

## **48 hours in Cardiff**

Right. You're in Cardiff, you have 48 hours to see the city. That's a tough one, so we've put together a selection of our favourite places to make it easier for you to get the most out of our city.

### **A little Overview**

Resurgent Cardiff, the undisputed capital of Wales. A truly modern and cosmopolitan city with nightlife to match. In the Cardiff Bay area, you'll find some stunning showpiece buildings - the Millennium Centre, a fantastic arts and cultural venue; the spanking new slate and glass Welsh Parliament Building and in the city centre, the Millennium Stadium with its 'Thunderbirds are go' sliding roof. But despite all that forward thinking, it's a city that has not forgotten its past. The Civic Centre and National Museum are one of the finest in Europe and Cardiff Castle an unexpected city centre surprise.

What's really great about Cardiff is its size. It's compact. Almost everything you want to see is within walking distance or a short cab ride. So you won't be wasting your time getting from place to place.

### **Day 1**

#### **The Morning**

You've arrived, dropped your bags off in some swanky boutique hotel and are ready to explore. Head straight to the Cardiff Visitor Centre to pick up a map and a guide. Then you're ready.

#### **Cardiff Castle**

The best place to get your bearings is Cardiff Castle. You can't miss it. Cardiff revolves around it. It's like a big calm cube right in the city centre. Originally a Roman fort, it's now a mixture of buildings from all eras. Ultimately, it was the 3rd Marquis of Bute, one of the richest men on the globe, who transformed Cardiff Castle into the mock gothic extravaganza you'll see today.

Take the guided tour. The interior is stunning. Then climb up to the top of the 12th century Norman keep (the little castle in the middle) for great views over the city. Watch out for those pesky peacocks. They love the limelight and always try to get in the way of the best thought out photo opportunity.

#### **Civic Centre**

From the Castle's Norman keep, you can see your next stop: the Civic Centre. It's the finest in the British Isles, even if we do say so ourselves.

There are some seriously impressive buildings here. The centrepiece is the magnificently domed, snarling-dragon-topped City Hall.

Take a look inside, the interior's great, and well worth a look. As you go through the main entrance look to your left and you will see the Peace Sculpture: it depicts one of the women who marched from Cardiff in 1981 to establish the Greenham Common Peace Camp. Then head up to the Marble Hall, lined with columns of Siena marble and statues of Welsh heroes. Including the main man himself - St David, the Patron Saint of Wales.

Nearby buildings which make up the Civic Centre include Cardiff University, the Temple of Peace and the Welsh National War Memorial - a beautiful and surprisingly quiet place to sit and watch the world go by.

### **National Museum of Wales**

You're likely to spend a lot of your time in the next building - the National Gallery and Museum of Wales. It's the big domed one next to City Hall.

The museum is one of the finest in the UK. If you had the time you could quite happily spend a few days in here, wandering the galleries. Highlights include: the Evolution of Wales gallery, packed with high tech stuff - moving dinosaurs, earthquakes, volcanoes that sort of thing.

The Archaeology Galleries are packed with Roman relics, Celtic Crosses, and Bronze Age gold. Take a look at the Caergwle Bowl, a gold votive container in the shape of a boat that's more than 3,000 years old.

The main draw for most people is the Davies Collection. The largest collection of Impressionist and Post Impressionist paintings outside Paris. Cezanne sits next to Renoir and Rodin, opposite Monet, near Pissarro, over by Manet. Look out for Van Gogh's stunning *Rain at Anvers* – angry slashes of rain run right across what is otherwise a beautiful landscape. It was painted just weeks before his suicide.

On a lighter note, you'll be pleased to know that that the museum is completely free.

### **Afternoon**

You must be starving after all that culture. Luckily there are plenty of great places to eat very nearby.

For a lighter lunch, you may want to try one of the many sandwich bars and cafés which dot the city. Try to grab a bite to eat at the hip New York Deli in the High

Street Arcade - they do a mean bagel. Or at Capsule, a restaurant and contemporary art gallery on Charles Street. Take a break from sightseeing, sit amongst the paintings, glass of wine in hand and relax. But not for too long - there's more to see.

Two choices are open to you now. If you have even the slightest interest in rugby, or simply enjoy visiting changing rooms, you have to head to the Millennium Stadium, the spiritual home of sport in Wales.

If you're not, shame on you. But each to their own. You can indulge in some retail therapy instead.

### **Millennium Stadium**

The Millennium Stadium is quite simply magnificent. The stadium dominates the city and has become an iconic symbol of not only Cardiff, but of Wales as a whole.

The capacity is 72,500, and all seating has an excellent, unimpeded view of the action on the pitch. Its four masts hold up a "thunderbirds are go!" massive sliding roof. The roof is so well balanced that to open or shut it uses no more than £2.54 worth of electricity.

Each of the stadium's fifteen bars are equipped with "joy machines" which can pour 12 pints in less than 20 seconds. At a recent Wales v France rugby match, 63,000 fans drank 77,184 pints of beer. Almost double the number drunk by a similar number of fans at the same weekend's Twickenham match.

You can take a tour of the stadium which includes running down the player's tunnel. Imagine yourself being greeted by 72,500 people eagerly awaiting the pain and the glory of rugby at its best. They even play the crowd cheering and the Welsh National Anthem. Quite stirring.

### **Shopping**

Queen Street is Cardiff's main shopping thoroughfare. One of the finest shopping centres outside London, this is where you'll find all the high street chain stores.

But Cardiff knows how to stand out from the UK city crowd. You'll see how if you explore the Victorian Arcades.

There are six in total, stuffed full of the quirky and the unusual. Snug coffee shops sit next to esoteric club clothing boutiques and chic high end fashion stores. There's a shop that sells nothing but buttons next to one that sells nothing but violins. And they're next to a surf shop, a Welsh cheese shop, and a shop that only sells condoms.

Take a look at Melin Tregwynt. Inside, you'll find contemporary-looking rugs, throws, cushions gifts and clothes. You won't find the usual mass-market daffodil and dragon goods here, because Melin Tregwynt is all about giving you the chance to see what's new, cool and contemporary on the Welsh scene.

For a novel shopping jaunt, visit Jacob's Antique Centre at the bottom of St Mary's Street. Fancy a Victorian fireplace, some 18th-century jewellery, antique brass or hardware, pocket watches, or 70s inspired home wear? Take your pick, there are antique shops here that sell almost everything.

Budding art collectors should make a bee line for the Martin Tinney Gallery, in Windsor Place. The atmosphere is friendly and informal. The gallery specialises in Welsh and Wales-based artists of the highest quality, past and present.

A must for anyone with an enthusiasm for contemporary art is Kooywood. This gallery offers an eclectic range of works. As well as providing a new vehicle for the exhibition of works by some familiar names, Kooywood is rapidly establishing itself as a showcase for some of the brightest new Welsh talent.

While we are talking about galleries, one to visit tomorrow is Craft in the Bay on Bute Street. This gallery features the largest selection of handmade quality crafts in Wales,. Baskets, pottery, jewellery, hand-crafted furniture, ceramics and the like are all stuffed into this restored maritime warehouse.

## **Food**

Eating out in Cardiff is an experience in itself. The city offers an eclectic mix of cultural traditions and different types of cuisine. From Hawaiian to Japanese to Welsh.

If you can't decide what nationality to eat, head towards the café quarter, home to a host of trendy restaurants, bars and clubs. Giovanni's has three restaurants in the area, each catering for different tastes. You could also try Jumpin' Jacks for a Mexican feast or the Juboraj for high-class Indian food.

A firm Cardiff tradition is a red hot curry after a night at a club. City Road, just out of the city centre, is the place to go if you want something cheap and quick. The Kismet is a good one to try, but most of the restaurants here are very similar in terms of menu and price, and they're all open until the early hours of the morning.

Our longstanding favourite? It has to be Caroline Street, or Chippy Lane. Best stumbled upon after a long night on the tiles, sophisticated its not. But if you're in need of a late night snack, it's the place to be. And don't worry, anyone who is anyone ends up here sooner or later.

## Later on

Cardiff is packed full of pubs and clubs of all hues, with chic cosmopolitan bars jostling alongside more traditional Victorian places and massive beer barns. For those who enjoy less boisterous surroundings, there are several wine bars where you can sit back and enjoy waiter service. Any visit should include an opportunity to sample a pint of the city's very own beer - Brains SA - brewed in the heart of the city. Legend has it that the SA stands for 'skull attack'. You'll have to make up your own mind about that one.

For the dance floor athletes amongst you: go to the Welsh Club, aka Clwb Ifor Bach and enter into musical delights from Hip Hop all the way to Indie. Or try the Toucan Club. Notorious for its great atmosphere (it's a bar/club combo), it plays anything from world music to the hippest of hip hop. Lino is available for any brave break dancers.

For a relaxed "dance like a muppet, but not give a monkeys" venue, try The Emporium - as seen in the film *Human Traffic*. The décor is bizarre - almost gothic, with wrought iron gates and dark little corners.

## Day 2

### Morning

Head to Cardiff Bay or 'down the bay' as everyone from Cardiff says. This is the former docks area of the city and used to be the largest port in the world. It was once better known as Tiger Bay, immortalised by locally born Shirley Bassey. It's about a mile from the city centre. You could walk, take the train, or the waterbus. Or there's an open top tour bus from outside the castle.

These days, the Bay is one of the world's largest regeneration projects. Central to the whole idea is the Cardiff Bay Barrage, which transformed the bay from mud flats to a massive freshwater lake. Around the lake, Cardiffians have realised that they love water. Marinas, apartments, water taxis, opera houses and even a parliament building all vie for a waterfront location.

### Wales Millennium Centre

Start your day at the Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff's new multi purpose arts centre. If you think you have seen this building before, you probably have. It's featured in the BBC's *Doctor Who* series, and also sits on top of the fictional underground head quarters of *Torchwood*.

The building is all glass and slate. And it looks very much like a Welsh armadillo. It's home to seven of Wales' major cultural institutions, including the Welsh National Opera. The structure is dominated by a huge dome coated in copper

oxide to give it a bronze colour. This is designed to look better with age. Well, aren't we all?

Inscribed above the front door are two poetic lines. The Welsh version, "Creu Gwir fel gwydr o ffwrnais awen" means "creating truth like glass from the furnace of creation". The English version reads: "In these stones, horizons sing". The letters form the windows of the upper floors and are lit up at night. The materials come from all over Wales and are designed to reflect the different parts of the country.

Take a guided tour, visit the interactive exhibitions or take in a free performance. These vary from day to day, but can be anything from hip hop to poetry.

### **The Senedd**

Next door to the Millennium Centre is the Welsh Senedd (Parliament) Building. The building is impressive. Its wave-like roof juts out into the sky uncompromisingly; its glass walls afford you a clear view inside the building from 50 metres away, but still reflect the waters of Cardiff Bay which practically lap onto its steps. It manages to be both gutsy and ethereal - and has a certain magic that you can only feel by visiting it. So that's what you should do. Take the tour. Poke around a bit, have a look for those elusive politicians.

### **Pierhead Building**

The red terracotta building in front of the Senedd is known as the Pierhead Building. This magnificent, ornate French-Gothic pile was designed by William Burges - remember him from Cardiff Castle? Same architect. The building now houses the National Assembly Information Centre.

### **Afternoon**

The area around the Millennium Centre is known as Mermaid Quay. It's a jumble of shops, bars and restaurants, and on a warm day, packed. A great place to people watch.

Try the Terra Nova, named after the ship on which Captain Scott set sail for Antarctica from Cardiff. Occupying one of the best spots in Cardiff Bay, this is a smart sophisticated bar, popular with both the locals and tourists. More 'dark and sophisticated' than 'cool and trendy', Terra Nova is both a bar and restaurant - and it excels at both. The food ranges from simple bar snacks to full meals, and the choice is excellent.

To the east of Mermaid Quay is the gleaming white Norwegian Church, an old seaman's mission in which Roald Dahl was christened. If by now you fancy a coffee and a cake, you're in luck. The Church has been converted into a great little café and art gallery.

Next to the church is a building known locally as 'the squashed toilet roll'. This telescope shaped building is actually a Tourist Information Centre. It contains plenty of exhibits and information, and a huge model of Cardiff Bay.

## **Techniquet**

If you've got kids, this is where to leave them for a few hours. If you haven't; just pretend. It's great for adults too.

Techniquet is one of the UK's largest science centres. It's packed full of fun exhibits, experiments and hands-on quirky stuff like rocket firing and bubble racing.

## **Cardiff Bay Barrage**

Take a boat over to the Barrage. Boats depart from Mermaid Quay, outside the Terra Nova. The Barrage itself is 1.1km long, and extends from Cardiff docks in the north to Penarth in the south.

The barrage is quite a busy place with all the yachts coming in and out of the locks. Go and see the giant fish passes, you may see some jumping salmon or trout. The landscaped embankment is a great place for a picnic - with excellent views out over the sea and back to the city.

## **Evening**

Stay in Cardiff Bay to chill with the seagulls and watch the sun set on the water.

There's a huge variety of restaurants and bars offering tapas and sushi, lager and cocktails. And everything in between.

For a really laid back experience try the Canteen Bar in Mount Stuart Square. City Canteen is chilled out beyond belief – lounge on a big leather sofa and soak up the art on the walls.

## **Food**

For the ultimate in luxury dining, book into the Tides Grill at St David's Hotel, and prepare to spend several hours enjoying a leisurely dinner.

Back up in the city other restaurants combine Welsh influences with modern European cooking. The Armless Dragon and Le Gallois appeal to the upper end of the market and are both well worth visiting.