

# Adventure in Wales

**Only few people know Wales is a perfect destination for adventure activities. You can for example go surfing, sea kayaking, mountain biking and 'coasteering'; a bizarre combination of swimming and rock climbing along the wild coast of Pembrokeshire National Park. Sp!ts jumped in at the deep end.**

*Written by Joris van Drooge*

"Three, two, one ... JUMP!"

It is too late for weak apologies. Instructor Paul Ellis is counting down and I just HAVE to jump. I am standing on a cliff, ten meter below the Atlantic Ocean swirling like a bottle of beer, with deep green water and white crested waves. I take a step and throw myself into the sea. The location: Pembrokeshire, the most remote area of Wales. The water temperature: 9 degrees Celsius.

The moment I surface, I see a few hikers standing on rocks 20 meters above me. They are curiously looking down and I can HEAR them think: 'that man is raving mad'. It is my first experience with *coasteering*, a spectacular adventure activity, we are discovering the rough coast, while climbing, cliff jumping and swimming. Not just like that: the gear we are wearing would make James Bond jealous. A thick wetsuit and a thermal waist coat against the cold, plus for safety a helmet, a life jacket and a stout pair of trainers.

We started today calm and dry, with climbing along the coast, a few meters above sea level. Meanwhile instructor Paul was telling about the origins of this adventure sport: 'coasteering is invented by surfers and rock climbers who were just having some fun. Rock climbing above the sea and then jumping down, increasingly higher and more extreme every time. The coast of Pembrokeshire is the perfect location, because everywhere you will find rocks, small islands, cliffs and bays. However coasteering goes back so much longer. Centuries ago treasures and contraband were hidden in the sea caves. That also was called coasteering, only those people probably tried to stay as dry as possible.

We are definitely not staying dry. Very quickly we are taking turns in rock climbing, swimming and jumping. And by the time we are used to the ice cold water the real thing is only getting started. While swimming we are exploring a 30 meters deep sea cave, where we are heaving in the spooky twilight in the breakers. We are climbing up 15 meters slippery rocks, to - on our bottoms - glide back into the sea. A little further along, Paul knows a 'washing machine': a small rock cliff where we are spinning round in the breakers like socks in a washing machine. Due to the heavy waves the height difference can be two meters! And Paul knows even more attractions. His philosophy: the coastal area is one true-to-nature amusement park. Like spiders we are climbing up the slate rocks - to jump off screaming loud. "This is the essence of coasteering," Paul laughs. "While you are on your way, having as much fun as possible." Result: during a four hours long expedition we have moved only 500 meters. No, coasteering is not a quick way of movement.

Our wetsuits are that thick, the cold hardly has a chance. It is only after a few hours that the ice cold water takes its toll. Particularly my unprotected hands are tingling with cold and the strength in my fingers is disappearing. When I am not even able to tie my shoes, it is enough. We are finishing our coasteering expedition the way we started: with a party

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jump into the dark, ominous water of a hidden bay. After that jump we walk back to Paul's car, wet as can be and high on adrenaline. "Someone fancy going to the pub?" Paul asks. We have been swimming for hours in ice cold sea water and jumped off 15 meter high rock cliffs. I have heard worse reasons to go to a pub.

### **Surf's up...in Wales**

Forget Hawai and California: also Wales is perfect for surfing. Because of the vicious Atlantic Ocean there is a strong swell, sometimes even 4 meters high. All the same particularly Pembrokeshire is a great location to learn this natural sport: we are in a surfing class on a kilometres long sand beach where almost nothing can go wrong. There are hardly any other surfers, no rocks on the bottom and there are no sharks either. After some dry training on the beach, surf instructor Paul takes us into the real breakers. Then soon we learn: surfing is more difficult than it seems. Nevertheless there is one thing that makes all efforts more than worth: the ten seconds after two hours of plodding, that you are standing on your surfboard, pushed along by a rolling white crested wave.

### **Cardiff: 'party capital'**

Cardiff is the capital of Wales, a pleasant city with an ancient castle and ultramodern architecture. It is also a great city to party: the city centre counts hundreds of pubs, clubs and restaurants. They vary from traditional, dark pubs to trendy, light clubs, particularly on Thursday, Friday and Saturday all packed with people. Therefore Cardiff is not just the capital, but certainly also a *party capital*. Affordable also: a *pint* will cost about € 3, a good pub meal € 10. Cheap flights from Amsterdam to Cardiff with Bmibaby ([www.bmibaby.com](http://www.bmibaby.com)): returning flights starting from € 47 including surcharges!

### **Sea Kayaking**

The most popular way to explore the coast waters of Pembrokeshire is by sea kayak. The possibilities are at least as spectacular as for example in New Zealand or Canada, with the most important difference that Wales is only a one hour flight away. Moreover you do not need to have kayaking experience to narrowly paddle by the rock cliffs, play in the breakers or explore the sea caves. With a little luck you will see seals, with more luck you will even see dolphins or killer whales.

### **Hiking paradise: Pembrokeshire Coast Path**

Rather looking for something less extreme than coasteering? Along the entire coast of Pembrokeshire runs the *Coast Path*. Following this path it is wonderful hiking along a coast that is with reason certified as 'National Park'. On one side you will see the lovely countryside of Pembrokeshire. With villages, farms and rolling meadows. On the other side: the rough coast with bays, beaches, mass of rocks and cliffs. The coast path is 300 kilometres long: if you are up for it you are hiking for ten days at least. For more information: [www.pcnpa.org.uk](http://www.pcnpa.org.uk)

### **Activities in Wales**

We did our activities with Preseli Venture, an activity company with their own *Lodge* at a beautiful location in Pembrokeshire. From the Preseli lodge, during an 'adventure weekend' you can do various activities like surfing, sea kayaking, hiking and of course coasteering. Also fun: a typical Welsh and delightful countryside pub is on walking distance. An adventure weekend (3 days) costs € 295 including activities, equipment, overnight stay, guide, meals and transfer from the train station. For more information: [www.preseliventure.com](http://www.preseliventure.com).

Wales Tourist Board: [www.visitwales.nl](http://www.visitwales.nl)  
[www.adventure.visitwales.com](http://www.adventure.visitwales.com)