

# Take a Modern Pilgrimage to Spiritual Wales



International Passenger Survey statistics indicate that 4% of visitors to Britain polled indicate the primary reason for their trip is visiting religious sites or religious places of interest.

“Religious tourism” is a growing trend with the World Religious Travel Association reporting that the faith tourism industry amounts to \$18 billion with 300 million travelers annually.

And Wales is uniquely positioned as an attractive religious tourism destination combining Christian significance with both St. David and St. Patrick reputedly born in Wales, and an intriguing Celtic heritage encompassing Neolithic sites throughout the country. There are even dedicated spiritual and religious tours offered by local tour companies.



So important was Wales' patron saint — St. David — to the spread of Christianity, that in 1220, Pope Calistus II declared that two pilgrimages to St. David's equaled one to Rome. Following in the footsteps of St. David has been a tradition for centuries, with the English Kings William I and Henry II among the

early pilgrims. Modern-day pilgrims are seeking out Wales in greater numbers, and while most forego the hardships of yore, the intention of connecting with the sacred remains primary.

With cathedrals in St. David's, Llandaff (Cardiff) and St. Asaph (reputedly Britain's smallest), historic religious sites such as the sacred Bardsey Island off the Llyn Peninsula and St. Illtyd's Church in Llantwit Major with its important collection of ancient Celtic stones, visitors can easily plan their own trip using a newly released 'Factfile of Religious Tourism' available from [TravelWales.org/religious](http://TravelWales.org/religious).



For visitors wanting a more structured tour, two companies that have responded to the growing interest in spiritual travel to Wales are Cambrian Routes and Pilgrim Travel.

Cambrian Routes, a Welsh family-owned business, has created "Of Saints and Stones," a chauffeur-driven tour that explores Wales' Celtic Christianity centering on Pembrokeshire, the home of St. David's. Founded by St. David in the 6th century as a Celtic monastery, St. David's is Britain's smallest city with a population of 1,800, the spiritual heart of Wales and one of the great historic shrines to Christendom.



Pilgrim Travel has created an in-depth, scholarly tour tracing the routes of St. David and his better-known fellow Celtic saint, St. Patrick. Pilgrim Travel's 13-day "In the Footsteps of St. David and St. Patrick" features many of Wales' treasured sacred sites including St. Govan's Chapel, the most spectacular and romantically-sited of the hermitages remaining in Wales; Caldey Island, home to a Catholic Cistercian community of the strict observance; Porth Mawr – Whitesand Bay, St. Patrick's point of departure for his mission to Ireland and the St. David's Peninsula with a visit to St. Non's, commemorating David's mother and the legend of his birth. The last stop in Wales before heading to Dublin is the Isle of Anglesey – Ynys Mon—the pre-Roman intellectual center of Druidic Britain.

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