

# IT'S A MUSEUM





## It's a museum

Alun Ffred Jones, Minister of Heritage,  
Welsh Assembly Government

Cultural heritage is what makes this Wales unique – living languages, sporting passions, arts and literature, industrial heritage and castles and monuments.

**A**s Heritage Minister, I am privileged to have a portfolio that encompasses: the Welsh language, which does much to define us as a nation; the historic environment, museums, libraries and archives, the arts, sport and tourism.

The institutions, events, writers and performers that celebrate this unique heritage all help to build Wales' profile on the world stage, both as a destination and as a place to do business. This is vitally important in attracting visitors to Wales and bringing money into the Welsh economy.

Later this year, Wales will be the featured nation at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, a major cultural event which attracts more than one million visitors over 10 days. Around 100 Welsh artists, performers and craftsman will take centre stage on the National Mall in Washington DC to showcase the best of Wales. This in turn will raise the profile of Wales in the United States and hopefully, encourage people to come and visit Wales and see for themselves our stunning landscape and experience our distinct culture.

Tourism brings in more than £8 million a year to Wales. Sporting events also attract a great many people. A number of high-profile events are held at the magnificent Millennium Stadium in Cardiff and there is just over a year to go until Wales plays host to the 2010 Ryder Cup at the Celtic Manor Resort. With around 40,000 visitors expected for the competition itself, the event will have a big economic impact on the local area as well as further afield.

When it comes to film and television production, you only have to look at the way that Doctor Who and Torchwood have put Cardiff on the map. Popular comedy Gavin and Stacey has done wonders for the town of Barry.

Two major films – the latest instalment in the Harry Potter series, as well as a remake of Robin Hood by Ridley Scott, starring Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett are preparing to film in Pembrokeshire. These films not only boost local coffers by using local crew and facilities, but they can also have an impact on the tourism trade.

On average, the Wales Screen Commission records over £20 million a year in direct spend from film and television production throughout Wales.

The arts also play a strong role in drawing visitors to Wales through exhibitions, festivals and events. The Artes Mundi contemporary arts prize is just one of many examples. Visitors come to Wales to see this exhibition and spend money elsewhere.

Wales, like the rest of the UK and other parts of the world, is facing some tough challenges in the current tough economic climate. When the upturn comes, it is vital that Wales is in a strong position to take full advantage. The value of creating a country that is known for its creativity and innovative spirit cannot be underestimated.

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# The beauty of Bluestone

In March 2009, Bluestone was formally recognised as the first, and so far only, five star holiday village in Wales. The announcement was a significant milestone for Bluestone. It's been less than a year since the first guests were welcomed on site, but well over a decade since the project was originally conceived. Though it's fair to say that getting to this point has not always been plain sailing, Bluestone is now well on course toward achieving its primary aim: becoming the UK's most-loved short break destination.

[ It is in an idyllic setting. All the accommodation, and the village, lies within the renowned Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the only coastal national park in the UK. From the outside, looking in: Bluestone is barely visible. From the inside, looking out: the views are stunning—ancient woodlands, rolling fields, and as a dramatic backdrop, the fabled Preseli Hills. ]

Created over 500 acres within Pembrokeshire's historic Landsker borderlands, Bluestone comprises 182 stylish, comfortable timber lodges, set around a newly-built but traditionally-designed village. The village contains more accommodation in the form of 30 cottages and 17 studios, and a range of facilities including shops, three restaurants, a pub, a wine bar, and a lavish holistic spa, all for the exclusive use of staying guests.

In the adjoining valley are Blue Lagoon, a unique, biomass-fuelled waterpark housed in a giant upturned coracle; and the Landsker Sports Club which boasts the only fully-equipped Nautilus One fitness facility in the UK.

There is also a range of multi-purpose rooms and associated facilities which make Bluestone an ideal venue for conferences and corporate events. In fact, in October 2008, Bluestone staged the prestigious British Ports Association annual conference; the first time it had been held in Wales.

Bluestone stands apart from conventional holiday villages in several clear ways. The first is the idyllic setting. All the accommodation, and the village, lies within the renowned Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the only coastal national park in the UK.

From the outside, looking in: Bluestone is barely visible. From the inside, looking out: the views are stunning—ancient woodlands, rolling fields, and as a dramatic backdrop, the fabled Preseli Hills.

The commitment to meeting modern expectations means high standards not only in accommodation, facilities and service, but also in environmental performance.

"It's been a long and sometimes difficult journey" says William McNamara OBE, the man who created Bluestone, "but we're here and we're taking tourism in Wales to a new level.

"After so much work, it's hugely gratifying and exciting for me to see my vision finally realised, but there's no real let-up for us. All our energy is now focused on making sure that for our guests, the Bluestone experience is everything we always wanted it to be."

No comparable destination can match Bluestone's investment in renewable energy, and every aspect of the operation is carried out in line with the stringent



Green Dragon environmental management system. Bluestone has already achieved Level 3 of the Green Dragon Standard, and aims to achieve Level 5 within its first year of operation.

While environmental considerations are obviously important, Bluestone looks toward true sustainability and takes seriously its economic and social obligations to Pembrokeshire.

Of the 350 people currently employed, 88% live in Pembrokeshire. That level of employment, and the consequent boost to the local economy, will rise when the phases two and three (150 more lodges and the snow centre) are complete. It is anticipated that ultimately, Bluestone will employ 700 people and – according to an

independent study—inject more than £30 million into the local economy every year.

Another longstanding tenet of the Bluestone concept is that guests are encouraged to venture off-site and explore the rest of Pembrokeshire. The Information Centre houses a wide range of promotional material for attractions and activity providers within the area, and staff are always keen to offer guests advice on where to go and what to do.

Bluestone has also developed a supplier programme which rates prospective suppliers against four criteria: locality, quality, commerciality and environmental performance.

For more information about Bluestone, visit the website [www.bluestonewales.com](http://www.bluestonewales.com)

bluestone

## Bluestone

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# An elegant stay

Sarah Milne

The award winning Park Plaza offers sumptuous luxury and great facilities in a beautiful location.

Caption

To be the recipient of an award for customer service is always welcome when you're in the hospitality industry, so when a hotel has won an award every year that it's been operating, it's certainly something to shout about, and the Park Plaza Cardiff is rightfully proud of all the accolades given since the hotel opened in 2005.

For General Manager Hugh Hilary, the awards they have won are the result of plenty of hard work from the whole team: "We've just been awarded the top Expedia Regional Customer Service award – that includes everywhere in the UK outside London." The hotel is also currently number one on Trip Advisor, and for Hugh, this again underwrites and emphasises what the hotel is about: "These awards can't be bought, they have to be hard earned and our staff work very hard to satisfy our customer's every need."

Located right in the heart of the city centre, it's easy to see why the Park Plaza is so adept at providing such good service. The four star deluxe hotel—which has also been awarded AA Hotel of the Year, Wales and BRDC No 1 Conference Hotel: Wales & West Region for 2007 & 2008—boasts 129 guest rooms, including superior and executive rooms as well as suites. The whole hotel is sophisticated and relaxed, allowing it to service every kind of guest comfortably – regularly welcoming both business customers and those looking for a relaxing break, meaning it enjoys the highest occupancy of any hotel in the city.

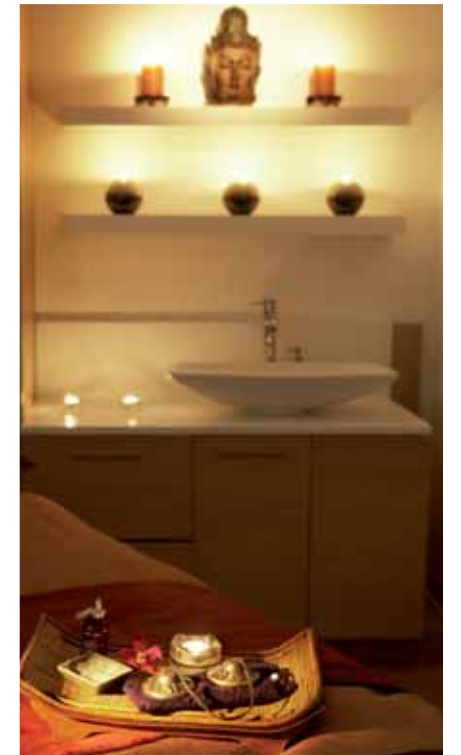
The décor is modern and elegant, giving guests the space to switch off and simply enjoy their stay.

As well as conference facilities including nine meeting rooms, the hotel offers complementary WiFi connection to resident—making an afternoon meeting in front of the roaring fire in the lobby as efficient as possible. And, at the end of a long day, the state-of-the-art Laguna Health & Spa has everything you might need to unwind, including a 20 metre swimming pool and a fully equipped gym—if you're feeling particularly stressed, a massage in one of the Elemis rooms will leave you walking on air. The Laguna Kitchen & Bar offers a modern menu, focusing on fresh, seasonal Welsh ingredients, which again is bucking the current economic trend with a mix of hotel guests and locals making the restaurant a busy dinner venue.



And it's this combination of facilities and well-trained staff at the Park Plaza that keeps the customers coming back for more – one of their guests has recently completed her 100th stay at the hotel, proving that she's more than happy with the service.

The success of the Park Plaza Cardiff is indicative of the regeneration of the city as a whole, and Hugh is encouraged by the number of visitors coming for weekend breaks, as well as the more traditional sporting events: "People are realizing that Cardiff is an attractive destination, and the gateway to the natural beauty that Wales has to offer." And there's no better way to start a visit to Wales than a stay at the Park Plaza.



[ The décor is modern and elegant, giving guests the space to switch off and simply enjoy their stay. ]



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Hotel Tel: 029 20 111 111  
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Laguna Health & Spa  
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# Luxury facilities

Matthew Wilson

Set in the heart of Cardiff city centre, the modern contemporary five-star Hilton International creates a striking landmark. Distinctive elegance and design describes best the 197 luxury bedrooms, many of which offer spectacular views across the city and over Cardiff Castle.



Opened in August 1999 after a two-year £20m redevelopment, including the addition of two floors to the original Portland stone building, the hotel's construction and facilities were governed by a very simple philosophy: only the finest in the world would do. As a result, materials, fittings, and fixtures from 24 countries are in use. One of the dominating architectural features of the building's facade, from the roof to the ground floor windows, is the curve, that is a recurring design feature appearing throughout the hotel in the dramatic sweep of the seventh floor rotunda, in undulating corridors, in the gentle arc of the bars, and even in the crescent-shaped walk-in shower cubicles in all bedrooms. The hotel has a unique feel to it, with bright yet sophisticated colours throughout, a spectacular atrium with glass elevators, a conservatory bringing the restaurant to life alongside the pavement, and the use of delicately grained American carat, along with specially crafted Italian furniture in all the bedrooms. Each bedroom is fully air conditioned and equipped with the most up-to-date facilities from high speed internet access connections to private bars, safes, and in-room entertainment with LCD screens in line with Hilton International standards.

The Presidential Suite on the top floor has hosted many famous celebrities and heads of state over the years, and the Executive Lounge is a home-from-home offering hospitality of the highest standards. The hotel's award-winning Razzi restaurant is extremely popular with residents and locals alike and offers a wide selection of international cuisine.

One of the best-kept secrets in town is the hotel's Premium Club where members receive a wide range of dining benefits along with other promotional offers in Hilton Hotels. The adjoining Razzi Piano Bar offers a peaceful haven and a warm welcome at all times of day and night. An alternative experience is provided by the Steam Bar which is extremely popular with non-residents – offering informality in the daytime and turning into a destination bar on weekend nights.

The hotel's exclusive Livingwell Health Club on the second floor boasts a fully equipped gymnasium, a sauna and steam room, a jacuzzi and a 20 metre swimming pool uniquely constructed from panels of polished stainless steel from Sweden. Containing 44,000 gallons of water, the



pool is set alongside a feature wall of distinctive glass brick blocks. Two sensory treatment rooms complete the facilities on offer. For meetings, conventions, and conferences, the Hilton has seven conference and banqueting suites, capable of accommodating any event from two to 340 guests. The Hilton Meetings brand is known worldwide, and the Cardiff Hilton is extremely popular all year round for local, national, and international events.

A business centre provides residents and delegates with a full range of office and secretarial services on the first floor. As general manager, Marie Fagan says: "Hilton Cardiff can offer conference organisers everything they could wish for

in a city centre venue." Under Ms Fagan's management, the hotel plays a leading role in the city and around and is a strong voice in the development and structuring of the local economy. It has a deservedly well-won reputation among the city's business people for the quality of its service and the standard of its facilities, and is similarly popular among Cardiff residents and visitors alike. "Since we have won five major awards over the past eight years," she explains, "we are clearly providing guests with a consistent and hassle-free personalised service that attracts them back time and time again."



**Hilton Cardiff**  
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# Pembrokeshire – the place to be

Every year, thousands upon thousands of tourists visit Pembrokeshire, the most south westerly point in Wales. Some will come because of the numerous fine and safe beaches (Pembrokeshire has more Blue Flag beaches than any other county) whilst others will come to visit the UK's only coastal National Park, or to walk all, or a part of, the 186-mile long coastal path that goes around three sides of the county.



Others will visit because they want to see or study the abundant wildlife such as seals, dolphins or the many birds that live on the offshore islands, whilst the more active may want to take part in one of the varied water sports, or climb the coastal cliffs or walk the Preseli Mountains. Others with an interest in history may want to see one of the many castles or the source of the famous Bluestone from which Stonehenge is built – there are many other reasons that have led people to write or paint pictures about this varied county. And some will simply be passing through as they travel to or from Ireland.

Whatever the reason for visiting Pembrokeshire, the county provides a warm welcome and a rich choice of places to stay, from the luxurious hotel or the new Bluestone Holliday Village to the simple rural or coastal camping sites.

When choosing something to eat there are also decisions to be made, from fast food to pubs and restaurants specialising in Pembrokeshire produce. This local produce can also be purchased at the award winning Farmers Market held every other Friday in an attractive riverside setting in Haverfordwest, and a new service Pembrokeshire Produce Direct is now available to deliver local foods direct to your home.

Those of us who are lucky enough to live in Pembrokeshire, be it in St Davids, the smallest city in the UK, or in one of the attractive coastal or waterside towns and villages, or any of the picturesque inland locations, not only enjoy all of the factors and facilities mentioned above but also reside in an area with the lowest crime rate in the UK and the lowest Council Tax in Wales.

The tourist and the local produce, together with the sea (Milford Haven is the 5th busiest port in the UK) and the energy industry provide many people in the county with good jobs and an enviable lifestyle.



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[ WORLD CLASS WALES It's a museum ]



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# World class cultural venue

Wales Millennium Centre, which celebrates its fifth birthday in November 2009, has already established itself as a world class venue. Its cultural vision is to showcase the best of Wales to the world and to bring the best of the world to Wales. Since opening, the Centre has also become an iconic landmark and a strong and powerful symbol of a self-confident devolved Wales. Not only does the Centre help raise the profile of Wales internationally, but it also reinforces how culture can be used to promote national identity.

[ Arts and culture are also important determinants in terms of inward investment. In an increasingly crowded and competitive marketplace factors such as image and identity are becoming even more crucial. A recent survey amongst key corporate decision makers, showed that 60% of respondents said they believed that a strong tradition in culture and the arts contributes to the impression of a positive destination for investment purposes. ]

Situated in the heart of Cardiff Bay, Wales Millennium Centre is home to eight creative companies – Welsh National Opera; BBC National Orchestra of Wales; Diversions, The Dance Company of Wales; Academi, the literary agency for Wales; Hijinx Theatre; Touch Trust; Tŷ Cerdd and Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Wales's national youth organisation. World class touring companies and artists regularly perform on the Centre's stage, including the prestigious Mariinsky Opera and ballet companies, Australian Ballet and the composer Philip Glass. The Welsh BAFTAs have taken place in the Donald Gordon Theatre for the last two years, and in 2005 the Centre staged the Royal Variety Performance, attended by Her Majesty the Queen.

Wales Millennium Centre has drawn a number of popular West End musicals to Cardiff, including the UK premiere of Never Forget, the musical based on the music of Take That, which opened at the Centre before its successful West End run. Musical theatre legend Cameron Mackintosh has brought Mary Poppins and Miss Saigon to Cardiff, with Les Misérables opening in December 2009. First day box office sales broke all previous records at the Centre. Andrew Lloyd Webber's Starlight Express has visited the centre and in July 2009 his production of The Sound of Music will begin its UK tour here in Cardiff.

Arts and culture are also important determinants in terms of inward investment. In an increasingly crowded and competitive marketplace factors such as image and identity are becoming even more crucial. A recent survey amongst key corporate decision makers, showed that 60% of respondents said they believed that a strong tradition in culture and the arts contributes to the impression of a positive destination for investment purposes. Wales Millennium Centre plays an increasingly important role in positioning Cardiff and Wales as world-class business locations, and inspiring places in which to live and work.

Judith Isherwood, Chief Executive of Wales Millennium Centre, has been at the helm of the Centre since it opened. She said, "When I reflect on the success of the Centre, it is hard to believe that we are still a fledgling in the performing arts world. Already, we have won our place in the premier league on the world stage, not only for the quality of our facilities but also for our cultural vision and ambitious



Valery Gergiev of Mariinsky Opera, who are returning to Wales Millennium Centre as part of its 5th birthday celebrations

programming." Not that she's resting on her laurels. The Centre is in a period of growth that will see it extending its role as one of the UK's cultural leaders and also as a major tourist destination. Since opening, the Centre has attracted nearly six million visitors, making it the No 1 visitor attraction in Wales and one of the top ten cultural attractions outside London.

The Centre's world class reputation is reflected in its celebratory programme of performances and events to mark its 5th birthday. The Mariinsky Opera will be joined on stage by Bryn Terfel – an ambassador for the Centre – for a performance of Verdi's Requiem and an Opera Gala. Other performances include the return of Never Forget, and the world premiere of Cape Town Opera's Porgy and Bess.

Ms Isherwood said, "2009 will be a time to celebrate our achievements and our success; a time to showcase a spectacular programme of international standing in our five star venue."



Bryn Terfel outside Wales Millennium Centre

Neil Bennett

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wmc.org.uk  
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