

Capital city itinerary: the must-see historic sites outside Cardiff

If you're spending a couple of days in the capital city, there are many must-see historic sites in the surrounding area.

Just over 20 minutes drive from the centre of Cardiff you will come across **Caerphilly Castle**, which has a tower that leans more than Pisa's, or you can explore the dazzling ceilings and furnishings of the fairytale **Castell Coch**. Delve deeper into the Valleys and you can explore the World Heritage Site of **Blaenavon Ironworks**, or experience life as a Roman at **Caerleon Roman Baths**. You're sure to have a monumental day out...



Caerphilly Castle

Caerphilly Castle is the biggest castle in Wales. Although not quite complete, the iconic fortress is mighty impressive, surrounded by a series of moats and watery islands. The castle is the brainchild of Gilbert 'the Red' de Clare, a redheaded nobleman of Norman descent, who's early attempts at building the castle were thwarted by Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. Gilbert eventually succeeded to build a mammoth stronghold using the concentric 'walls within walls' system of defence. Climb to the rooftop of the massive east gatehouse, and from here you can see the rings of stone and water defences that made Caerphilly such a stronghold. Explore the dark passage known as the Braose Gallery and look out for the south-east tower — which out leans Pisa's famous tower — and the mighty siege engines and special firing events. The castle is a favourite backdrop for TV and films including Dr Who.



Castell Coch

On the other side of Caerphilly mountain, less than 15 minutes away, you'll spot **Castell Coch** hidden in the trees. Castell Coch, a Welsh name meaning 'Red Castle' rests on the medieval foundations of an earlier castle built by de Clare. However the current structure is relatively modern, and is the by-product of a vivid Victorian imagination. William Burges was given free rein by the third marquess of Bute to create a rural retreat to complement the opulence of his main residence, Cardiff Castle. Multi-sensory resources allow easy exploration of this Victorian Gothic-style castle, which was a romantic vision of the Middle Ages, using touch-screen technology.



Blaenavon Ironworks

Just under an hour's drive from Cardiff up into the Valleys stand the famous World Heritage Site **Blaenavon Ironworks**. The ironworks were a milestone in the history of the Industrial Revolution and at the time were at the cutting-edge of new technology. The power of steam was harnessed and a way of making steel using iron-ore was developed, which led to a worldwide boom in the steel industry, taking Wales's industrial might to a new height. Visitors to the site can see the refurbished Stack Square cottages and recreated company truck shop, and the new cutting-edge audio-post technology helps bring the story of the ironworks to life like never before. The surrounding landscape is also revolutionary in its form and function. From mines to train lines, you can still trace the routes in and routes out, from raw material to finished product.

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Caerleon Roman Fortress and Baths

From Cardiff head east on the M4 towards Newport, and within a 30 minute drive you will reach **Caerleon Roman Fortress and Baths**. Caerleon is one of the most varied and fascinating Roman sites in Britain, incorporating a fortress and baths, well-preserved amphitheatre and a row of barrack blocks, the only examples currently visible in Europe. With heated changing rooms, a selection of cold or warm baths, covered exercise rooms and even an open-air swimming pool, the remains clearly visible at Caerleon suggest that Roman life could be comfortable and luxurious. After a relaxing bath, the Romans most likely headed towards the nearby amphitheatre for a bit of blood and gore, to see a gladiator and beast fight tooth and claw for their lives!

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The journey time from Cardiff to Castell Coch is approx. 15 minutes, 20 minutes to Caerphilly, 30 minutes to Caerleon and 45 minutes to Blaenavon.