

Pembrokeshire : The Perfect Break

Pembrokeshire offers fine beaches, untamed coastal scenery and the gastronomic delights of Britain's smallest city, says Fred Mawer of the Daily Telegraph. July 9 2008.



Pembrokeshire boasts a number of big, pretty beaches

Why go?

Pembrokeshire's 200-odd miles of coastline are as upliftingly beautiful as any in Britain – hence its status as a National Park. It is arguably at its best in the little developed far west of the county, where there are a number of awesomely big, sandy beaches fringing St Brides Bay; and near to St David's, miles of dramatic cliff scenery, and several pretty seaside villages (Broad Haven, Solva, Porthgain).

While south Pembrokeshire has a plethora of contrived family attractions, out in the west it's all about communing with the natural world – hiking along the coastal path, surfing, or, for the more intrepid, sea kayaking, rock climbing or coasteering. St David's is a great base. Britain's smallest city by some margin, with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, is establishing itself as something of a foodies' hotspot: no fewer than four of the city's restaurants are featured in the latest edition of the Good Food Guide.

The only disadvantage of a summer holiday in west Pembrokeshire is that you need to be quite hardy. It can often be nippy and breezy: wetsuits and windbreaks may be required for days on the beach.

Travel by...

Car: from southern England, all but the last 35 miles to west Pembrokeshire are on the M4 or a dual carriageway. In good traffic, London to St David's takes around 4½ hours.

Train: coming from England, you need to change trains in south Wales. The journey from Paddington to Haverfordwest, with a change at Newport, can be done in under five hours. For more information, see www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Sleep in...

The Druidstone (01437 781221, www.druidstone.co.uk). On the cliffs above a mile of spectacular beach near Broad Haven, this is a strong contender for Wales' most family-friendly hotel. Expect a laid-back vibe, good food and simple accommodation; rooms sleeping a family of four from £105 B & B.

The Waterings (01437 720876, www.waterings.co.uk) is a good-quality B & B on the outskirts of St David's. Spacious bedrooms can accommodate families (£120 B & B for a family of four). No children under five, and there is some building work nearby.

If you want to rent a cottage, **Coastal Cottages of Pembrokeshire** (01437 767600, www.coastalcottages.co.uk) and **Quality Cottages** (0800 007 5299, www.qualitycottages.co.uk) offer lots of choice.

West Pembrokeshire has a number of campsites in memorable coastal locations.

Caerfai Bay (01437 720274, www.caerfaibay.co.uk), above a pretty cove just outside St David's, has magnificent views from its pitches, and an enticing farm shop; £27.50 a night for a family of four in a tent in August.

If you struggle to find somewhere to stay, as you might in August, www.visitpembrokeshire.com is a good starting point for other options.

Spend the morning...

On **Whitesands beach**. Five minutes' drive from St David's, this gorgeous, long, sandy strand offers something for everyone, including acres of space for ball games, enticing rock pools and surfing (kit and lessons available; conditions usually good for

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beginners). Avoid coming when the tide is high as the beach all but disappears, and if the weather is good don't arrive too late, as you may end up in a long queue waiting for a space in the car park.

Lunch in...

The Refectory at St David's (01437 721760, www.refectoryatstdavids.co.uk). The cathedral's very superior café, in an impressive space in the cloisters, serves interesting dishes such as rabbit and cider casserole, along with good sandwiches, mini pizzas and cakes.

If you are around over the last weekend in August, take in the city's Really Wild Food & Country Festival, a "celebration of food and countryside crafts originating from the wild". For more information, see www.reallywildfestival.co.uk.

Stroll around...

The cathedral – of gold and purple-hued stone – nestling in a hollow beyond the centre of St David's. Admire the wonderful oak ceiling above the sloping nave, and the amusing carvings on the choir stalls' misericords. Back outside, cross the river to the 14th-century bishop's palace – the romantic ruins are topped with a richly decorated, arcaded parapet.

Buy...

Local art, on sale in a number of galleries in St David's.

Have dinner...

Up the coast at Porthgain – the little village and striking harbour was a major quarrying and brickmaking centre from 1850 to 1930. There are two extremely popular dining options here – book ahead for both.

The Shed (01348 831518, www.theshedporthgain.co.uk), a few-frills bistro in a former carpenter's shed near the quayside, serves highly commended fish dishes; three-course dinners from around £31 a head, excluding drinks.

The family-friendly **Sloop Inn** (01348 831449, www.sloop.co.uk), overlooking the village green and decorated with bits and bobs salvaged from shipwrecks, does the best pub meals for miles around, from steak and chips and sticky-toffee pudding to fishy specials posted on blackboards. Come early, and build up an www.holidaycottagepemps.co.uk

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appetite with a walk along the coastal path to Traeth Llyfn, a spectacular beach with arresting rock formations reached by a long metal stairway.

Stay up late at...

One of the several pubs around the secluded inlet of Solva, on the other side of St David's. Also, St David's Cathedral hosts inexpensive organ concerts on Wednesday evenings in the summer – see www.stdavidscathedral.org.uk.

Recover by...

Going wildlife spotting. Take a boat trip from St Justinian's harbour near St David's. Look out for grey seals and porpoises, and colonies of seabirds on the ledges of the towering cliffs of Ramsey Island, an RSPB reserve. If you want to visit the island, Thousand Island Expeditions (www.thousandislands.co.uk) has sole landing rights. Bear in mind that you may need your sea legs to cope with the swirling currents of Ramsey Sound.

At all costs avoid...

The traffic jams on the M4 through south Wales at peak traffic times – such as late morning on a Saturday in August.

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