batteries are good!

Although Carreg Cennen is within the Brecon Beacons National Park, access is simplest from Carmarthenshire. Llandeilo lies on the Heart of Wales railway line between Swansea (55 minutes) and Llandrindod Wells (75 minutes), and the narrow, hilly streets are worth exploring for a couple of hours.

Combine a visit to the castle with a meal at **Carolita's Mexican Cantina** (☎ 01558-822908; mains £7-8; ☹ lunch Wed-Sat, dinner Thu-Sun). Hailing from southern Texas, and arriving in Llandeilo via Mexico, Carolita serves up some of the best grub for miles around – homemade tacos, nachos and enchiladas are plentiful and cut a fiery zing. Mexican decorations (some for sale) send you south of the border, while the welcome's as warm as the food is hot.

The castle is easiest reached by car, but you can also ask that the train stop at Ffairfach, from where it's a hilly 3.5-mile walk.

After his death, the ever-conservative BBC altered the spelling to 'Llaregyb'.

You can visit the remains of the 12th-century **castle** (Cadw; ☎ 427906; adult/child £2.90/2.50; ☹ 10am-5pm Apr-Sep) but most want the spiritual literary experience. Today a 21st-century celebrity, actor Neil Morrissey, haunts the village and owns several local properties.

Dylan Thomas Boathouse

Perched on the cliff with splendid views across the bay, the **boathouse** (☎ 427420; adult/child £3.50/2.75; ☹ 10am-5.30pm May-Oct, 10.30am-3.30pm Nov-Apr) is a gentle stroll from town, either via a seafont path by the castle or, higher up, along a leafy lane.

Thomas passed his final four years here with his wife Caitlin, and the house is preserved as a shrine, with photographs, manuscripts and recordings of the poet reading from his own works. From the terrace tea-room of the house you can survey his 'heron priested shore'.

Above the boathouse sits 'The Shack', the cabin where Thomas wrote *Under Milk Wood*. Peek through the window and it looks as if

he's just nipped out for a pint. The décor is (supposedly) just as it used to be.

Sleeping & Eating

Laugharne has a number of respectable accommodation and dining options.

Coach House B&B (☎ 427992; Market Lane; s/d £35/50) Exposed wooden beams, bare stone walls and a terrace with winning views in the former castle coach house. Central location *and* great privacy.

Dylan's By The Bay (☎ 427909; Victoria St; d £80) Two rooms offer spacious accommodation and sweeping estuary views – you can even take a soak in the Jacuzzi.

New Three Mariners (☎ 427426; Victoria St; mains £4-10, 3-course Sunday lunch £10; ☹ lunch & dinner) No amount of beige paint, chocolate-coloured wood or 'coffee-bar' smiles can hide the fact that this is really a pretty regular pub. Decent bar food though.

Owl & The Pussycat Tearooms (☎ 427742; Grist Sq; mains £7-12) Curiously decorated with a range of owls and cats in wicker, wood and porcelain, this is a good choice for traditional afternoon tea, as well as something more substantial.

Stable Door Wine Bar & Brasserie (☎ 427777; Market Lane; mains £12-17; ☹ dinner Thu-Sat) Probably Laugharne's classiest eatery, with tasty morsels including Welsh steak, lamb, fish and tempting veggie options. Alternatively, just stop for a glass of whatever you fancy.

Getting There & Away

Bus 222 runs from Carmarthen (35 minutes, two-hourly Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK

Rocky, sandy, sparkling and remote, the wonders of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park are unmissable. Covering 230 sq miles in the far-flung southwest, the park sits firmly in a region that the inhabitants proudly refer to as west Wales.

The stunning coastline is typified by soaring cliffs and vast swaths of golden beach, virtually all of which is encompassed within the park's boundaries and set against a backdrop of boiling surf or sheltered crystal coves.

Offshore boat trips run to the islands of Skomer, Skokholm, Grassholm and Ramsey to visit the huge colonies of raucous sea birds. Elsewhere, from countless rocky promontories on the northern coast, you can spot resident bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises, together with migrating dolphins and minke whales.

Punctuating the vista are chocolate-box seaside towns such as Newport, Fishguard and St David's, Britain's smallest city, whose historic, earthquake-wobbled cathedral is Wales' holiest site.

Walkers flock to tramp the fabled Pembrokeshire Coast Path, which can be broken into several memorable day-hikes. Adrenaline junkies get their kicks with rock climbing, kayaking, surfing and diving, whilst the pulse-juddering sport of coastering goes from strength to strength. Inland, the park extends to the Preseli Hills (535m); crisscrossed by ancient trade routes and dotted with prehistoric remains, this is mountain-biking country.

Holidaymaking is central to Pembrokeshire's identity, particularly along the south coast. This area is known as 'Little England' – more than 50 castles here were built by the

Anglo-Norman invaders and today many guesthouses are run by English settlers.

The rugged north coast is more Welsh, with a delightfully remote shoreline accessible down dead-end roads and along the coast path.

Orientation & Information

The park (www.pcnpa.org.uk) has four sections: the coastline east of Fishguard to Cardigan and inland to the Preseli Hills; the coastline west of Fishguard and south round to Milford Haven (including the islands of Skomer, Skokholm, Grassholm and Ramsey); the inland stretches of the Milford Haven waterway; and the coastline around the southern Pembroke peninsula. Oil terminals along the industrial estuary of Milford Haven disqualify this waterway from the national park.

Major tourist offices are at Tenby, Pembroke, Haverfordwest, **St David's** (☎ 720392; enquiries@stdavids.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk; The Grove), Fishguard and Newport. On arrival, pick up a free copy of *Coast to Coast*, the excellent park visitor newspaper.

For the local weather forecast call **Weather-call** (☎ 09068-500409).

Activities

Pembrokeshire's tourist offices are well informed and carry useful brochures and route maps for all the activities listed in this section. Two valuable publications are the free newspapers *Coast to Coast* and *Activity Wales*, which have events listings and further activity details.

ACTIVITY CENTRES

Pembrokeshire has two well-established centres offering fully-equipped sea kayaking, surfing and coastering adventures.

Preseli Venture (☎ 01348-837709; www.preseliventure.com; Mathry; half/full-day/full-board weekend from £45/89/189) is a super-friendly adults-only centre in a stunning north-coast location. Join a weekend course and enjoy the comfy lodge, complete with cosy bar, pool table and tasty hot meals. At the time of research a new wing was under construction, due to open early in 2007 and offering basic accommodation (see p686). Find it at Mathry, on the A487 between Fishguard and St David's.

St David's-based **TYF Adventure** (Tw-y-Felin; ☎ 01437-721611; www.tyf.com; 1 High St; half/full-day/full-board weekend £45/85/190) takes under-16s on its

courses, all of which start from its Twr Y Felin Hotel (p685). From South Pembrokeshire, contact TYF at Freshwater East (☎ 01646-672764).

BOAT TRIPS

Get up close and personal with Pembrokeshire's sea life on a boat around the islands – Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm lie off St Brides Bay, while Ramsey Island is off the northerly St David's peninsula. Further south, boats from Tenby head to Caldey Island.

Whichever operator you choose, make sure it adheres to the Pembrokeshire Marine Code, designed to protect the fragile park environment.

CYCLING

Cycling on the coast path itself is prohibited (as it is on all footpaths in Britain) but just inland are countless country lanes and 320 miles of bridleways to explore, so alternative options are plentiful.

The **Celtic Trail** national cycle route is at its best on the coast between Broad Haven (near Haverfordwest), St David's and Fishguard.

Get details from **Sustrans** (☎ 0845 113 0065; www.sustrans.org.uk). For more on Sustrans and the National Cycle Network see p88.

Gentle mountain biking can be found in Canaston Woods near Narbeth, while the bridleways of the Preseli Hills offer tougher upland routes (p689). **Newport Bike Hire** (☎ 01239-820773/330; East St; per half-/full-day £10/15) supplies bikes and routes for the north coast and Preseli Hills.

PONY TREKKING & HORSE RIDING

This is an ideal area for riding – either along the beaches, across open moors or high up in the Preseli Hills – and there are a dozen stables in or near the park. Ask at a tourist office for your local centre.

SEA SPORTS

Pembrokeshire has been blessed not only with spectacular coastal scenery but also reliable surfing. Easily accessible hot spots include Newgale and Freshwater West, and (most popular) Whitesands Bay near St David's.

You can easily hire and buy equipment, or simply arrange tuition. Try **Whitesands Surf**

COASTEERING & SEA KAYAKING

If you fancy a spot of rock climbing, gully scrambling, cave exploration, wave riding and cliff jumping, all rolled together, then try coasteering. More or less conceived on the Pembrokeshire coast, this demanding activity is the mainstay of the local adventure-sports scene. It's also risky, so take guidance from an instructor and don't be tempted to take flight from the nearest precipice.

Pembrokeshire also has some of Britain's finest sea kayaking, suitable for all levels. Powerful tidal currents generate large standing waves between the coast and offshore islands; novice paddlers can splash around the sheltered coves. Everybody, experienced or not, can revel in the beautiful cliffscapes (rock stacks, caves and idyllic bays) and wildlife (porpoises and birds) from the water – without an outboard motor in sight.

School (☎ 01437-720433; www.whitesandsurfschool.co.uk; High St; 2hr class £25), based at Ma Sime's Surf Hut in St David's, or **Outer Reef** (☎ 01646-680070; www.outerreefsurfschool.com; 2½/5hr class £25/35), which moves from beach to beach with the best waves.

As well as surfing, **West Wales Wind, Surf & Sailing** (☎ 01646-636642; www.surfdale.co.uk), based at Newgale, also offers windsurfing, dinghy sailing, canoeing and powerboating.

You can also enjoy canoeing and surfing at Preseli Venture and TYF activity centres (p675).

If you prefer scuba diving, see rich marine life and several local wrecks with **West Wales Diving Centre** (☎ 01437-781457; www.westwalesdivers.co.uk; Hasgurd Cross), near Little Haven, or **Celtic Diving** (☎ 01348-871938; www.celticdiving.co.uk; Goodwick Parrog), based by the Fishguard ferry terminal.

Newgale on St Brides Bay has one of the best beaches in Wales for **fishing**.

As exciting as all these are, Pembrokeshire's true star attraction is coasteering (above), a crazy mix of climbing, diving and swimming. Try it with Preseli Venture or TYF.

WALKING

The 186-mile cliff-top **Pembrokeshire Coast Path** hugs the shoreline between Amroth on the south coast and Poppit Sands near Cardigan on the north coast. En route you can discover over 50 bathing beaches, 40 Iron Age forts and countless hidden coves. The rise and fall of the cliffs adds to the challenge; 15 days is a good estimate for the total distance, but most people do shorter sections. Suggestions for good walks include Dale to Martin's Haven near Marloes, and Solva to Whitesands Bay on St David's peninsula.

Recommended is the detailed *Pembrokeshire Coast Path* by Brian John (£12.99),

available from tourist offices, together with leaflets breaking the walk into shorter sections. From the park website (www.pcnpa.org.uk) you can also download route maps for 95 circular walks.

Accommodation is always close to the route and youth hostels are often spaced a day's hike apart, but book ahead between Easter and September. Tourist offices can help you plan where to stay.

The route is covered by two Ordnance Survey *Explorer OL* 1:25,000 maps: No 35 (North Pembrokeshire) and No 36 (South Pembrokeshire).

Pembrokeshire Coastal Bus Services (p678) operates daily from June to September (three times a week in winter), allowing access to more remote coast-path sections and circular walks.

Sleeping

B&Bs and hotels are plentiful in the park, especially around the well-developed south coast (www.visitpembrokeshire.co.uk).

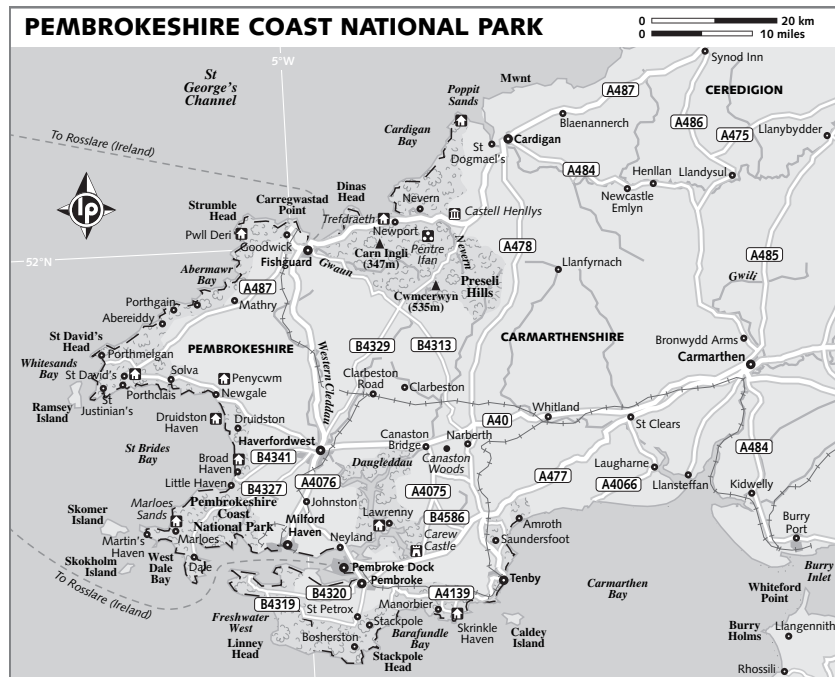
There are nine YHA hostels: Manorbier (p679), Lawrenny, Marloes Sands (p682), Broad Haven (p682), Penycwm (p682), St David's (p685), Pwll Deri (p686), Trefdraeth (Newport; p688) and Poppit Sands (p690).

Fishguard has the Hamilton Backpackers (p687).

It always pays to book ahead between Easter and September, and especially from June to August (the main holiday period for Brits).

Getting There & Around

Frequent West Wales railway services from Swansea (connections for Cardiff and London's Paddington) run to Pembrokeshire's major transport hubs, Haverfordwest (£9.30, 1½ hours) and, for Irish ferries, Pembroke Dock (£9.20, 2¼ hours). National Express



coach 508 runs from London to Haverfordwest (£25.50, seven hours, three times daily).

Once in Pembrokeshire, use buses to get around rather than trains but note that Sunday services are limited, especially from October to April. The West Wales Rover (£6) is a one-day ticket valid on most buses in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion – buy it on the bus. For details of the multiday Freedom of South Wales Flexi-Rover ticket, which includes trains, see p662.

Pembrokeshire has a second Irish ferry port at Fishguard. Take bus 412 (30 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) from Haverfordwest to Fishguard Sq, and then bus 410 (five minutes, every half-hour Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) to Goodwick.

Between May and September a collective of local buses constitute **Pembrokeshire Coastal Bus Services** (☎ 01234-567890; www.pembrokeshiregreenways.co.uk). The Poppit Rocket, Preseli Green Dragon, Strumble Shuttle, Celtic Coaster, Puffin Shuttle and Coastal Cruiser ply the coast-path roads daily, picking up and setting down at any safe point.

Between October and March, a reduced service (Poppit Rocket, Strumble Shuttle, Puffin Shuttle and Coastal Cruiser only) operates three days a week.

You can use the West Wales Rover ticket on these services. Tourist offices stock timetables and information is also published in the free *Coast to Coast* newspaper.

TENBY (DINBYCH Y PYSGOD)

☎ 01834 / pop 4934

With attractive architecture, 13th-century fortifications and B&Bs galore, Tenby might seem like the perfect seaside town. But that doesn't tell the whole story. If Jekyll and Hyde had lived in Wales, the faded-pastel splendour of this Victorian resort would have been their Utopia, such is its capacity to entrance and appal with equal measure.

Generations of holidaying Brits have chosen Pembrokeshire's foremost seaside town for their summer hols, attracted by golden sands, a sheltered harbour and superbly located castle, and why not? Wandering the narrow medieval streets of the old town is a captivating experience, never more so than on a warm spring morning (hello Dr Jekyll).

But spring turns to summer and with it Tenby shatters your serenity like a Welsh bull on steroids. Suddenly the town is full

to bursting. Kiddies scream, dads shout, the beach heaves and boozy hen and stag parties leave chunky, spattered calling cards in the streets (welcome Mr Hyde).

Time your visit right and Tenby enthral. Get it wrong and you might wish you never came.

Orientation & Information

Tenby's major landmark is the headland of Castle Hill, site of the Norman stronghold. On the north side is the harbour and North Beach. On the southern side is little Castle Sands, then long South Beach. The train station, on Warren St, is on the western side of town, with the bus station one block further south, at Upper Park Rd.

The **tourist office** (☎ 842404; tenbytouristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; The Croft; ☹ 10am-5pm Easter-late-May, 10am-5.30pm late-May-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Nov-Easter) is by Somerfield supermarket.

Sights & Activities

Popular boat rides bob the 20 minutes to **Caldey Island** (☎ 844453; www.caldey-island.co.uk; adult/child £9/5; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Easter-Oct, 10.30am-4.30pm Sat May-Sep), one-time home of Cistercian monks and enduring haunt of grey seals and Wales' largest cormorant colony.

Twice-daily guided tours explore the monastery and the island has attractive walking. Boats depart (every 15 to 20 minutes in high season) from the quay at high tide and Castle Sands at low tide. Buy tickets at the harbour kiosk.

Handsomely restored, Tenby's 15th-century **Tudor Merchant's House** (NT; ☎ 842279; Quay Hill; adult/child £2.50/1.20; ☹ 11am-5pm Sun-Fri Easter-Oct) has period furnishings and the remains of early frescoes on the interior walls.

The castle ruins house **Tenby Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 842809; Castle Hill; adult/child £3/1; ☹ 10am-5pm Easter-Dec, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Jan-Easter), which tells the town's story through period exhibitions and paintings by the likes of Augustus and Gwen John.

For a guided walk with a variety of themes (for example ghosts, pirates or the story of Tenby) contact **Town Trails** (☎ 845841; walks £3.75; ☹ Mon-Sat Jun-Sep & holidays); it also offers Halloween and Christmas specials.

Sleeping

Tenby overflows with classic seaside B&Bs and hotels. The nearest YHA hostel is about 6 miles west at Manorbier.

Meadow Farm (☎ 844829; per person on foot £6; ☹ Easter-Sep) The best of Tenby's camp sites, this is a simple coastal site (on a bit of a slope) with showers, five minutes' walk north of town.

Glenholme (☎ 843909; Picton Tce; s/d from £30/37) Tenby can be pricey so here's a cheaper place that offers en suite rooms. There are no sea views, but it's central – find it off South Beach Esplanade by the Tenby bowling green.

Castle View (☎ 842666; www.castleviewhotel.co.uk; The Norton; d from £60; ☹) On the North Shore seafront, Castle View has a winning location and, amid a sea of frills and flounce, offers en suite rooms that are comparatively tasteful.

Kinloch Court Hotel (☎ 842777; www.kinlochcourt-hotel.co.uk; Queens Pde; s/d from £65/84; ☹) Perched above the South Shore, this is a beautiful former rectory converted into understated accommodation with en suite rooms and sweeping views across the bay. Rooms are spacious, although the décor doesn't quite match the splendour of the exterior.

Eating & Drinking

Tenby's old town has a clutch of welcoming eateries.

Bay of Bengal (☎ 843331; 1 Crackwell St; dishes £3-13; ☹ dinner) Bag a window seat at the Bay of Bengal for far-reaching sea views. There is tasty sub-continental scran.

Nana's Italian Restaurant (☎ 844536; St Julian's St; mains £7-17; ☹ lunch & dinner) By the harbour, Nana's has honest pizzas, pastas and salads, together with more sophisticated delights such as seared Welsh lamb. Alternatively, grab a drink and indulge in people-watching from the terrace.

Bay Tree (☎ 843516; Tudor Sq; mains £10-17; ☹ lunch & dinner) Opposite Pam Pam, this place sources fresh Pembrokeshire produce and has live music on Saturdays. Try Tan-y-Draig (home-made Welsh lamb curry).

Pam Pam (☎ 842946; Tudor Sq; mains £10-19; ☹ lunch & dinner) So good they named it twice? Not quite, but enjoy char-grilled tuna or baked butternut squash with Mediterranean vegetables in this pub-style restaurant boasting a pianist.

Plantagenet House Restaurant (☎ 842350; Quay Hill; mains £14.50-22; ☹ lunch & dinner) Forget the oft-mentioned 12th-century Flemish chimney hearth, this rustic place is about creative presentation of the best local meat and seafood.

The £7.95 lunchtime sausage special (try juicy lamb and mint, pork and apple, or veggie) suits all wallets.

For a rambunctious night out, follow the crowds to the most popular spots. For something less frantic, sink a real ale at the **Crown Inn** (☎ 842796; Lower Frog St).

Getting There & Away

Trains run from Swansea (£9.20, 1½ hours, every two hours Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday) via Carmarthen (£5.80, 40 minutes) en route to Pembroke Dock (35 minutes).

National Express coach 508 runs from Swansea (£6.80, 1½ hours, three times daily) via Carmarthen (45 minutes) and on to Haverfordwest (50 minutes, three times daily). Bus 349 also serves Haverfordwest (1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday)

MANORBIER

☎ 01834

Compact and hilly, this isolated village boasts attractions as disparate as wild sandy beaches and a batch of reject-grade waxworks from Madame Tussauds in London.

The dilapidated 12th-century **castle** (☎ 871394; www.manorbiercastle.co.uk; adult/child £3.50/1.50; ☹ 10.30am-5.30pm Easter-Sep) was the birthplace of Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), one of the country's greatest scholars, who was passionate about his home – 'in all the broad lands of Wales, Manorbier is the best place by far,' he wrote. This is also where the dodgy wax effigies ended up, put to good use in historical exhibits.

Perched by the hilly road down towards the sea, **Castlemead Hotel** (☎ 871358; www.castlemeadhotel.com; s/d from £40/78) is a flouncy but fine, well-established place.

Manorbier YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5954; manorbier@yha.org.uk; dm £14; ☹ by advance booking Mar-Oct) is a lonely, modernist-looking place 200m from sandy Skrinkle Haven, 1 mile east of Manorbier.

Bus 349 serves Haverfordwest (45 minutes, hourly) via Pembroke (20 minutes), continuing on to Tenby (20 minutes, half-hourly).

PEMBROKE (PENFRO)

☎ 01646 / pop 7214

Wales' oldest castle and a stoic Welsh atmosphere amid medieval streets make it easy to spend a happy half-day in Pembroke. You

may even wish to stay longer as the B&Bs are better value than those in popular Tenby.

The **tourist office** (☎ 622388; pembroke.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; Commons Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-5.30pm Jul & Aug) is south of (and below) Main St.

Pembroke Dock, with ferries to Rosslare (Ireland), is a separate town 2 miles west of Pembroke. Within the Irish Ferries terminal is another **tourist office** (☎ 01646-622753; pembroke.dock.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm Apr-Sep, also 10.30pm-1.30am mid-Jul-Aug) that opens in line with ferry arrival times.

Pembroke Castle

Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, there are two disparate attractions at Pembroke's **castle** (☎ 681510; adult/child £3.50/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Feb). Climb 100 spiral steps for unbroken views from the keep, before dropping way down to subterranean **Wogan's Cavern**, a massive natural cave with a watergate.

During the Irish conquest, the stronghold was the base of 'Strongbow' Richard FitzGilbert, earl of Pembroke. A plaque marks the 1456 birthplace of Henry, the first Tudor king and father to Henry VIII, the monarch who formalised the English-Welsh union. During the Civil War, the fortress resisted Oliver Cromwell for 48 days until he discovered and blocked the water source.

The castle occasionally holds **open-air theatre** during summer.

Sleeping & Eating

Two central Pembroke B&Bs have enduring appeal.

Beech House (☎ 683740; 78 Main St; s/d £17.50/35) With a naturally endearing hostess, period Georgian features and rooms that are as comfy as you could wish for, Beech House immediately improves your impression of Pembroke. And with such great rates, how can you go wrong?

Woodbine (☎ 686338; 84 Main St; s/d £25/50) Next door to Beech House, Woodbine has a calm, serene atmosphere and is done out in light colours, which means you'd better leave muddy boots outside. The emphasis is on modern, which is reflected in the slightly higher rates.

Cornerstone Café (dishes £3-5; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Cross the bridge over the pond for this cute place attached to a local craft shop. Tasty organic ingredients are used in sandwiches, lasagne and the intriguing courgette-and-lemon soup.

Jays (☎ 683838; Main St; sandwiches £3) Great place for a big, floury bacon bap (£1.80).

Old Kings Arms Hotel (☎ 683611; www.oldkingsarmshotel.co.uk; Main St; mains £6-18.45; ☎ lunch & dinner) Nothing flashy here, just good old-fashioned meat and fish dishes prepared in pub-

restaurant style. The use of local produce has earned significant commendation.

Wisebuys Country Stores (☎ 687046; 19 Main St) Self-caterers can stock up here, with a huge array of quality meats, breads, fruit and veg.

Getting There & Away

Bus 349 calls at Pembroke (and Pembroke Dock) on its way between Haverfordwest (50 minutes) and Tenby (40 minutes) hourly Monday to Saturday. On Sunday, there are five Haverfordwest services, and four Tenby services.

Irish Ferries (☎ 0870 517 1717; www.irishferries.com) runs two ferries a day to Rosslare (Ireland) from Pembroke Dock (3¼ hours).

AROUND PEMBROKE

If you need another fortress-fix, moody **Carew Castle** (☎ 651782; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-Oct) broods over its glassy **tidal millpond**. The 1-mile circular walk around the castle, mill, causeway and bridge is recommended.

The 12th-century fortification was later converted to an Elizabethan manor before being abandoned in 1690. The millpond used to trap the incoming tide, releasing the waters through sluice gates that turned the millwheels. For 400 years to 1937, the three-storey building ground corn for the castle estate and community. Free guided tours run daily at 2.30pm.

A tall 11th-century **Celtic cross** stands by the road near the castle entrance. Opposite, the **Carew Inn** (☎ 01646-651267; mains £7.50-16) serves quality pub food and hosts live-music nights.

The site lies 5 miles east of Pembroke. Bus 361 stops at the cross on its way between Pembroke Dock (15 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday, none on Sunday) and Tenby (55 minutes).

HAVERFORDWEST (HWLFFORDD)

☎ 01437 / pop 13,367

Less-than-attractive Haverfordwest is Pembrokeshire's main transport hub. With an inland location it lacks both the charm and breezy freedom of its coastal neighbours.

Founded in the 12th century beside the River Western Cleddau, the town allowed migrants from overpopulated Flanders to settle here. The one-time river port thrived before the railway arrived in the mid-19th century.

The small **Castle Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 763087; adult £1) is in the outer ward of the

castle. The **tourist office** (☎ 763110; haverfordwest.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; 19 Old Bridge; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Easter-May & Oct, 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter) is centrally located.

Sleeping & Eating

College Guest House (☎ 763710; www.collegeguesthouse.com; 93 Hill St; s/d from £38/55) Undoubtedly the best option in town, the College mixes period style with modern hospitality and fantastic Welsh breakfasts. The en suite rooms feature wooden shutters to keep summer mornings at bay.

George's (☎ 766683; 24 Market St; mains £5-11) Sharing premises with a New Age gift-shop, George's has a unique atmosphere. Little tables hide in cosy snugs and the menu features everything from jacket potatoes to Cypriot *tofournou* (baked macaroni with minced beef or lamb), as well as tempting smoothies and shakes. When you're finished, you can probably buy the gargantuan Indonesian reclaimed-teak chairs you were just sitting on.

Getting There & Away

Bus services from Haverfordwest serve all of Pembrokeshire.

Bus 412 runs hourly to Cardigan (1¼ hours, four on Sunday) via Fishguard (45 minutes), and bus 411 serves St David's (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday).

National Express coach 508 serves London (£25.50, seven hours, three times daily).

Trains run every two hours to Swansea (£9.30, 1½ hours), connecting to Cardiff and London.

ST BRIDES BAY (BAE SAIN FFRIDD)

Broad, beautiful St Brides Bay has Wales' best beaches, which magically absorb the summer crowds. **Little Haven** is a pretty little village above a fine beach, **Broad Haven** is the liveliest resort and glorious **Newgale** beach is the biggest strand, a honey-pot for swimmers and surfers.

The bay lies at the western end of the Landsker Line, the invisible boundary running from west to east and dividing Welsh Pembrokeshire in the north from the more anglicised south.

Activities

In Broad Haven, **Haven Sports** (☎ 01437-781354; www.havensports.co.uk) offers water-sports tuition

COAST WITH THE MOST

Many of Pembrokeshire's best beaches lie down winding country lanes, hidden from the bigger towns and villages. Public buses are good, but if you've got your own wheels then the more remote stretches of coast are yours to explore. Just grab a map, take to the roads and check out these beauties.

- Musselwick Sands (at low tide) is near Marloes, on the spit pointing towards Skomer Island. It's a large sandy beach with plenty of craggy inlets to explore.
- Traeth Llyfn is by the village of Aberiddy near St David's. Descend a metal staircase to this pretty beach with sheltered swimming.
- Druidston Haven sits below the beguiling Druidston Hotel (p682) near Nolton Haven. Low tide reveals a long stretch of silky golden sand.
- Porthselau is south of Whitesands Bay; a tiny but cute beach great for families.
- Pwllgwaelod is near Dinas head between Fishguard and Newport. Drop down the steps to this long, wild stretch of golden shoreline.
- Broadhaven South and Barafundle Bay are near Bosherton to the south of Pembroke. There are gorgeous, secluded National Trust beaches. The walk from Barafundle to intriguing St Govan's Chapel, beautifully set into the rock, is one of the most scenic clifftop stretches in the national park.

and rents gear. For details of other teaching outfits – Outer Reef and West Wales Wind, Surf & Sailing – see p676.

Sleeping

Villages around the bay have plenty of mid-range B&Bs. Camp sites abound, and most farmers are happy to let you use a field for a couple of pounds – ask first.

Newgale Campsite (☎ 01437-710253; tent sites per person £5; ☽ Easter-Sep) Wild site by sweeping Newgale beach, with café, pub and shop close by.

Druidston Hotel (☎ 01437-781221; www.druidstone.co.uk; d from £78-130) To call this clifftop place quirky would be an understatement. It offers a mix of beautifully remote accommodation (rooms at the top are the best), award-winning food (bar meals around £8) and individual welcome – just to start. If you've got more time to kill, ask about staying in the Roundhouse, a solar-powered self-sustaining ecohouse.

YHA hostels are well sited for beaches and the coast path:

Marloes Sands (☎ 01646-636667; reservations@yha.org.uk; dm £9.50; ☽ Apr-Sep) For bookings more than seven days in advance call ☎ 01629-592708. It's 1 mile from Martin's Haven, and the departure point for Skomer Island.

Broad Haven (☎ 0870 770 5728; broadhaven@yha.org.uk; dm £14; ☽ Mar-Oct with 48hr notice) Panoramic bay views.

Penycwm (☎ 0870 770 5988; penycwm@yha.org.uk; dm £15.50) Britain's first five-star hostel, 2 miles from the beach. Advance bookings only.

FIVE BEST FREEBIES

Britain's not all spend, spend, spend you know. Even if the budget's running low, you can still join in these local shindigs.

- Sample the best local food direct from the producers at Haverfordwest Farmers Market, voted Britain's best in 2006. It's on alternate Fridays from 9am to 3pm at Riverside shopping centre.
- Fiddle around at a local folk club. Try the Royal Oak in Fishguard (p688), where weekly music sessions happen every Tuesday evening.
- Watch the traditional longboat races at the Solva Regatta in early August, 3 miles east of St David's.
- Discover your spiritual side at the mystical Celtic Blue Rock Community Arts Festival, with live bands, dancing, art and symbolic burning of the wicker phoenix; see www.celticbluerock.org.uk.
- Join a local group spotting sea birds or porpoises at Strumble Head near Fishguard. Ask at the tourist office for forthcoming meetings.

Getting There & Away

The coast path and Marloes, Dale, Broad Haven, Druidston and Newgale are served by the Puffin Shuttle (p678).

Regular buses run from Haverfordwest; for Dale and Marloes take bus 315 (one hour, three daily Monday to Saturday); bus 311 terminates at Broad Haven (20 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday); Newgale and Penycwm are stops on the bus 411 route, running hourly Monday to Saturday between Haverfordwest (25 minutes), St David's (20 minutes), and, infrequently, Fishguard (70 minutes).

SKOMER, SKOKHOLM & GRASSHOLM ISLANDS

Rocky and exposed, these three little islands off the St Brides Bay's southern headland are a marine nature reserve and home to some of Wales' largest **sea-bird colonies**, most active from April to mid-August. Regular trips run from Easter to October.

The largest and easiest island to reach, Skomer is home to over half a million breeding sea birds, including puffins, guillemots, razorbills, fulmars, cormorants and shags. About 150 **grey seal pups** are born here annually, and **porpoise** and **dolphin** sightings are common.

To the south, Skokholm plays host to some 35,000 **Manx shearwaters** and puffins. Together with Skomer, it has the world's largest colony of burrow-breeding Manx shearwater – 160,000 strong. Accommodation on the island can be booked through the **Wildlife Trust South & West Wales** (☎ 01239-621600).

The smallest island is Grassholm, 11 miles offshore and with the second-largest **gannet colony** in the northern hemisphere – 33,000 pairs. Landing on Grassholm is not permitted.

Two reliable boat companies are listed as follows.

Dale Sailing (☎ Dale Princess Cruises 01646-603123, Dale Sea Safari Adventures 0800 028 4090; www.dale-sailing.co.uk; trips £8-25) has daily landing trips to Skomer, round-island cruises, evening shearwater spectaculars and high-speed rigid inflatable boat (RIB) safaris. Departures from Martin's Haven near Marloes.

Shearwater Safaris (☎ 08081 445529; www.boatrideres.co.uk; trips £25) has RIB trips around the islands, including evening departures and sea-life safaris, but no landings. It's based at Neyland Yacht Haven near the Cleddau Bridge.

ST DAVID'S (TY-DDEWI)

☎ 01437 / pop 1800

Tiny St David's holds a village-like charm that, despite big summer crowds, never seems to fade. Prosperous and with a vaguely bohemian whiff, this is also Britain's smallest city, courtesy of the magnificent 12th-century cathedral that marks Wales' holiest site. It lies close to some of Pembrokeshire's wildest coast, and thrill-seekers flock here for adventure sports.

The patron saint of Wales, Dewi Sant, established the first monastic community here in the 6th century. His relics are still preserved in a casket inside the cathedral, hidden in a hollow below the main square. A visit here, and to neighbouring Bishop's Palace, is essential.

In tune with the upmarket holiday crowd that favours St D's, the tiny streets boast more than their fair share of cosmopolitan restaurants and café-bars.

Information

The combined **National Park Visitors Centre & Tourist Office** (☎ 720392; enquiries@stdavids.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk; ☽ 9.30am-5.30pm) is at the east end of town, and stocks information on accommodation and national park literature. Internet access costs £1 per half-hour.

Sights

ST DAVID'S CATHEDRAL

This beautiful grey-granite **cathedral** (☎ 720691; admission by donation £3) is St David's top tourist site and should not be missed.

Built during the late 12th century on a site where a church had existed for 600 years, this

is Wales' holiest site – in 1124 Pope Calixtus II declared that two pilgrimages to St David's equalled one to Rome and that three equalled a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem itself. Additions to the cathedral were subsequently made between the 12th and 16th centuries. In between times, Norse pirates plundered it on at least seven occasions.

The atmosphere inside is one of great antiquity. The floor slopes sharply and the pillars keel drunkenly following a 1248 earthquake, while the Norman nave's superb Irish oak ceiling dates from the 16th century. The equally richly carved choir in the centre of the cross is illuminated from the tower above. The relics of Dewi Sant, the patron saint, were wrecked during the Reformation and are now kept behind the altar.

As part of a large-scale renovation project the Treasury was established in 2005 to house the cathedral's treasures and tell the story of Christian worship and scholarship of St David. In 2006 the beautiful refectory opened as the Refectory at St David's restaurant.

Tours of the cathedral (£3, 1½ hours) are held at 2.30pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday during July and August.

BISHOP'S PALACE

On leaving the cathedral, don't overlook the ruins of **Bishop's Palace** (Cadw; ☎ 720517; The Close, St David's; adult/child £2.90/2.50; ☽ 9.30am-5pm Apr, May & Oct, 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat & 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). The imposing architecture, including the arcades of the parapet, is mostly due to Henry de Gower, bishop from 1327 to 1348. The palace is one of the most elaborate testaments to the power and wealth of the medieval church in this region.

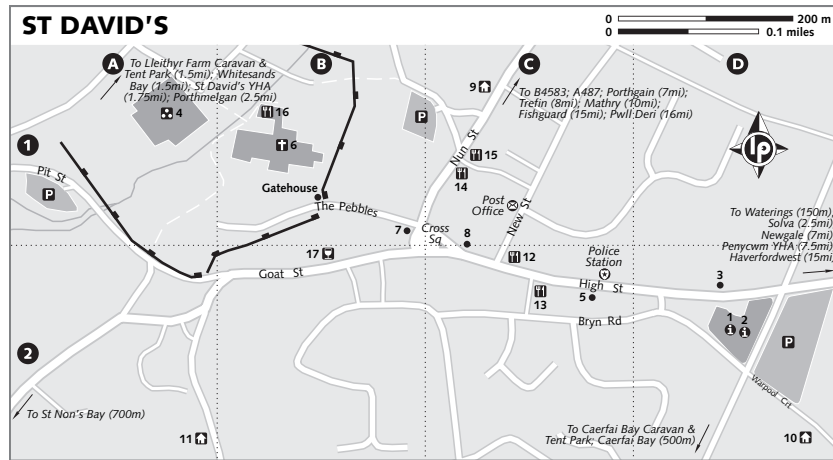
The palace is a spine-tingling setting for open-air theatre during the summer Arts Festival (p685).

ST NON'S BAY

St David's supposed birthplace lies three-quarters of a mile south of the cathedral, beside the bay that bears his mother's name and the ruins of the 13th-century **St Non's Chapel** (also a modern chapel and a building used as a retreat). A spring at the site is attended by pilgrims and fabled for its curative powers.

BEACHES

West-facing **Whitesands Bay** (Porth Mawr), 2 miles northwest, is a prime surfing beach and



INFORMATION		Thousand Islands		EATING	
National Park Visitors Centre.....	1 D2	Expeditions.....	7 B1	Bench.....	12 C2
Tourist Office.....	2 D2	TYF Adventure.....	8 C1	Cwtch.....	13 C2
		Voyages of Discovery.....	(see B8)	Lawton's at No 16.....	14 C1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SLEEPING		DRINKING	
Aquaphobia.....	3 D2	Alandale.....	9 C1	Farmer's Arms.....	17 B2
Bishop's Palace.....	4 A1	Twr Y Felin Hotel.....	10 D2		
Ma Sime's Surf Hut.....	5 C2	Warpool Court.....	11 A2		
St David's Cathedral.....	6 B1				

usually crowded in summer. **Porthmelgan Beach**, a further 15 minutes' walk northwest on the coast path, is smaller and more secluded.

RAMSEY ISLAND

Just off St David's Head, Ramsey Island plays host to Atlantic grey seals and thousands of nesting sea birds, whilst porpoises and dolphins frolic near spectacular sea caves.

Boat trips covering island landings, cave tours, jet-boating and whale and dolphin-watching are offered by several companies in St David's – make sure whichever one you choose follows the Pembrokeshire Marine Code, designed to protect the fragile park environment.

Aquaphobia (☎ 720471, after hours 721648; www.aquaphobia-ramseyisland.co.uk; Grove Hotel, High St; trips £20-40) offers round-Ramsey tours and evening trips to see shearwaters.

Thousand Islands Expeditions (☎ 721721/721686; www.thousandislands.co.uk; Cross Sq; trips £14-50) has evening puffin- and shearwater-spotting, whale watching, fishing trips and high-speed rigid inflatable boat (RIB) jaunts, as well as Ramsey cruises with landing and guided walks.

On **Voyages of Discovery** (☎ 0800 854367; www.ramseyisland.co.uk; 1 High St; trips £15-50) you'll enjoy whale watching, Ramsey voyages, north-coast adventures to Strumble Head, and puffin and shearwater cruises.

Activities

WALKING & CYCLING

The Pembrokeshire Coast Path passes St David's. The nearest sections are a mile south around Porthclais, St Non's Bay or Caerfai Bay (all about a mile apart). The path around the peninsula between Solva, St Justinian and Whitesands Bay is a longer trek, served by two youth hostels – St David's YHA Hostel and Penycwm (p682). The tourist office stocks walking leaflets.

St David's is the westernmost point of the Celtic Trail cycle route (see p676).

WATER SPORTS

Whitesands Surf School (☎ 07789-435670; www.whitesandsurfschool.co.uk; 2½hr lesson £25) teaches at the popular surf spot of Whitesands Bay and has a base inside Ma Sime's Surf Hut in St David's.

TYF Adventure (☎ 01437-721611; www.tyf.com; Twr y Felin; 1 High St; half/full-day/full-board weekend £45/85/190) offers coasteering, sea-kayaking, climbing and surfing trips.

Festivals & Events

St David's Cathedral Festival (☎ 720271; festival@stdavids cathedral.org.uk) Nine days of classical recitals in the cathedral from late May to early July.

Arts Festival The highlights of this two-week gathering, beginning in early August, are the atmospheric open-air Shakespeare productions at romantic Bishop's Palace.

Really Wild Food Festival (☎ 891381; www.real lywildfestival.co.uk) Celebrate the best local food and crafts at this jamboree held over a weekend in early September.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Lleithyr Farm Caravan & Tent Park (☎ 720245; www.whitesands-stdavids.co.uk; 2-person tent site £6.50; ☺ Easter-Oct) Near Whitesands beach and on the coastal path, this five-star site has a shop selling fresh meat – ideal for the barbecue.

St David's YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6042; stdavids@yha.org; Llaethdy; dm £11; ☺ Easter-Oct with advance bookings) Also near Whitesands, this is a basic, self-catering farmhouse hostel. It's a 1.75 mile walk from town – there's no public transport.

Caerfai Bay Caravan & Tent Park (☎ 720274; www.caerfaibay.co.uk; 2-person tent site £12.75-16.25; ☺ Mar-mid-Nov) The last stop before hitting the little beach. The views are one reason this site gets busy; book ahead in summer.

MIDRANGE

Twr Y Felin Hotel (☎ 721678; www.tyf.com/tyfhotel; s/d £40/80, without bathroom £30/60) Part of the TYF Adventure group, this laid-back hotel offers a place to stay that's clean, crisp and unfussy. Retaining original features from the period property, like marble fireplaces, the restaurant also doubles as a summer barbecue.

Alandale (☎ 720404; www.stdavids.co.uk/guesthouse/alandale.htm; 43 Nun St; s/d £32.5/65; ☒) Still offering great value in the 'city', Alandale is a smart town house with sweeping rear views over the peninsula. Rooms are with en suite, and the lounge boasts an open fire to banish those winter chills.

Waterings (☎ 720876; www.waterings.co.uk; Anchor Dr, High St; d from £70; ☒) Close to the tourist office, this sprawling bungalow has large gardens and accommodation set around an internal courtyard. En suite rooms are large and comfortably furnished.

TOP END

Warpool Court (☎ 720387; www.warpoolcourthotel.com; d from £180; ☒) Rooms at this stately old hotel are a little dated (especially for the price) but you're paying for unrivalled sea views and the classic stately home experience – croquet, tennis and, should you wish, an afternoon G&T on the lawn.

Eating & Drinking

Bench (☎ 721778; 11 High St; mains £1.50-13; ☺ 10am-10pm; ☒ wi-fi) Bustling, rabbit-warren bar with a stylish Mediterranean feel. Snuggle into deep sofas or try the bright, sunflower-themed conservatory – a great place to chomp on fresh pizza or just sip a coffee. Don't miss the wonderful ice creams (blackberry and apple pie, for example) made with local milk. Internet access costs £1 per 20 minutes or £3.75 wireless docking charge.

Refectory at St David's (☎ 721760; mains £1.65-8.45; ☺ 10am-6pm, until 9pm Jul & Aug) St D's most atmospheric dining experience opened in mid-2006 as the centrepiece of the cathedral's renovation project. Medieval St Mary's Hall has been given a splendid ultramodern face-lift, with blonde woods contrasting against the exposed walls and a shiny mezzanine supported on slanted legs. The food – honest and great value – just tops it off.

Cwtch (☎ 720422; 22 High St; 1-2-/3-courses £14/20/25; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, dinner only Sun) Another city-sleek place causing ripples, Cwtch means 'warm, safe place' and you'll feel embraced by the affable welcome and contemporary, locally sourced food. Delights include superb fish pie and asparagus and goats cheese tart. The upstairs bar boasts long drinks and cool sounds.

Morgan's Brasserie (☎ 720508; 20 Nun St; mains £12.50-19.50; ☺ dinner Wed-Mon) Another well-established bistro, chocolate-and-beige Morgan's serves a similar array of lip-smacking fish and meat dishes.

Lawton's at No 16 (☎ 729220; 16 Nun St; mains £16-32; ☺ dinner Tue-Sun) A stylish, bright interior contains fishy delights at Lawton's, which also gets the juices flowing with prime free-range meats. It's not the cheapest, but local recommendations are glowing.

Farmer's Arms (☎ 721666; Goat St) Busy and relaxed, this is a real pub.

Getting There & Around

Bus 411 stops en route from Haverfordwest (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two

on Sunday) to Fishguard (50 minutes, every two hours, one on Sunday).

St David's is served by the Puffin Shuttle, Celtic Coaster and Strumble Shuttle (p678), which stop at coast path access points and villages.

St David's gets clogged with summer traffic so park the car at the tourist office and walk the five minutes to town, or hop on the free shuttle bus.

AROUND ST DAVID'S

If you plan to spend any time mooching the less explored cliffs and coves, make it the rugged stretch from St David's to Fishguard. This is one of Pembrokeshire's most beautiful areas.

The Strumble Shuttle bus (p678) serves various points along the coast path between St David's and Fishguard.

Close to St David's is the cove village of **Porthgain**, with sheltered harbour and a fantastic fish restaurant. The ramshackle **Shed** (☎ 01348-831518; lunch dishes £6-18, dinner dishes £19.50-23; ☎ tearoom 9am-5pm, 7-11.30pm, closed Mon Apr-Sep, bistro 7.30-11pm Fri & Sat Oct-Mar) is pricey but serves some of the best fish and seafood you'll ever taste. Booking is essential. Just across the green, the 250-year-old **Sloop Inn** (☎ 01437-831449) will serve you a decent pint if you don't want to eat at the Shed.

On this stretch of coast are some wonderful places to stay.

Experience space by the coast in the luxury B&B **Awel Mor** (☎ 01348-837865; www.stdavids.co.uk/guesthouse/awelmor.htm; Penparc; s/d from £30/60; ☎). With its large gardens, terraced patio and open views to the sea, you might spend more time outside than in your comfy room.

In Llanrhian, 5 miles east of St David's, is **Caerhafod Lodge** (☎ 01348-837859; www.caerhafod.co.uk; dm £13), a spic-and-span private hostel with en suite dorms (with power showers); huge self-catering kitchen and priceless friendly welcome.

Preseli Venture Adventure Lodge (☎ 01348-837709; www.preseliventure.com; half/full-day/full-board weekend from £45/89/189) is the newly created dorm accommodation at this activity centre with the friendly welcome and wonderfully isolated location. You can have full run of the lodge (including pool table, wood-burning stove, library and seemingly endless coffee), and it's a 10-minute woodland stroll down to Abermawr beach, where you can sometimes watch sleepy seals.

Pwll Deri (☎ 0870 770 6004; Trefaser; dm £11) is the only YHA hostel remaining on this coastal stretch. It's a basic whitewashed house perched high on the cliffs, with cinematic sea views and the chance to spot seals. It's open from Easter to October with advance booking. Find it at Trefaser, 4.5 miles west of Fishguard.

FISHGUARD (ABERGWAUN)

☎ 01348 / pop 3193

Fishguard might be famous for being a ferry terminal with a funny name, but don't be put off by preconceptions. Stop awhile and you'll discover a hilly little town with a cute harbour and intriguing history. Lying towards the northeastern end of the coast path, it's also temptingly close to the rocky promontories of Strumble Head and Dinas Head, and the green inland Gwaun Valley and Preseli Hills.

From the town centre the main street plummets eastward to the picturesque original harbour of Lower Fishguard, the setting for the 1971 film *Under Milk Wood* starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

Ferries to Ireland actually sail from the neighbouring town of Goodwick (Fishguard Harbour) in the next bay northwest.

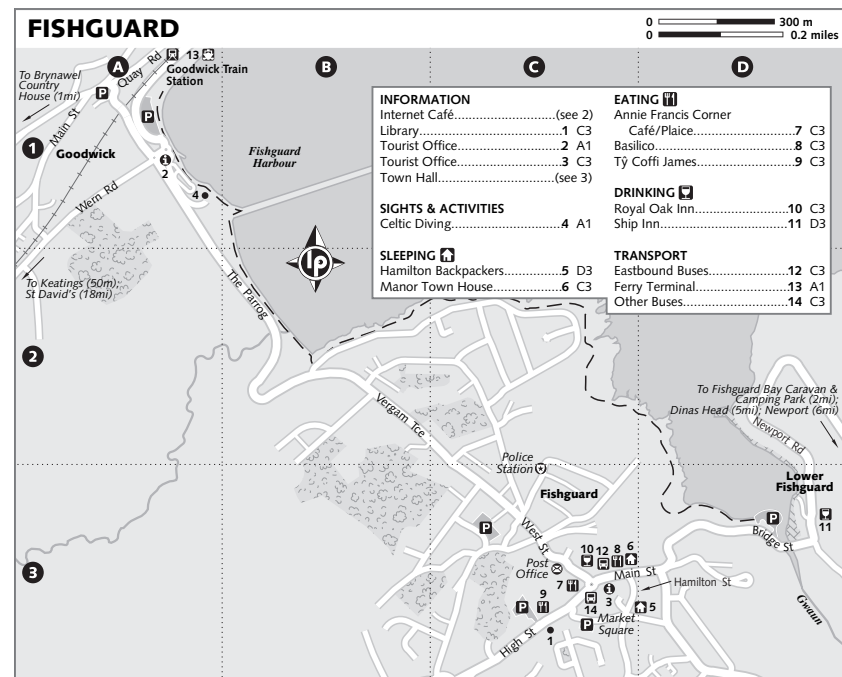
In February 1797 Fishguard was the improbable setting for the last invasion of Britain. Some 1400 French mercenaries landed with the intention of marching to Liverpool and diverting English troops, thereby allowing another French force to conquer Ireland. But the ragamuffin band stumbled across stocks of Portuguese wine and, befuddled by its potency, were captured by sober locals. Their surrender was signed in the town's Royal Oak Inn, which still pulls a decent pint.

In 1997 a magnificent 30m tapestry telling the story of the invasion was commissioned to mark the bicentenary of this event. It was planned for this to be on permanent display in the town hall from early 2007.

Orientation & Information

The train station (Fishguard Harbour) and ferry port (for ferries to Rosslare, Ireland) are at Goodwick, about a 20-minute walk northwest from central Fishguard.

The town **tourist office** (☎ 873484; fishguard.touristoffice@pembrokeshire.gov.uk; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-May & Oct, 10am-5.30pm Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter) is at the town hall by the central roundabout. At the time of research it had been temporarily moved to the library while renovation work



was carried out on the town hall, although this should now be complete.

The **portside tourist office** (☎ 872037; ☎ 10am-6pm Easter-Oct, 10am-4pm Nov-Easter; internet per 30min £2), with internet café, is near the ferry terminal at Goodwick.

Activities

WALKING & DIVING

Tourist offices stock walking literature for knobly Dinas Head and the Preseli Hills, as well as the coast path section around Strumble Head.

Use the Celtic Coaster, Strumble Shuttle and Poppit Rocket bus services (p678) for travel to points west and east on the coast path, to walk sections or all the way back.

Located near the ferry terminal, **Celtic Diving** (☎ 871938; www.celticdiving.co.uk; Goodwick Parrog) will take you from a try-out session through to full PADI certification. It also has clean, comfortable dorm accommodation (£18) in the purpose-built accommodation block.

Sleeping

Pwll Deri (opposite) is the nearest YHA hostel.

Fishguard Bay Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 811415; www.fishguardbay.com; 2-person tent site from £10; ☎ Mar-Nov) On a peninsula overlooking the bay, this well-equipped site has TV room, laundry and pool table. It's 2 miles east of Fishguard and handy for the coast path.

Hamilton Backpackers (☎ 874797; www.hamiltonbackpackers.co.uk; 21 Hamilton St; dm/d £14/36; ☎) Swing your thing in a garden hammock, hit the sauna or watch satellite TV. Yep, this is a hostel – it's also central and close to the town's boozers.

Keatings (☎ 873546; Manor Way; s/d £35/45) Just 500m from the ferry terminal, this makes a good base if you need to be near the boats. Rooms are simple yet comfortable.

Manor Town House (☎ /fax 873260; Main St; s/d from £35/65) Still Fishguard's classiest option. The graceful décor of this Georgian town house is a cut above average and has attracted national press acclaim. There's a beautiful palm-tree garden and an excellent three-course dinner for £19.50.

Eating & Drinking

Ty Coffi James (High St; snacks & cakes £1.50-5) Improbably located in a sewing shop, this modern

café has homemade sandwiches, cakes and breakfasts. There's a garden at the rear and local artworks adorn the walls.

Annie Francis Corner Café/Plaiice (☎ 874649; Market Sq; mains around £11; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat Jul-Oct) On a cold, wet morning, this is a fantastic place for a greasy bacon bap. On a warm, sunny evening it's well worth investigating the fresh fish dishes. A winner, whatever the weather.

Royal Oak Inn (☎ 872514; Market Sq) Full of invasion memorabilia, the Oak is well known for its winning weekly folk jig.

Ship Inn (☎ 874033; Newport Rd) By the old harbour in the pretty lower town, here be the snuggest little tavern you ever could wish to find.

At the time of research a new Italian restaurant offering accommodation, called Basilico, was preparing to open. Why not check it out and let us know what it's like?

Getting There & Away

Bus 411 serves St David's (50 minutes, every two hours Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday). Bus 412 stops en route to Haverfordwest (45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) and Cardigan (40 minutes).

The Strumble Shuttle (west to St David's) and Poppit Rocket (east to Cardigan), serve points and villages along the coast (p678).

Fishguard Harbour railway station (Goodwick) has services from London Paddington (£67, 4½ to 5½ hours, two daily) – change at Cardiff – and Swansea (£9.30, 1½ hours, twice daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday).

Stena Line (☎ 0870 570 7070; www.stenaline.co.uk) runs a boat (3½ hours, two daily) as well as a faster summertime catamaran (two hours, two to four daily) to Rosslare, Ireland.

Getting Around

Bus 410 swings between Fishguard and Goodwick (five minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday).

NEWPORT (TREFDRAETH)

☎ 01239 / pop 1120

Towards the northeast boundary of the national park, diminutive Newport lies snuggled at the mouth of the River Nevern in attractive Newport Bay.

Dominated by the rocky outcrop of **Carn Ingli** (347m), Newport makes a great base for discovering the mystical Preseli Hills, just

a few miles inland. There are also several beaches, of which **Parrog Beach** and **Newport Sands** are the most popular.

The **tourist office** (☎ 820912; info@newporttourist-office.fsnet.co.uk; 2 Bank Cottages, Long St; ☎ 9.45am-1pm & 1.45-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.45am-1.15pm Sun) is opposite the car park. The village is also home to the **Newport Collective** (☎ 821056; Market St), a group of artists who collaborate to promote and sell local crafts.

Be sure not to confuse the village with the city of the same name, near Cardiff.

Walking & Cycling

The tourist office can suggest local walks; try the town trail, a section of coast path, a hike up Carn Ingli or the picturesque Gwaun Valley (Cwm Gwaun) leading to the Preseli Hills (high point Cwmcwrwyn, 535m).

Cycling is also good. Try the Gwaun Valley again and, for mountain biking, the hilly Preseli bridleways. Hire bikes and get local route information from **Newport Bike Hire** (☎ 820773/820330; East St; per half-/full-day £10/15), based at Newport Wholefoods on the main street.

Sleeping & Eating

Morawelon Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 820565; Parrog Beach; 2-person tent sites £10-11.50) Camp near the coast, northwest of the centre (leave the A487 near the Royal Oak Inn in Fishguard).

Trefdraeth YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 6072; reservations@yha.org.uk; Lower St Mary St; dm £12.50; ☎ Easter-Oct with advance bookings) A converted schoolhouse centrally located by the tourist office; self-catering only and with no daytime access.

Our pick **Llys Meddyg Guesthouse & Restaurant** (☎ 820008; www.llysmeddyg.com; East St; d £90-120; mains £6.50-25; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) This converted doctor's residence takes contemporary big-city cool and plonks it firmly by the seaside. Chic rooms boast comfy beds, gorgeous en suites and luxurious touches including LCD TVs and exposed oak. The bar and restaurant epitomise the design ethos: funky urban-type retreat downstairs (think chill-out) and a classically opulent dining room upstairs, serving the best in innovative dishes. Outside, the garden kitchen serves high-quality pub-style dishes in a less formal atmosphere.

Cnapan (☎ 820575; www.cnapan.co.uk; East St; s/d £45/76; dosed mid-Jan–mid-Mar; ☎) Close by is this more classically British B&B. Rooms here

THRILLS AND HILLS

Craggy coast and shimmering sands dominate Pembrokeshire, but turn away from the sea and follow the national park inland to the ancient **Preseli Hills** near Fishguard and a whole new landscape reveals itself. It's littered with prehistoric forts, standing stones and burial chambers, and ancient trade routes crossed these spiritual hills. From here, around 1500 BC, came the bluestone megaliths of Stonehenge in England, almost 250 miles away.

This is excellent mountain-biking territory, where quiet country lanes and the shady Pantmaenog Forest lead to the hills' highest peak, Cwmcwrwyn (5365m). From the summit, the views across the coastline and beyond to the Irish Sea are breathtaking.

To plan your own routes use Ordnance Survey Landranger 1:50,000 map 145. For bike rentals and route information, contact **Newport Bike Hire** (☎ 01239-820773/330; East St; per half-/full-day £10/15).

are spacious and decorated with period furnishings and homely clutter, while the recommended restaurant (two-/three-course dinner £22/27.50) offers winning dishes.

Café Fleur (☎ 820131; Market St; dishes £5.25-10; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-9pm Jul-Sep) Cosy, wood-rich café with no-nonsense grub like sausage and mash and steak-and-onion pie. In the daytime, grab a panini or deliciously decadent Belgian waffle.

Getting There & Away

Bus 412 runs through Newport between Fishguard (15 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) and Cardigan (20 minutes).

AROUND NEWPORT Nevern

The overgrown castle and **Church of St Brynach** make this hamlet, 2 miles east of Newport, a curious excursion. St Brynach was a 5th-century Irish holy man who lived in a hut on Carn Ingli, above Newport.

The atmospheric 6th-century churchyard contains a **Celtic cross** erected some 500 years later, and has a shady alley of ancient yew trees leading to the church door. Inside, the **Maglocunus Stone** is thought to be 5th-century and bears inscriptions in Latin and *ogham* (an ancient Celtic script).

Castell Henllys

A visit to this **castle** (☎ 891319; adult/child £3/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct) is an intriguing affair. Ongoing archaeological digs have enabled a faithful reconstruction of an important Iron Age settlement *in situ*, with authentic roundhouses and outbuildings sitting on original foundations. Craft demonstrations and costumed staff enliven the site.

The site was the location for the BBC's *Surviving the Iron Age* TV series, which plucked a group of jolly volunteers from the comfort of modern life and dropped them into scratchy woollen clothes (no underpants) to survive with little more than axes, hammers, candles, chickens (live), eel traps and an outside latrine. Tempers flared.

It's 4 miles east of Newport along the A487. Bus 412 Fishguard–Newport–Cardigan stops at Melina Rd, three-quarters of a mile south.

Pentre Ifan

A little imagination helps validate the long uphill hike to 5500-year-old Pentre Ifan, one of Wales' best-preserved Neolithic cromlechs (burial chambers). A huddle of stones is actually a delicate arrangement with a great capstone balanced on the pinpoint of upright slabs – the skeleton of what was once a huge enclosed earthen mound. The soil has been eroded by the passage of time.

Pentre Ifan is 2 miles south of Nevern. Take bus 412 from Newport (ask the driver for the Pentre Ifan stop), then walk 2.5 miles up signposted lanes.

CARDIGAN (ABERTEIFI)

☎ 01239 / pop 4082

Although Cardigan lies in the county of Ceredigion, it appears in this Pembrokeshire Coast National Park section as it's the closest town to the northern end of the coast path. The big walk begins at Poppit Sands to the northwest. The town itself, near the mouth of the River Teifi, is small, busy and worth a fleeting visit.

The **tourist office** (☎ 613230; cardigantouristoffice@ceredigion.gov.uk; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul & Aug, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun) shares the lobby of Theatr Mwldan.

Sights

A contrasting vision of ragged stone, rampant ivy and plastic tarpaulin, the town's medieval **Cardigan Castle** is emerging from decades of neglect. It was for many years under private ownership, but the local council purchased the ramshackle ruins in 2003 and national fame followed when the castle featured on BBC TV's *Restoration*. Today renovation is well underway, allowing a unique chance to see the site in a state of flux. The scale of the task is astonishing – trees and creepers have ravaged the buildings but you can pick up an explanatory leaflet and follow a rudimentary path through the grounds, often alone amid eerie silence.

In more glorious times, some 800 years ago, the castle hosted the first competitive eisteddfod, held by Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd in 1176 to select his court musicians. Those times might be returning (crowds, café, visitor centre and all), so take a look now before it's completed. Find the site down tiny Green St opposite the Castle Café.

Cardigan's **Heritage Centre** (☎ 614404; 🕒 10am–5pm Sun–Fri), in a restored but scruffy granary by the town bridge, tells the town history.

Theatr Mwldan (☎ 621200), which shares a space with the tourist office, is an excellent modern town theatre and cinema, with gallery and café.

Sleeping & Eating

Brongwyn Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 613644; 2-person tent sites £10) Camp 3 miles northeast off the A487 at Penparc.

Poppit Sands YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5996; poppit@yha.org.uk; dm £14) This is tucked away by Cardigan Bay, four miles northwest of town and near the start/finish of the coast path. The Poppit Rocket (p678) sets down in the car park half a mile away.

Tipi West (☎ 07813-672336; www.tipiwest.co.uk; Hendre Farm, Blaenannerch; tipi £15) Fancy a Welsh camping experience with a difference? Snuggle by the fire in an authentic tipi (tepee) a stone's throw from the golden sands of Aberporth – just bring a sleeping bag. Find it 5 miles east of Cardigan off the A487.

Brynhafryd Guest House (☎ 612861; Gwbert Rd; s/d from £21/45; 🍷) There's not much choice in town, but here's a well-established, friendly place with six spacious rooms (three with en suite).

Abdul's Tandoori Spice (☎ 621416; 2 Royal Oak; dishes £2.50–15; 🕒 5–11.45pm) Renowned for lip-smacking curry dishes, Abdul's is opposite the Somerfield supermarket.

Food For Thought Café (☎ 621863; 13 High St; mains £5–11) Lovely pastel-shaded café specialising in organic and veggie meals, and boasting plenty of daily specials.

Getting There & Away

Bus 412 serves Haverfordwest (1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday) via Fishguard (50 minutes); buses 460 and 461 serve Carmarthen (1½ hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday). Heading east, more remote points on the north coast are served by the Poppit Rocket (p678).