

Wales



NEIL SETCHFIELD

Cardiff (Caerdydd)



Contemporary Cardiff is the epitome of cool, pulsing with a creative energy and relaxed atmosphere that complements its youthful heritage. The capital of Wales since only 1955, the city has embraced its new role with vigour, emerging as one of Britain's leading lights in the 21st century. And it's easy to see why – historical gems, urban renovation, leafy parkland and blistering nightlife are infused with a quiet nationalistic confidence and shoehorned into a city smaller than many of its English counterparts.

Cardiff made its fortune from coal. The rich seams of the Rhondda valley propelled the Victorian town to world prominence and provided some of its greatest legacies. But the industry collapsed in the 1980s, and Cardiff hit the buffers. So step forward Cardiff Bay, a dazzling re-invention of the depressed docklands, with international restaurants, contemporary hotels and fabulous buildings of national importance such as the Wales Millennium Centre, home to the Welsh National Opera, and the Senedd, the seat of independent government. In the city centre, the elegance of the National Museum & Gallery of Wales and the City Hall stand as proud, resilient testaments to a prosperous past, while the fantastic folly of Cardiff Castle is the fairytale work of the 19th-century marquis of Bute, Cardiff's unimaginably wealthy King of Coal.

But if coal was the cake that made Cardiff fat, then sport is its modern-day icing. And perched on top, like the fattest of cherries, is the colossal Millennium Stadium, built for the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Match days paralyse the city as tens of thousands of fans pack the bars and swell the streets with a glorious, overwhelming pride – it's an experience not to be missed.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Invading the mock-Gothic folly of **Cardiff Castle** (p647), then following the leafy parkland corridor of the **Taff Trail** (p651) to magical **Castell Coch** (p659)
- Catching a gig at **Clwb Ifor Bach** (p656), the venue where some of Wales' biggest bands broke onto the scene
- Sampling the atmosphere at the jaw-dropping **Millennium Stadium** (p648)
- Getting cultural at the **National Museum & Gallery of Wales** (p647)
- Soaking up the renovated waterfront of **Cardiff Bay** (p649)
- Chilling in a contemporary **restaurant** (p654) or sipping coffee at a laid-back **café** (p655)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 029

■ POPULATION: 327,706

HISTORY

You can thank the Romans for Cardiff. They built a fort here in AD 75, and the city's name is most likely derived from Caer Tâf (Taff Fort) or Caer Didi (Didius' Fort), referring to a Roman general, Aulus Didius.

Following the Norman Conquest of 1093 Robert Fitzhamon, conqueror of Glamorgan, built a castle (the remains stand in the grounds of Cardiff Castle) and a small town soon developed. Further Norman conflict followed, in 1183 and 1404, the latter inspired by Owain Glyndŵr, leader of the ill-fated rebellion against the English. Suffering severe damage during the fighting, Cardiff stagnated for centuries.

In 1801, despite being an important trading port, only 1000 people lived in the town. Not until the northern Welsh valleys kick-started the iron-making and coal-mining boom did Cardiff flourish, directed by the aristocratic Bute family of Scotland. They inherited Cardiff Castle in the 18th century, and the wealth derived from their coalfields and docks enabled them to commission further fine buildings. The castle became their resplendent family home, and in 1905 Cardiff was declared a city.

By 1913 Cardiff was the world's biggest coal port, and a colourful multiethnic community was established in dockside Butetown. Watching over it all, the third marquis of Bute had become one of the world's richest men.

WWI heralded tough times and the 1930s Depression was barely a memory before WWII ravaged Cardiff. Shortly afterwards the coal industry was nationalised, which led to the Butes packing their bags and leaving town in 1947, donating the castle and all their land to the city.

Cardiff became the Welsh capital in 1955, making it Europe's youngest capital and injecting fresh vigour to the tired city. But the coal industry was dying and, with it, the docks slipped in to decline. In 1987 a renovation project began to convert the forlorn waterfront for culture, business and leisure use. Hundreds of millions of pounds later, enter Cardiff Bay, home to a range of impressive facilities including the Senedd (Wales' independent parliament) and the stunning Wales Millennium Centre.

ORIENTATION

Central Cardiff is small enough to explore on foot. There are two unmistakable landmarks – the castle, located on the northern

side, and, a little to the south, the enormous Millennium Stadium. The compact shopping and restaurant zone, including the tourist office, is located east of the stadium. The central bus and train stations are south of the centre.

Bute Park extends northwest behind the castle, bordered by the River Taff on its western side. The elegant Civic Centre, including the National Museum & Gallery of Wales, City Hall and Law Courts, is east of the park, northeast of the castle.

Cardiff Bay waterfront lies 1 mile southeast of the centre through Butetown. The leafy Cathedral Rd area, with B&Bs and guesthouses, is northwest of the castle.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Troutmark Books (☎ 2038 2814; 41-43 Castle Arcade; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) All manner of secondhand tomes, from sci-fi to sewing and comics to classics.

TSO (Map p648; ☎ 2039 5548; 18-19 High St) Small Welsh-language section and map service.

Waterstone's (Map p648; ☎ 2066 5606; 2a The Hayes) Comprehensive travel section.

Emergency

Police station (Map p648; ☎ 2022 2111; King Edward VII Ave) Near Alexandra Gardens.

University Hospital of Wales (Map p648; ☎ 2074 7747; Heath Park) Two miles north of the Civic Centre (buses 1, 2, 8, 9 or 9A from bus station, 35 minutes), with an Accident & Emergency department.

Internet Access

Cardiff Central Library (Map p648; ☎ 2038 2116; St David's Link, Frederick St; free internet access; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-7pm Thu, 9am-5.30pm Sat) More than 60 broadband PCs; booking recommended.

Medical Services

Pharmacies rotate late opening hours. Check the regional newspaper, *South Wales Echo*, for daily details.

Boots (Map p648; ☎ 2023 1291; 36 Queen St; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 8.30am-6pm Tue & Sat, 8am-8pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun)

University Hospital of Wales (Map p648; ☎ 2074 7747; Heath Park) See above.

Money

Major banks (with ATMs and currency exchange) are on Queen St, St Mary St and High St.

CARDIFF IN...

One Day

Jump-start your day in one of Cardiff's many **cafés** (p655) before invading the neo-Gothic extravagance of **Cardiff Castle** (below). Grab a quick lunch before getting some culture at the **National Museum & Gallery of Wales** (below) or sports-fever at the space-age **Millennium Stadium** (p648). In the evening stroll through **Bute Park** (below) before dinner at **Cardiff Bay** (p655) – take a **waterbus** (p651) from the city. If you're lucky, you can finish up with live music at **Clwb Ifor Bach** (p656).

Two Days

Follow the one-day itinerary, but dine in the **city centre** (p654) in the evening. On day two, head out to **Llandaff Cathedral** (p651), continuing to **Castell Coch** (p659) and **Caerphilly** (p659). For dinner, try **Cardiff Bay** (p655), before returning to town to sink a pint or two in a local **pub** (p656).

Post

Main post office (Map p648; The Hayes; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, 9.30am-5.30pm Tue)

Tourist Information

Cardiff Bay Visitor Centre (Map p650; ☎ 2046 3833; Harbour Drive, Britannia Quay, Cardiff Bay; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5pm Sat & Sun) Known as 'the tube' and shaped like a squashed aeroplane fuselage, this elevated info centre has a scale model of the bay area.

National Assembly of Wales Visitor & Education Centre (Map p650; ☎ 2089 8200; Pierhead St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Easter-Sep, 10am-4.30pm Oct-Easter)

Tourist office (Map p648; ☎ 2022 7281; www.visitcardiff.info; Old Library, The Hayes; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat Sep-Jun, 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-4pm Sun all year) Piles of information and an accommodation-booking service.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Cardiff Castle

Dazzling Victorian style and mock-Gothic folly make **Cardiff Castle** (Map p648; ☎ 2087 8100; www.cardiffcastle.com; Castle St; adult/child grounds only £3.50/2.20, with castle tour £6.95/4.30; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-5pm Nov-Feb) an entertaining visit. Although far from a traditional Welsh castle (it's more a collection of disparate castles around a central green), the site encompasses practically the whole history of Cardiff and is, rightly, the city's leading attraction.

To the right of the entrance the remains of a 3rd-century-AD Roman fort (that guarded the River Taff) contrast with the motte and bailey of the 12th-century Norman castle. Opposite the fort, the neo-Gothic Victorian main buildings house the reconstructed home of the coal-rich Butes.

The romantic décor which adorns their residence is a particular highlight, medieval in style following the whims of the eccentric third marquis. There's a gloriously over-the-top fireplace, a 199-mirrored bedroom ceiling, minstrels' gallery and clutch of decorative knights.

Iron and coal made the marquis' fortune and funded this fantasy. His talented designer, William Burges, executed the castle work between 1868 and 1881.

At the time of research a new visitor interpretation centre was under construction.

Bute Park & Parkland Corridor

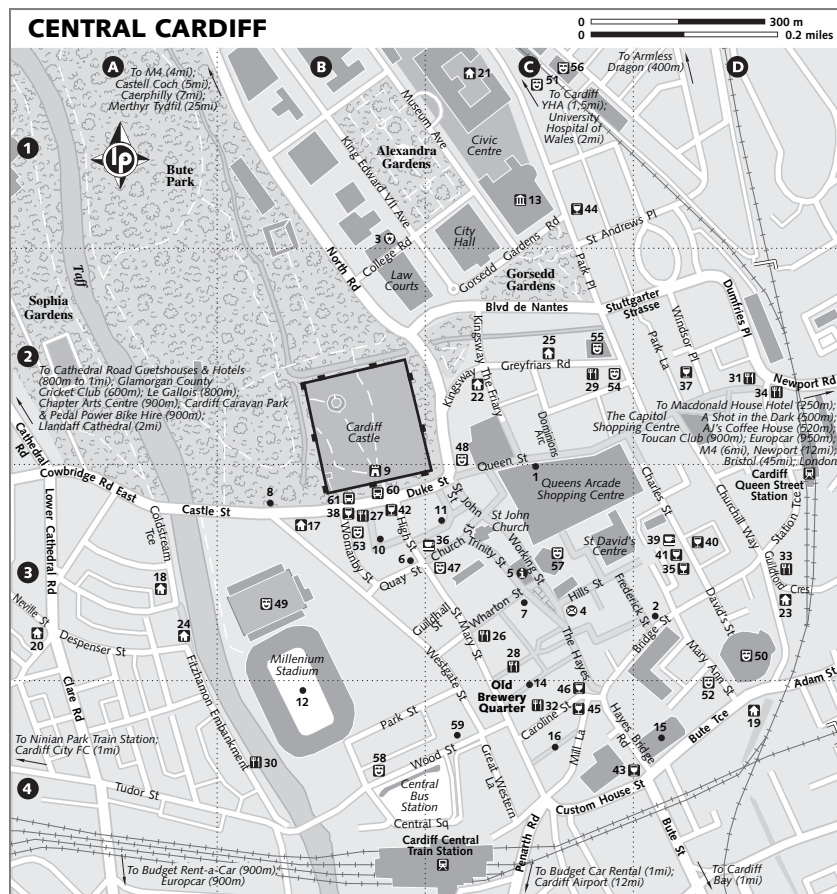
After the urban city bustle, leafy Bute Park offers the green breathing space that all great cities need. Originally part of the castle estate, the park follows the River Taff northwest from the city, extending 7 miles upriver to Castell Coch.

The park is bounded on Castle St, beside the castle, by an **animal wall** (Map p648), where flamboyant stone creatures squat on the parapet, perpetually immobile.

A half-mile walk leads to **Sophia Gardens** (Map p648), home to Glamorgan County Cricket Club, and busy with students from the Welsh Institute for Sport. Hire bikes from **Pedal Power Bike Hire** (☎ 07896-374679; Pontcanna Fields; per 2hr/3hr/full-day £6/8/11; ☎ Mon, Wed & Fri-Sun), based at Cardiff Caravan Park.

National Museum & Gallery of Wales

Sitting proudly at the northern edge of the city centre is the fantastic Welsh **national museum** (Map p648; ☎ 2039 7951; www.museumwales.ac.uk; Cathays Park; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun; ♿).



With international-quality galleries and enthralling natural history exhibits, this museum is a treat for adults and kids alike. Allow a day to see everything or a half-day for the highlights.

The museum is part of Cardiff's beautiful **Civic Centre** (Map p648), northeast of the castle. Built on Cardiff's coal-boom wealth, the white Portland-stone buildings also comprise the **Law Courts** and **City Hall**.

Inside, you're spoilt for choice. The national art gallery houses the largest impressionist collection outside Paris, featuring works by Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse and Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Welsh artists hold their own; Richard Wilson and Gwen and Augustus John feature

prominently, and the latter's portrait of Dylan Thomas is spine-tingling.

The biggest attractions come in the galleries devoted to the natural world. Animal treats include a 9m-long humpback whale skeleton and the world's largest turtle (2.9m by 2.7m). In the mineral world, booming films of volcanic eruptions and footage of the soaring Welsh landscape trace evolution through 4600 million years.

Millennium Stadium

The scepticism that greeted the decision to build a new stadium on the grounds of the old Cardiff Arms Park disappeared with the first drop-kick at the spectacular **Millennium Stadium** (Map p648; ☎ tours 2082 2228, box office 0870 558 2582;

| INFORMATION | | EATING 🍴 | | ENTERTAINMENT 🎪 | |
|---|----------|---|----------|--|-------|
| Boots..... | 1 C3 | Café Jazz..... | 26 C3 | Aqua..... | 47 C3 |
| Cardiff Central Library..... | 2 D3 | Celtic Cauldron..... | 27 B3 | Barfly..... | 48 C2 |
| Police Station..... | 3 B1 | Crubs Salad Restaurant..... | 28 C3 | Cardiff Blues..... | 49 B3 |
| Post Office..... | 4 C3 | Fat Fat Café Bar..... | 29 C2 | Cardiff International Arena..... | 50 D3 |
| Tourist Office..... | 5 C3 | Muldoons..... | (see 32) | Cardiff University Students Union..... | 51 C1 |
| Troutmark Books..... | (see 10) | Riverside Real Food Market..... | 30 B4 | Cineworld..... | 52 D4 |
| TSO..... | 6 B3 | High Street Arcade..... | 11 C3 | Clwb Ifor Bach..... | 53 B3 |
| Waterstone's..... | 7 C3 | Millennium Stadium..... | 12 B4 | Creation..... | 54 C2 |
| | | National Museum & Gallery of Wales..... | 13 C1 | New Theatre..... | 55 C2 |
| | | Royal Arcade..... | 14 C4 | Sherman Theatre..... | 56 C1 |
| | | Welsh National Ice Rink..... | 15 D4 | St David's Hall..... | 57 C3 |
| | | Wyndham Arcade..... | 16 C4 | Vue..... | 58 B4 |
| | | | | | |
| SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES | | DRINKING 🍷 | | TRANSPORT | |
| Animal Wall..... | 8 B3 | Bar Icon..... | 35 D3 | Cardiff Bus Office..... | 59 C4 |
| Cardiff Castle..... | 9 B3 | Brazil Coffee Co..... | 36 C3 | Guide Friday Tourbus Stop..... | 60 B3 |
| Castle Arcade..... | 10 B3 | Buffalo Bar..... | 37 D2 | Megabus Bus Stop..... | 61 B3 |
| David Morgan Arcade..... | (see 10) | Café Bar Europa..... | 38 B3 | | |
| High Street Arcade..... | 11 C3 | Capsule..... | 39 D3 | | |
| Millennium Stadium..... | 12 B4 | Club X..... | 40 D3 | | |
| National Museum & Gallery of Wales..... | 13 C1 | | | | |
| Royal Arcade..... | 14 C4 | | | | |
| Welsh National Ice Rink..... | 15 D4 | | | | |
| Wyndham Arcade..... | 16 C4 | | | | |

www.millenniumstadium.co.uk; tours £5.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun & Bank Holidays; 📞 ()

You can't miss this hulking monolith, hanging over the River Taff and dwarfing the surrounding streets. Against a tight schedule, the project was rushed through (the contractor lost a fortune) in time for the 1999 Rugby World Cup. Each of the 72,500 seats affords an unimpaired view of the action, but vertigo sufferers should avoid the precipitous upper tier.

The stadium also hosts big live-music events and football fixtures. In 2012, football fixtures for the London Olympic Games will be played here. On match days the city grinds to a halt. Streets are closed, bars are *definitely* open and the beer flows. Even if you can't get a ticket, the atmosphere is worth savouring. (For sporting events at the stadium, see p658).

A superb 45-minute tour gives a close-up look at the stadium, including access to the dressing rooms and the chance to walk down the players' tunnel. It starts at Entrance 3 on Westgate St.

Cardiff Bay

Twenty years ago Cardiff's dockland was a festering blot, Cardiff's forgotten fringe. Known as Tiger Bay, the area was forlorn and neglected, testament to Wales' long-lost industrial power.

The story of Cardiff Bay begins in the 1880s, when the burgeoning coal trade mined

millions of tonnes of 'black gold' from the hills and exported it from the city docks. But demand slumped after WWII and decay followed. To cover the unsightly tidal basins, a 1.1km-long tidal barrage was constructed at the mouth of the Rivers Taff and Ely, creating a permanent 200-hectare freshwater lake and 13km-long waterfront.

THE WATERFRONT

To see the bay now it's hard to believe it was ever so decrepit. The waterfront boasts contemporary dining, world-class arts facilities,

ARCADE ADVENTURES

Cardiff's best shopping is hidden from view under the ornate roofs of old Victorian Arcades.

Take a wander through **Castle Arcade** (Map p648; btwn Duke St & High St), **High Street Arcade** (Map p648; btwn High St & St John St), **Royal Arcade** (Map p648; btwn St Mary St & The Hayes), **Wyndham Arcade** (Map p648; btwn Mill Lane & St Mary St) and **David Morgan Arcade** (Map p648; btwn St Mary St & The Hayes) and you'll find everything under the sun.

From retro clothes to dusty tobacco-nists, punk gear to fresh deli meats, and cuddly toys to intimate piercings, the only restriction is the size of your wallet.

a dizzying new National Assembly building, pleasure-boat trips and Wales' premier spa hotel, St David's Hotel & Spa – on a blue-sky Sunday it's a popular place to stroll in the sun. Detractors criticise the bay for lacking atmosphere – it does feel a little staid – but the development is still young, and maturing all the time.

On the city side of the bay, **Mermaid Quay** (Map p650; www.mermaidquay.co.uk) is a dining and shopping complex. Beside it is **Roald Dahl Plass**

(Map p650), an open-air boardwalk and venue during the Cardiff Festival (p652).

Cardiff Bay has enticed two distinguished organisations away from the city. The **Senedd** (Map p650; the National Assembly for Wales, see p652) resides in the impressive glass-walled, wavy-roofed building on the waterfront; next door, the red-brick **Pierhead Building** (Map p650) houses the Assembly's **Visitor & Education Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 2089 8200; Pierhead St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am–6pm Mon–Thu Easter–Sep, 10am–4.30pm Oct–Easter), explaining the devolved body's democratic function.

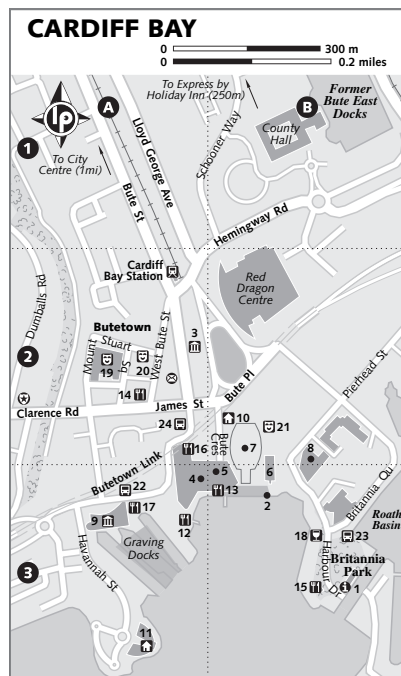
Bringing a Scandinavian air to the eastern tip of the bay, the little white **Norwegian Church** (Map p650; ☎ 2045 4899; Harbour Dr; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm) is one of the last remaining historic dockside buildings. Constructed in 1869, it was originally 200m inland but relocated by the Norwegian Seaman's Mission during redevelopment of the area. It now functions as a cute café and arts venue.

WALES MILLENNIUM CENTRE

Set back from the water, the magnificent **Wales Millennium Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 2040 2000; www.wmc.org.uk; Bute Pl) sits confidently as Wales' premier arts complex. Much more visually attractive than the Assembly, and featuring a golden roof and mauve slate panelling, the venue was designed by Welsh architect Jonathan Adam and opened in 2004 to rapturous praise. It has two theatres and is home to the Welsh National Opera.

TECHNIQUEST

Unusually for a children's attraction **Techniquest** (Map p650; ☎ 2047 5475; www.techniquest.org; Stuart St; adult/child £6.90/4.80; ☎ 9.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm school holidays, 10.30am–5pm Sat & Sun) is a place to have fun *and* learn. More than 160



INFORMATION

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National Assembly of Wales
Visitor & Education Centre...(see 6)

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Coal Exchange.....(see 19)
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Senedd.....8 B2

Techniquest.....9 A3
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Caribbean Restaurant.....14 A2
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Point.....20 A2
Wales Millennium Centre.....21 B2

TRANSPORT

Guide Friday Tourbus Stop.....22 A3
Guide Friday Tourbus Stop.....23 B3
Guide Friday Tourbus Stop.....24 A2
Waterbus.....(see 5)

FREEWHEELING THROUGH WALES

All across Wales, the lush hills and gentle valleys are crisscrossed with great cycle routes. The longest is the national **Lôn Las Cymru trail**, a 311-mile epic from Cardiff to far-away Holyhead on the Isle of Anglesey.

Along the way you'll pass some achingly beautiful scenery (crossing the national parks of the Brecon Beacons and Snowdonia) and visit towns including Abergavenny, Hay-on-Wye, and Machynlleth in Mid Wales, and Caernarfon in North Wales.

For serious pedal-buffs the whole route can be completed in a week, and many prefer to start out in the more populated south. Bear in mind though that the Welsh weather is rarely settled for that long, so why not ply the beautiful 40-mile **Taff Trail** to Brecon on a weekend trip, or do it vice versa for a mainly downhill ride?

You can learn more from the sustainable transport group **Sustrans** (☎ 0845 113 0065; www.sustrans.co.uk).

hands-on demonstrations enthrall kids of all ages (oldies too); fire a rocket or launch a hot-air balloon before exploring the wonderful changing exhibitions.

BUTETOWN

Victorian **Butetown** (Map p650) was the heartbeat of Cardiff's coal trade, a multi-ethnic community that propelled the city to world fame. Today the stately streets are partly renovated (but mostly shabby) relics of the time when this was Tiger Bay, complete with gritty characters and a happening jazz scene.

The **Butetown History & Arts Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 2025 7657; www.bhac.org; 5 Dock Chambers, Bute St; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Fri, 11am–4.30pm Sat & Sun) presents a significant, but not entirely comprehensive, photographic record of Butetown's past (plenty of 1950s family snaps), together with changing exhibitions.

The elegant **Coal Exchange** (Map p650; ☎ 2049 4917; www.coalexchange.co.uk; Mt Stuart Sq), was where the international coal price was once set. Today it's a public venue, holding a range of events (mostly bands) inside the beautiful carved-wood hall.

Close by, the **Point** (Map p650; ☎ 2046 0873; www.thepointcardiffbay.com; Mt Stuart Sq), is a Gothic-style stone church that was restored in 2003 to act as another live-music venue. Designed with acoustics in mind, the sound inside here is superb and the hall now hosts some top names.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Walk 1 mile south from the city centre down Bute St, or take bus 6 that loops between the bay and the city (20 minutes, every 10 to 15 minutes).

Shuttle trains run from Queen St station to Cardiff Bay station (four minutes, every 15 minutes).

The **Waterbus** (Map p650; ☎ 07940-142409; www.cardiffcats.com) shuttles around Mermaid Quay, the barrage and up the Taff to the city (single/return from Mermaid Quay to either barrage or city £2/4).

Llandaff Cathedral

In a peaceful suburb 2 miles northwest of the city centre, villagelike Llandaff is home to a fine-looking **cathedral** (☎ 2056 4554; www.llandaffcathedral.org.uk; Cathedral Rd; admission free).

Built on the site of a 6th-century monastery, the cathedral itself dates from 1130 and has fulfilled various roles over the centuries. Having crumbled through the Middle Ages, it found itself first an alehouse and then an animal shelter during the Reformation and Civil War. It was derelict by the 18th century, largely rebuilt during the 19th century and then heavily damaged again by German bombing during WWII. Today it is a mish-mash of styles thanks to its disturbed history; one tower dates from the 15th century, the other from the 19th.

The interior is notable for its clear glass windows; despite some stained glass (Pre-Raphaelite), the clarity of light is striking and unique. A central concrete arch carries the cathedral organ and Sir Jacob Epstein's aluminium sculpture *Christ in Majesty*. In the **St Illtyd chapel** is a triptych by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, while period artworks are scattered liberally around. The cathedral holds several daily services.

Buses 24, 25, 33 and 62 run along Cathedral Rd to Llandaff (15 to 20 minutes, every 10 to 15 minutes).

CARDIFF FOR CHILDREN

Compact and easy to navigate, Cardiff needn't be hell for families. Kids love learning, and there's nowhere better than the National Museum & Gallery of Wales (p647), full of weird and wonderful animals and fascinating exhibits. Interactive Techniquet (p650) will stretch their little brains, whilst what kid wouldn't want to stage a mock-invasion of Cardiff Castle (p647)? After that, take them on the road-train with Cardiff Bay Tours (below) or let them off the leash in pretty Bute Park (p647).

For a trip out of town, try the immense Caerphilly Castle (p659) where the open-air Museum of Welsh Life (p660) shows them an era they never knew existed.

TOURS

Bay Island Voyages (Map p650; ☎ 01445-420692; www.bayisland.co.uk) Adrenaline-filled Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) trips around the bay (£12, 30 minutes), through the barrage gates (£12, one hour) or to Flatholm and Steephholm Islands (£20, two hours).

Cardiff Bay Tours (☎ 2070 7882; www.cardiffbaytours.co.uk) Guided walking, bus, boat and road-train tours, from the bay to the city and back.

Guide Friday (☎ 2038 4291; www.guidefriday.com) Departing from the castle this hop-on hop-off open-top bus (£7.50) has 10 stops around the city, leaving every 30

to 60 minutes between 10am and 3pm (March to October only). A nonstop tour takes 50 minutes.

John May (☎ 2081 1603; 1½hr walks £5) Local historian guides you around the Civic Centre, castle grounds and riverside on a wheelchair-accessible route.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Cardiff Festival (☎ 2087 2087; www.cardiff-festival.com) This month-long festival is a summer highlight. Running from late June to early August, the knees-up features world music, the Welsh proms (classical concerts), a carnival and a popular Celtic food and drink festival.

Metro Weekender Comprises two days of live music in Bute Park in late August. Day one is Cardiff Calling (www.cardiffcalling.com), for indie bands (☎ tickets 2023 0130); while on day two South West Four (www.southwestfour.com) is all about dance acts and DJs (☎ tickets 2023 0130).

Mardi Gras Cardiff's gay-pride festival held in late August or early September; see also p657.

SLEEPING City Centre

Keep an eye out for big sports events, when finding a bed can be impossible.

BUDGET

Cardiff Backpackers (Map p648; ☎ 2034 5577; www.cardiffbackpacker.com; 98 Neville St, Riverside; dm with light

breakfast from £16; 📍) A stalwart of the Cardiff scene, this garish purple and yellow place is a strong favourite with independent travellers. Well-maintained dorms or private rooms offer great value, and it's a mere oval ball drop-kick to the city centre.

Cardiff University (University of Wales; Map p648; ☎ 2087 4702; www.cardiff.ac.uk; s £20) Pick from more than 3000 student rooms with en suite, which are available between mid-June and mid-September, many just 15 minutes' walk from the city centre.

MIDRANGE

Austin's Guest House (Map p648; ☎ 2037 7148; www.hotelcardiff.com; 11 Coldstream Tce; s/d £28/45) Shown up by the other low-cost digs near the Millennium Stadium, Austin's doesn't do anything wrong but it lacks the buzz you get elsewhere. Rooms are simple but adequate.

NosDa at the Riverbank (Map p648; ☎ 2037 8866; www.nosda.co.uk; 53-59 Despenser St; s/d from £36/52; 📍) For backpackers demanding a little more, this vibrant place, across from the Millennium Stadium, is redefining the hostelling genre. An ex-low-class hotel, it's being renovated – cool bar, chic outdoor deck, private rooms and honest local food. At the minute, rooms were still shabby, but it's changing fast so go check it out – then let us know the latest news.

Angel (Map p648; ☎ 2064 9200; www.paramount-hotels.co.uk/angel; Castle St; s/d from £45/55; 📍) Victorian and suitably opulent, rooms at the Angel are tastefully relaxing and good value if booked well in advance. Prices rise for short-notice bookings, so get in early for luxury at a bargain price. The grand period reception is especially impressive.

Big Sleep (Map p648; ☎ 2063 6363; www.thebigsleephotel.com; Bute Tce; d £45-99) Former office block that's harsh from the outside but funky within. 'Design B&B' isn't a term we use often, but this is it, popular with weekend clubbers and the ultracool (don't forget your jaunty beret and arty spectacles). Rooms epitomise modern cutting-edge cool, but some are bigger than others so ask for the best you can afford.

Ibis (Map p648; ☎ 2064 9250; www.ibishotel.com; Churchill Way; r from £46.95) Try this for an identikit budget chain option.

TOP END

Hilton (Map p648; ☎ 2064 6300; www.hilton.co.uk/cardiff; Kingsway; d from £112-220; 📍) Central Cardiff's glitziest residence has elegant rooms

with all the luxuries, and rates to match. But, hey, if you want heated mirrors in your bathroom, you're gonna pay for 'em.

Other business-class places worth a splurge are the sepia-hued **Park Plaza** (Map p648; ☎ 2011 1111; www.parkplazacardiff.com; Greyfriars Rd; d £100-145; 📍) near the New Theatre and with great weekend deals, or the slightly less central **Macdonald House Hotel** (☎ 0870 122 0020; www.hollandhousehotel.co.uk; Newport Rd; d from £120; 📍), where the John Charles Presidential Suite celebrates Welsh football's greatest son.

Cardiff Bay

In keeping with the renovation, there are no budget digs by the water.

Express by Holiday Inn (☎ 2044 9000; www.hiexpress.com; Longueil Close; r from £54.75; 📍) These modern, slimmed down Holiday Inn places are comfortable, contemporary in style and good value for money if booked in advance. This one's in no man's land between the city and bay, but is still convenient for access to both.

ourpick Jolyons Hotel Cardiff (Map p650; ☎ 2048 8775; www.jolyons.co.uk; Bute Crescent; d £85-140; 📍) Overlooking Roald Dahl Plass, this former seamen's lodge offers six rooms of opulent splendour with period furniture, luxuriant furnishings, a cosy downstairs bar, and a warm welcome. Ask for special weekend rates.

St David's Hotel & Spa (Map p650; ☎ 2045 4045; www.thestdavidshotel.com; Havannah St; r from £150; 📍) Epitomising Cardiff Bay's transformation from grimy wasteland to stylish place-to-be, this pile is popular with visiting national and international sports teams, who no doubt love its privacy and superb spa facilities.

Cathedral Road Area & Cathays

Leafy Cathedral Rd lies parallel to Bute Park, a 10- to 15-minute walk from the centre. Amid its stately Victorian town houses are some reliable old faithfuls. Cardiff YHA Hostel is in the Cathays area, 2 miles north of the centre.

BUDGET

Cardiff Caravan Park (☎ 2039 8362; Pontcanna Fields; tent sites per adult £4.25) Nestled next to the Sophia Gardens cricket ground, it's hard to believe this leafy site is just a 10-minute stroll to the city – there's plenty space but book ahead to be sure. It's also a good base for exploring the parkland corridor (p647).

Cardiff YHA (☎ 0870 770 5750; 2 Wedal Rd, Roath Park, Cathays; dm with breakfast £17.50; 📍) Functional but

AN INDEPENDENT FUTURE?

After several years struggling to justify its existence, the devolved National Assembly for Wales received a huge boost in July 2006 when the so-called 'Government of Wales' bill became law after opposition parties in the House of Lords, London, withdrew their objections. The decision effectively granted the Welsh people the opportunity of greater independence.

Established in 1999, the Assembly struggled amid political indifference and perceived impotence. Despite being hailed as a new dawn for Wales, only 38% of voters went to the polls in the 2003 elections. Nationalist reformers used this fact to cite the need for even greater local control, while those opposed to devolution branded the breakaway a flop.

The passing of the new bill, which will come into effect after the 2007 elections, should ignite local imagination. Shackled by London (some of the Assembly's early measures included the introduction of free milk for children), the central British government has always determined Wales' budget, taxation, foreign policy and defence strategy. For the time being that's how things will stay, but in the future it seems increasingly likely that Cardiff will be making more of the principal decisions.

Earlier in 2006, the Queen came to town to cut the ribbon on the fantastical new assembly building at Cardiff Bay, known as the **Senedd** (☎ 2082 5111; www.wales.gov.uk). Plenary (full) sessions take place here, and the centre is open to the public. Architecturally stunning, the Senedd has been championed as a 21st-century eco-building, incorporating energy-saving and recycling features. Wood chips fire the boilers and rainwater is collected to flush toilets and wash windows. Unfortunately, the project has also been beset with problems, not least of which was the leaking roof that splashed water all around the public gallery just a week after the official opening. All the more embarrassing when the project cost £67 million, five times the original budget.

drab modern building in the student district of Cathays, 2 miles north of the centre. Take bus 28, 29 or 29B from Stand D2 at the central bus station.

Welsh Institute for Sport (☎ 2030 0500; www.welsh-institute-sport.co.uk; Sophia Gardens; s/d nonmatch days £28.50/57, match days £33.50/67; 🍷) Just off Cathedral Rd, this is a great option. Rooms are basic but all have bathrooms, TV and safe. Breakfast is included and other meals are available; guests can use the pool and gym for free.

MIDRANGE

Cayo Arms (☎ 2039 1910; 36 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/55; 🍷) If you want B&B and a pint, why not stay in a pub? The Cayo is one of the best in town (good ale and decent food), with an easy-going vibe. When you're done supping, just totter upstairs to your unfussy and comfortable room, with bathroom.

Town House (☎ 2023 9399; www.thetownhousecardiff.co.uk; 70 Cathedral Rd; s/d from £45/62.50; 🍷) Stately and imposing B&B sitting proudly on an impressive Victorian terrace. Original features such as stained glass and mosaic flooring mix with a more modern finish and restful atmosphere. Rooms are (mostly) large and well furnished.

Beaufort Guest House (☎ 2023 7003; www.beauforthousecardiff.co.uk; 65 Cathedral Rd; s/d from £49/65) In a similar vein to the Town House, this is another impressive place boasting generous rooms with bathrooms and tasteful period décor. As with all good B&Bs the breakfast should keep you firing until dinner.

Also worth trying:

Georgian Hotel (☎ 2023 2594; www.georgianhotelcardiff.co.uk; 179 Cathedral Rd; s/d from £29/48) French- and Italian-speaking staff.

Courtfield Hotel (☎ 2022 7701; www.courtfieldhotel.com; 101 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/55; s without bathroom £30) Gay-run hotel (and part of the scene).

Annedd Lon (☎ 2022 3349; 157 Cathedral Rd; s/d £45/55) Another town-house B&B.

EATING

There's something for all among Cardiff's café-bars, international eateries and up-market bistros.

City Centre, Cathedral Road Area & Cathays

Towards the southern end of St Mary St, opposite Wood St, an old Brains brewery has been converted into the Old Brewery Quar-

ter, a sleek socialising hub. It's quite superficial, hosting the usual identikit names and pulling a fake-tan preclub crowd, but there are a couple of decent options in the area nonetheless.

Riverside Real Food Market (Map p648; ☎ 2019 0036; Fitzhamon Embankment; 🍷 10am-2pm Sun) For Sunday brunch alfresco wander to this weekly haven of local goodies, opposite the Millennium Stadium.

Sainsburys Central (Map p648; ☎ 2034 3748; 125-129 Queen St; 🕒 7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) This supermarket is on the corner of Queen St and Dumfries Pl.

Zushi (Map p648; ☎ 2066 9911; The Aspect, 140 Queen St; plates £1.50-3.50; 🍷 noon-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Happening sushi bar (complete with conveyor belt) with different coloured plates for different priced morsels. Universally popular – young city types hang out here, kids love the moving food and spiky-haired rugby pretty-boy Gavin Henson has been snapped scoffing its delights.

Fat Cat Café Bar (Map p648; ☎ 2022 8378; Grosvenor House, Greyfriars Rd; dishes £3.95-11.95; 🍷 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-1am Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 10am-11pm Sun) We usually steer clear of chains but this one started in Wales, and Cardiff's is the newest venture. It's slick, with comfy sofas and rich velvets, and serves from breakfast to dinner – just take your pick from a full fry-up, through to crisp salads and char-grilled steaks. Come evening, it's a hip bar.

Crumbs Salad Restaurant (Map p648; ☎ 2039 5007; 33 Morgan Arcade; dishes around £4.50; 🍷 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Wooden salad bowls are piled high with crisp leaves, fresh eggs, organic beans and tasty local cheese in this rustic little veggie-friendly place.

Muldoon's (Map p648; ☎ 2034 4949; Old Brewery Quarter; dishes around £5; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) More café than restaurant, this right-on organic place has delicious breakfasts, salads, jackets and toasties, not forgetting heavenly smoothies. Famous for having an outlet at the Saatchi & Saatchi agency in London, this is its first move out of the English capital, and it's going down well.

Celtic Cauldron (Map p648; ☎ 2038 7185; 47-49 Castle Arcade; dishes around £5-7; 🍷 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun) Tuck yourself away in the cosy wooden booths at this place and enjoy wholefood such as faggots (pig-offal meatballs) or a bowl of *cawl* (traditional Welsh broth).

Spice Quarter (Map p648; ☎ 2022 0075; Old Brewery Quarter; mains £6.95-11.95; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Oft-busy contemporary curry-house serving reliable Indian dishes together with more inventive regional specials such as Malabari fish curry, made with mango and coconut milk. The extensive lunchtime buffet is great value at £5.95.

Thai House (Map p648; ☎ 2038 7404; 3-5 Guildford Cres; mains £6.95-16.95; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Twenty years established and still one of the top tips for a Thai splurge, where silk-swathed waiters serve you fiery green curry or enticingly-steamed Cardigan Bay mackerel with lime, garlic and chillies. Evenings have a minimum of £17.50 per head, so if money's tight go for the lunch deals.

Café Jazz (Map p648; ☎ 2023 2161; St Mary St; 2-/3-course set menu from £7.95/10.95; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Jazz-joint by night, cool café by day, you can kick back here and enjoy anything from a coffee and cake to baked salmon or hearty lasagne. In the evening it puts on some lively gigs.

Le Gallois – Y Cymro (☎ 2034 1264; 6-10 Romilly Cres, Canton; mains £8.95-26.50; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Still renowned as one of Cardiff's finest, Le Gallois gives you a classy stomach-filling, allet-emptying experience. The confit of duck, with oriental greens and crispy noodles is an Eastern delight, while prime Aberdeen Angus steak comes with truffle sauce.

Armless Dragon (☎ 2038 2357; Wyverne Rd, Cathays; lunch menu £10, 3-course dinner around £25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) This excellent spot has been pleasing the palette with contemporary Welsh treats for more than two decades. Try prime Brecon lamb or *cawl* of seafood with spinach and saffron potatoes.

Laguna Kitchen & Bar (Map p648; ☎ 2038 8591; Park Plaza Hotel, Greyfriars Rd; mains around £15; 🍷 breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) Part of the sleek new Park Plaza complex, this is a contemporary

restaurant, with renowned chefs, which deals in quality. Pretend you're part of the stylish crowd while enjoying pasta, oriental and traditional British dishes.

Cardiff Bay

Eddie's Diner (Map p650; ☎ 2048 4020; Mermaid Quay; mains £3.50-8.70; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Nobody does '50s diners like the Americans, but Eddie's gives it a good go. If you just want a big burger, good ol' apple pie or frothy shake then come here, make like it's *Happy Days* and pretend you're the Fonz (girls, you can pretend to be Joanie).

Caribbean Restaurant (Map p650; ☎ 2025 2102; 12 West Bute St; mains from £5.50; 🍷 5-11pm Tue-Thu, 5pm-1am Fri & Sat, 5-9.30pm Sun) One of the oldest (and best) places, this serves Jamaican treats such as rice-and-peas in a reassuringly down-to-earth setting.

Café Naz (Map p650; ☎ 2049 6555; Mermaid Quay; mains £7.95-12.95; 🍷 noon-3pm & 6pm-midnight Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Sat & Sun) Recommended Bangladeshi/Indian cuisine that changes with the seasons. The three-course weekday lunchtime set-meal (poppadom, naan, rice and mouth-watering curry) is superb value at £4.95, although service can be painfully slow. Good veggie options.

Norwegian Church (Map p650; ☎ 2045 4899; Harbour Dr; 🍷 9am-5pm) Divine little café in the lovely wooden church provides scrummy treats such as cakes, waffles and light lunches.

Tesco Express (Map p650; ☎ 2022 5417; Corporation Rd; 🍷 6am-11pm) This supermarket is near Mermaid Quay.

Sophorus (Map p650; ☎ 2048 7477; Mermaid Quay; mains £8.95-14.75; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Jutting out superbly over the bay, this old favourite doesn't change much, but the views and hearty Turkish cuisine compensate for any dowdiness.

FIVE BEST CAFFEINE HITS

If your body won't pop without an espresso, cappuccino, mochaccino, americano, macchiato, café au lait, or just a good old latte, try these Cardiff cafés where you can also nibble morsels from tapas to pizza and veggie treats to decadent cakes.

AJ's Coffee House (☎ 2045 1588; 20 City Rd) Five-minute walk down Newport Rd from Queen St, then left into City Rd.

A Shot In The Dark (☎ 2047 2300; 12 City Rd) Just next door to AJ's.

Brazil Coffee Co (Map p648; ☎ 2022 4572; 4 Church St)

Café Capesso (☎ 2022 5374; 2 Mundy Pl, Cathays) Walk past the students' union towards Cathays, right at the lights, then down Mundy Pl past the Mackintosh pub.

Capsule (Map p648; ☎ 2038 2882; 48 Charles St)

Woods (Map p650; ☎ 2049 2400; Pilotage Bldg; mains £9.45-18.45; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) Converted from the dockside building once occupied by the pilots who guided in ships, this classy place serves dishes as diverse as pig trotters, roasted Mediterranean veg and Thai-style mussels. Fish and chips are recommended.

Tides (Map p650; ☎ 2031 3018; St David's Hotel & Spa; 2-/3-course dinner £25/30; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Stylishly located in Cardiff's glitziest hotel, Tides pulls a well-heeled crowd with dishes such as roast lamb-rump with garlic mash or sea bass fillet with seared parsnips, orange-flavoured spinach and saffron sauce. Recommended for a splurge – bookings essential for fixed-price menu.

DRINKING

Weekend boozing means St Mary St, when the road is closed and drinkers stagger to and fro unhindered by cars. It can be rough though, so dig a little deeper and try one of these gems.

Café Bar Europa (Map p648; ☎ 2066 7776; 25 Castle St; 🍷 to 11pm Wed-Sat) Favoured by the artistic crowd, little Europa is low-key by day (books, newspapers, board games) and a hip bar on four nights of the week.

Buffalo Bar (Map p648; ☎ 2031 0312; 11 Windsor Pl; 🍷 to 3am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat; wi-fi) Cardiff's best bar and a haven from binge-drinking madness, laid-back Buffalo features retro furniture and an extensive drinks menu. Collapse onto a sofa for the classic-film club, play old-school video games, bring your MP3 for an open DJ night or enjoy tasty daytime food.

Recommended pubs:

Cayo Arms See p654

Goat Major (Map p648; ☎ 2038 3380; cnr Castle & High Sts)

Incognito (☎ 2041 2190; Park Pl) By the Civic Centre.

Waterguard (Map p650; ☎ 2049 9034; Britannia Park, Cardiff Bay)

ENTERTAINMENT

Cardiff's monthly what's-on magazine is *Buzz*, available in bars and at the tourist office.

Cinemas

Chapter Arts Centre (☎ 2030 4400; www.chapter.org; Market Rd, Canton) Recommended art-house place with winning café-bar.

In the city centre, **Vue** (Map p648; ☎ 0871 224 0240; Millennium Plaza, Wood St) and **Cineworld** (Map p648; ☎ 0871 200 2000; Mary Ann St) are huge national-chain multiplexes showing the latest blockbusters.

Live Music

In keeping with the youthful air of the city, Cardiff's ripping music scene can count itself among Britain's best.

Clwb Ifor Bach (Map p648; ☎ 2023 2199; www.dwb.net; 11 Womanby St; admission £3-12; 🍷 to 2am Tue & Wed, to btwn 2.30am & 4am Thu-Sat) Truly an independent music great, many a regional Welsh band has broken onto the scene here since the early 1980s. Back when the club operated a strict Welsh-speaking policy, Catatonia made it big here. Today you'll get by with English but it remains the place to catch the next big thing. It's where local kids aspire to play, while the relaxed crowd soaks up the live music with an insatiable appetite.

VOICE FROM THE HEART

A Lonely Planet reader from Wales once commented that 'all Welsh people don't sing, it's only 79%'. And we're not just talking male-voice choirs here; Cardiff bristles with the best in local Welsh music, national big-name bands and international performers. So tune up your vocal chords and let's be off.

Cardiff still plays host to big-name Welsh acts including Stereophonics, Manic Street Preachers, Feeder and, one of Britain's most consistently inventive bands, Super Furry Animals. Look out as well for gigs by lesser-known but well respected acts such as supercharged rockers Bullet For My Valentine and solo singer-songwriter Christopher Rees. Pop fans can keep an eye out for Charlotte Church, the one-time chubby-cheeked 'voice of an angel' loved by grannies far and wide, now reinvented as vamplike sex bomb and more likely to be falling out of a nightclub than releasing a decent record.

The contemporary scene pulses at Clwb Ifor Bach (above), the venue famous for breaking some of the biggest acts onto the scene.

Want something more refined? Check out the dazzling Wales Millennium Centre (opposite), St David's Hall (opposite), or the beguiling Norwegian Church Arts Centre (opposite) in Cardiff Bay.

GAY & LESBIAN CARDIFF

Cardiff is home to Wales' largest and most relaxed gay and lesbian scene (see www.gaycardiff.co.uk). Partying peaks with the colourful **Mardi Gras** (www.cardiffmardigras.co.uk), held in late August or early September.

The easy-going nightlife centres on Charles St. Here you'll find **Club X** (Map p648; ☎ 2040 0876; www.club-x-cardiff.com; No 35-39; admission £2-10; 🍷 10pm-3am Wed, 9pm-4am Fri, 9pm-6am Sat, 11.30pm-4am Sun), a gay rite of passage with music from hard house to retro-cheese. Nearby is **Exit Bar** (Map p648; ☎ 2064 0102; No 48; admission free before 9.30pm, Sun-Fri £2, Sat £3; 🍷 8pm-2am Mon-Fri, 8pm-3am Sat, 8pm-1am Sun), spinning standard disco fare, while **Bar Icon** (Map p648; ☎ 2034 4300; No 60; free admission; 🍷 5-11pm Mon-Thu, 5pm-1am Fri, noon-1am Sat) is the latest must-visit lounge bar for the style-conscious. Down on Caroline St, **Lush** (Map p648; ☎ 2035 9123; No 22; free admission; 🍷 3pm-midnight Mon-Fri, 1pm-midnight Sat, 5pm-12.30am Sun) is better suited to a relaxing glass of wine.

Two traditional gay pubs are the **Golden Cross** (Map p648; ☎ 2034 3129; 283 Hayes Bridge Rd; 🍷 to 1am Wed-Sat, to 12.30am Sun), a Grade II-listed building with drag nights and strippers, and **KX** (Map p648; ☎ 2064 9891; 25 Caroline St; 🍷 to 1am Thu-Sat, to 12.30am Sun), with karaoke and cabaret on Sundays.

The city has a couple of notably gay-friendly places to stay: try the Courtfield Hotel (p654) or, should you want to tie the knot, the opulent Angel (p653) has a civil partnership licence.

Barfly (Map p648; ☎ 0870 907 0999; www.barflyclub.com; Kingsway; admission from £2; 🍷 to 2am) Swap sweat with the students in this intense basement joint that plays host to local and international indie acts. It also holds popular alternative and electronica club nights.

Toucan Club (☎ 2049 1061; www.toucanclub.co.uk; 95 Newport Rd; admission Sun-Tue free, Wed-Sat £3-5; 🍷 to 1am Tue-Sat, to 12.30am Sun) Relocated to escape the madness of St Mary St, this tiny independent venue continues to fly the flag for the city's music aficionados. Catch an eclectic mix of world grooves, soul and acoustic sessions, with DJs spinning an array of mind-bending sounds.

St David's Hall (Map p648; ☎ 2087 8444; www.stdavids.hallcardiff.co.uk; The Hayes; admission £5.50-30) It might be a concrete blot on the outside, but for a more civilised night out take a seat and soak up the culture of a Welsh choral recital, African gospel, orchestral performance, the annual Welsh Proms, or some of the biggest international names. You can sit on any side of the stage, getting various unique vantage points.

Wales Millennium Centre (Map p650; ☎ 0870 040 2000; www.wmc.org.uk; Bute Pl; admission £5-35) Cardiff Bay's glittering focal point is home to the Welsh National Opera, but you can also see a range of local and international performers in the Donald Gordon theatre, one of the best auditoria that Britain has to offer.

Cardiff International Arena (Map p648; ☎ 2022 4488; Mary Ann St; admission £17.50-36.50) This kind of place wasn't built for live music, which doesn't really matter because the sort of gig you'll find here is the horrific boy-band rot that

only teenage girls can get excited about, along with the occasional international heavyweight whose bank balance needs boosting.

Cardiff University Students Union (Map p648; ☎ 2078 1400; www.cardiffstudents.com; Park Pl; admission £9-16) Unsurprisingly, this is a staunch student hang-out, and the premier place for the latest just-making-it-cool-on-the-circuit bands and DJs. One step up the indie ladder from the Barfly.

The following venues in Cardiff Bay are absolute winners. Keep an eye out for occasional folk and jazz performances in the idyllic, intimate and totally unique **Norwegian Church Arts Centre** (Map p650; ☎ 0870 013 1812; Harbour Dr) The flawless acoustics provide a spine-tingling experience. For contemporary shows, check the listings at the **Coal Exchange** (Map p650; ☎ 2049 4917; www.coalexchange.co.uk; Mt Stuart Sq) and the **Point** (Map p650; ☎ 2046 0873; www.thepointcardiffbay.com; Mt Stuart Sq) – for both see also p651.

Nightclubs

Throw some shapes, bust some moves and dig the grooves in these trendy places.

Aqua (Map p648; ☎ 0870 350 109; 3-6 St Mary St; 🍷 to 2am Fri & Sat) Refurbished venue spinning a mix of upfront tunes in a stylish environment.

Creation (Map p648; ☎ 2037 7014; Park Pl; admission £4-15; 🍷 to 2.30am Mon-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat) Cardiff's biggest club crams in 2500 up-for-it punters who love their commercial chart and house stuff – if you can't pull in here, you might as well stay home.

Clwb Ifor Bach (Map p648; ☎ 2023 2199; www.dwb.net; 11 Womanby St; admission £3-12; 🍷 to 2am Tue & Wed, to btwn

2.30am & 4am Thu-Sat) Has an eclectic range of club nights covering everything from drum 'n' bass to folk and old-school indie to ska-punk, sometimes all in the same night. See also p656.

Theatre

Chapter Arts Centre (☎ 2030 4400; www.chapter.org; Market Rd, Canton; theatre tickets around £8) This excellent (and cool) centre has imaginative theatre, comedy and indie cinema.

New Theatre (Map p648; ☎ 2087 8889; www.newtheatre.cardiff.co.uk; Park Pl; tickets £7.50-23) This splendid theatre, restored to its Edwardian grandeur, stages classic shows from musicals to pantomime.

Sherman Theatre (Map p648; ☎ 2064 6900; www.shermantheatre.co.uk; Senghennydd Rd, Cathays; tickets £10-14; ☎ until 2am Mon-Sat, until midnight Sun) Has new drama and comedy, and occasional free recordings for BBC Radio Wales.

Glee Club (Map p650; ☎ 0870 241 5093; www.glee.co.uk; Mermaid Quay, Cardiff Bay; £8-13; ☎ to 2am Mon-Fri, to midnight Sat) This will have you rolling in the aisles with regular stand-up.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Cardiff airport (☎ 01446-711111; www.cwfly.com), 12 miles southwest of the centre, in Rhoose, has

daily direct flights to destinations in the UK and Continental Europe with **bmibaby** (☎ 0871 224 0224; www.bmibaby.com), **KLM** (☎ 0870 507 4074; www.klmuk.co.uk) and **Thomsonfly** (☎ 0870 1900 737; www.thomsonfly.com).

Aer Arann (☎ 0800 587 23 24; www.aerarran.com) serves Ireland, while **Zoom** (☎ 0870 240 0055; www.flyzoom.com) has low fares to Canada.

Bus

All buses use the central bus station. For details of fares and timetables, contact **Traveline Cymru** (☎ 0870 608 2 608; www.traveline-cymru.org.uk).

The First Shuttle bus 100 (£6, one hour, half-hourly Monday to Friday, hourly Saturday, four Sunday) travels from Cardiff to Swansea.

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) coach 322 serves Birmingham (£20.50, 2½ hours, nine daily) and Bristol (£6.50, 1¼ hours, six daily), and coach 509 serves London (£19, 3¼ hours, about hourly). For airports, coach 201 serves Heathrow (return £35, three hours, about hourly), continuing to Gatwick (£38.50, 4¼ hours).

Low-cost **Megabus** (☎ 0900 160 0900; www.mega bus.com; tickets from £1) runs to London, picking up by the castle.

SPORTING SPIRIT

Nowhere does Wales' sporting dragon roar louder than Cardiff. Rugby is the national game, played to packed houses at the spine-tingling Millennium Stadium (p648). To catch an international match here is to see inside the Welsh psyche, especially when the Six Nations tournament (contested annually between Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland, France and Italy) is in full swing. The party to end all parties came in 2005 when Wales beat Ireland in Cardiff to clinch the grand slam (victory in all five matches) for the first time since 1978. The city, and the rest of Wales, went potty. It's unlikely you'll see that again for a while, so make do with watching **Cardiff Blues** (☎ tickets 2030 2030; www.cardiffblues.com; tickets £15-24) play at the Millennium Stadium's smaller sibling, Cardiff Arms Park.

But it's not all oval balls and macho scrumming. Football's alive and kicking in the capital. **Cardiff City** (☎ tickets 0845 345 1400; www.cardiffcityfc.premiervt.co.uk; tickets £15-26) fly the flag in the English Second Division; they're considered too big for the Welsh league. The club aspires to join the megabucks big-boys of the Premiership, and with recent shrewd signings they might just have an outside chance.

For several years from 2001, Cardiff Millennium Stadium (yes, the home to Welsh rugby) also hosted the showpiece English football event, the FA Cup Final, as construction on the new Wembley stadium in London continued to falter.

Elsewhere, the refined sound of leather on willow can be heard at **Glamorgan County Cricket Club** (☎ tickets 0871 282 3400; www.glamorgancricket.com; tickets £8-15), where exciting times lie ahead. England visited Sophia Gardens for the first time in 2006, playing Pakistan in a one-day game, but the real coup will come in 2009 when Australia and England are due to go head to head in one of the Ashes test matches.

And to top it all off Cardiff's gearing up for the 2010 Ryder Cup, with the best golfers from Europe and the USA set to tee off at the Celtic Manor resort in nearby Newport.

Car & Motorcycle

To reach central Cardiff from the M4 motorway take junction 29/A48 from the east or junction 32/A470 from the west.

Car-rental companies include **Budget Rent-a-Car** (☎ 2072 7499; 281 Penarth Rd) and **Europcar** (☎ 2049 6256; rear of 289 Penarth Rd). Prices start from around £25 daily and £115 weekly, including unlimited mileage.

Train

For fare and timetable details contact **National Rail Enquiries** (☎ 08457 48 49 50; www.nationalrail.co.uk).

Regular services include Birmingham (£30.40, 2¼ hours, at least half-hourly), London Paddington (£67, 2¼ hours, half-hourly), Manchester (£44.90, 3½ hours, hourly) and Swansea (£7.70, 50 minutes, half-hourly).

Port-side connections (with ferries to Ireland): Fishguard, change at Swansea (£15.70, 2½ hours, twice daily Monday to Saturday, one Sunday); Holyhead (£57.50, 5½ hours, every one to two hours); and Pembroke Dock, change at Swansea (£15.70, 3¼ hours, every two hours).

Cardiff is served by **Valley Lines** (☎ 2044 9944; www.arrivatrainswales.com) trains to the Llynfi, Rhondda, Cynon, Taff and Rhymney Valleys, which depart from Cardiff Central and Queen St stations.

Always try and book ahead (especially for long-distance journeys) as discounts on these fares can be as high as 80%.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Bus X91 shuttles between the airport and central bus station (30 minutes, at least hourly). Regular trains run between Rhoose Cardiff Airport station (bus link to the airport) and Cardiff Central station (30 minutes, hourly). A taxi to the city centre costs about £20.

Bicycle

The Taff Trail walking/cycle route runs through Cardiff. For bike hire, see p647.

Public Transport

Pick up a free bus/train map from the tourist office or the Cardiff Bus office.

Cardiff Bus (Map p648; ☎ 2066 6444; www.cardiffbus.com; Wood St) has an office in the Travel Shop, located just opposite the central bus and train stations. Its services run all over town; present the exact change or a travel pass.

A local Day to Go pass (daily/weekly £3/13) is valid for travel on buses around Cardiff and Penarth. A regional Network Rider pass (daily/weekly £6/20) covers Cardiff, Penarth, Castell Coch and Caerphilly, and as far as Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenafon, Abergavenny, Monmouth and Chepstow. Buy passes on the bus or at the Travel Shop.

Local train stations are Cardiff Central, Queen St, Llandaff, Ninian Park and Cardiff Bay. **Valley Lines** (☎ 2044 9944; www.arrivatrainswales.com) trains, which depart from Cardiff Central and Queen St stations, are a good way to reach Caerphilly Castle, Penarth and Rhondda Heritage Park.

Taxi

On the street, flag a black-and-white cab, or for bookings, try **Capital Cars** (☎ 2077 7777).

AROUND CARDIFF

North of Cardiff are hills and valleys that display Wales' industrial heritage, and are also home to impressive castles.

CASTELL COCH

Fairy-tales could be made at **Castell Coch** (Cadw; ☎ 2081 0101; 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), seductively shrouded in thick beechwoods 5 miles northwest of Cardiff.

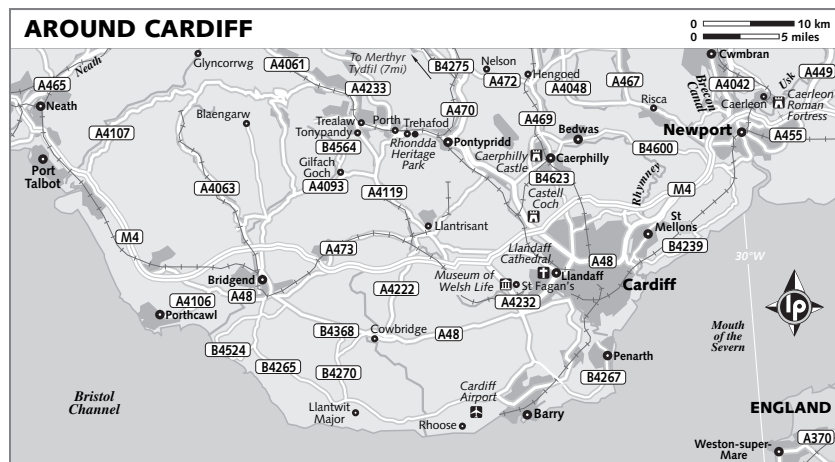
A Victorian fantasy built on the foundations of a real fortress, this was the summer retreat of Cardiff's coal-kings, the Bute family. As with glorious Cardiff Castle, the architect was William Burges, who did a fine job of creating a Disneylike hideaway. 'Kitsch' doesn't do it justice. The castle is gloriously over-the-top, featuring a tremendous drawing room decorated with mouldings from *Aesop's Fables*.

From Cardiff Central station take bus 26 (hourly Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday) to Tongwynlais, and then it's a steep 10-minute walk. Bus 26A (five daily Monday to Friday) serves Castell Coch direct.

Bus 26 continues to Caerphilly, for a two-castle day trip.

CAERPHILLY CASTLE

It would be difficult to find a more beautiful medieval fortress than 13th-century **Caerphilly Castle** (Cadw; ☎ 2088 3143; 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), complete with three moats, six portcullises and five defensive doorways, not to mention a leaning tower that puts Pisa to shame (gashed open by subsidence).

Catch a Valley Lines train from Cardiff Central (20 minutes, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, two-hourly Sunday). Visit both Caerphilly and Castell Coch by catching bus 26.

MUSEUM OF WELSH LIFE

Overseas visitors, kids and pensioners love the **Museum of Welsh Life** (☎ 2057 3500; St Fagan's; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), with a collection of 30 salvaged original buildings showing 'how life used to be'. Go to school or the wool mill before dropping into a local ironworkers' cottage from Merthyr Tydfil, the town that became the so-called 'Iron Capital of the World' in the early 18th century. The slightly twee craft displays will show you how to make clogs and barrels, among other things.

It's located at St Fagan's Castle, a 16th-century manor house 4 miles west of Cardiff. You should allow at least half a day for your visit.

From Cardiff Central station/Cathedral Rd take bus 32 (25 minutes).

RHONDDA HERITAGE PARK

You can't grasp the importance of mining in Welsh history without visiting the valleys that produced so much coal. Using ex-miners as

guides, Merthyr colliery in the **Rhondda Valley** (☎ 01443-682036; www.rhonddaheritagepark.com; adult/child £5.60/4.30; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar) can give you an insight into this unforgiving industry.

The park lies 10 miles northwest of Cardiff, between Pontypridd and Porth. Take a train from Cardiff Central station to Trehafod (35 minutes, half-hourly, two-hourly Sunday), or bus 132 from Cardiff Central (55 minutes, at least hourly).

CAERLEON ROMAN FORTRESS

Romans had a knack for picking strategic sites that were also habitable. For 200 years, they occupied Isca Silurum on the banks of the River Usk, later a 20-hectare township and their foremost Welsh base.

For relaxation, the 6000 soldiers visited the **amphitheatre** (open site), of which evocative mounds remain, and the **baths** (Cadw; ☎ 01633-422518; adult/child £2.90/2.50; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Apr-Oct, 9.30-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Nov-Mar). Near the baths, the **Roman Legionary Museum** (☎ 01633-423134; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) presents an insight into Roman soldiers' lives, with finds from jewellery to children's teeth.

The fortress lies 4 miles northeast of Newport. Bus 7 runs from Newport bus station to the museum. Newport lies 12 miles east of Cardiff; take the mainline train (12 minutes, at least four hourly).

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