

ARTICLES

Travel Features
Destination Guides
Unique Lodgings
Food and Wine
Outdoor Adventure
Getting There
Unusual Tours
Alternative Travel
Travel Desk
Women's Travel
Fairs and Festivals
Cruises
Family Travel
Travel Books
Helps Articles
Plane Reader eBooks
Bicycling Trips

Our eBooks



Cuba Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing...

Cuba stories from all over the island.



Germany Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing...

Germany from east to west, stories to get you ready to ...



Scandinavian Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing...

Scandinavia travel stories to help you plan your trip.



Central America Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing

Central America travel articles to help you plan yo...



Italy Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing

Italy travel stories to help you plan your trip and insp...



Naked Travel - eBook
Delabarre Publishing...

Nude beaches and nude recreation--listings of all cl...



Ireland Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing...

Ireland travel stories to help you plan your trip the...

Spain Plane Reader
Delabarre Publishing...

Coasteering in Wales: It Only Sounds Dangerous If You're Listening

By Steven Bochenek

Imagine climbing and leaping from cliffs into the Atlantic surf, then being buffeted helplessly about by whirlpools and tidal currents. Now imagine doing it safely and laughing yourself breathless.

Invented in Wales, coasteering combines extreme sport and environmental consciousness-raising amidst the cliffs of the achingly beautiful Pembrokeshire coast.

Death-defying alone, it's perfectly safe with protective equipment and a local guide who reads the ecologically sensitive coast like a big-print hymnbook.

Map Of Vermont

Get Maps, Directions & Traffic Conditions From Your Browser Free!
www.MapsGalaxy.com

Climb Kilimanjaro

Everything you need to know about planning and booking a Kili climb.
www.africatravelresource.com

New York Broadway Shows

Save More At The Authentic NYC Site All Broadway Shows & Sold Out Dates
www.NYC.com

AdChoices

industrialist with delusions of grandeur. St Brides is just one of dozens of culturally interesting private hotels the **Holiday Property Bond** owns throughout the world.

Only members of this British-based vacationers' club can rent apartments there by the week. They're completely self-contained with everything from cutlery and saltshakers to maps to a TV with DVD.

St Brides castle looks like something a sneering rock star would own. "Look. It's St Brideshead!" I joked when we first crested the hill before it. The kids began humming the Harry Potter theme and my wife recited the French soldier's stream of insults from the Monty Python sketch.

How we got around:

In late June, nearly the height of tourist season, Southwest Pembrokeshire seemed to have just one cab for about 100 square miles. The one time we called for it, we waited two hours, then paid at least four times what the four-mile ride would cost at home (Toronto, Canada) and were accompanied by a screaming toddler whom the cabbie was minding on the side. It was a chilly afternoon and young Grace had been napping till we boarded the taxi. Then she hollered blue murder for the 15-minute ride.

Fortunately, we rented a car.

We found a huge bargain online with **Europcar**. Total cost for two weeks was under US \$550 (including tax) for an economy French putt-putt with a standard transmission but only 6,000 miles on the odometer.

That included a full tank of gas and, since we used a gold card, the insurance was covered. No charge for mileage. If you ever rent a car in the UK, don't ask for an automatic transmission unless you have no choice and lots of money.

Be brave driving Elvis country



After climbing then leaping from cliffs as high 25 feet, you ride tidal currents and whirlpools. 'And you pay for this?' My wife asked. Photo courtesy of TYF Adventures. Click on photo to enlarge

It requires wetsuits, lifejackets, helmets and trainers (which may not return home after their experience in the sea).

Though physical, coasteering's not overwhelming. If you can walk Disneyland or the Louvre for a morning, you can coasteer. (My 11 and 14-year old daughters loved it.)

The experience should be on every thrill-seeker's bucket list, right after driving the Welsh coastal roads. An adventure in itself.

Driving there is just as terrifying.

Where we stayed:

Our day began 20 miles up the road in St Brides Castle, the former country estate of a wealthy Victorian

Looking for **CHEAP AIRFARES**?
Compare Rates on other sites, click here.
from Trip.com



WANNA GO?

VisitWales.com

[TYF Adventures](http://TYFAdventures.com)

[Holiday Property Bond](http://HolidayPropertyBond.com)

[Rent a car in Wales](http://RentacarinWales.com)

[Read more GoNOMAD stories about Wales](http://ReadmoreGoNOMAD.com)



Travel articles and

England Plane Re...
Delabarre Publishin...

England travel articles to help you plan your vacatio...

France Plane Re...
Delabarre Publishin...

The kid on the bike, baguettes, ahh, France.

amazon.com

Get Widget Privacy

GoNOMAD
on Facebook

Follow us on
Twitter

Read our
travel blogs

Get the
GoNOMAD
feed

Hotel
Reviews

Airline
Ticket
Quotes

HELPS

Reflections

Volunteering

Helps-Articles about
Helping People

TRAVEL TOOLS

Car Rentals

Travel Insurance

Travel Deals

Find Hotel Rooms

Airport Parking

Around the World
Airline Tickets

Find it on Amazon

Subscribe to
Our Newsletter

Get our **free monthly** newsletter and help support sustainable and responsible tourism.

Subscribe Now

Napolean standardized traffic in continental Europe, decreeing that all would move on the right. Popular belief holds that the British chose the left to spite the French. Spiteful or not, it makes each drive a mini-adventure. Everything's flipped, from the steering wheel to the gears to the way the windows roll and, of course, the roads.



These signs dot the Pembrokeshire cliff-side trail. No elaboration in English or Welsh was necessary to explain the obvious warning. Stand back. Photo by Steven Bochenek

Furthermore the signs are bilingual, English and Welsh – a consonant-heavy maze Tolkien wouldn't have forced on orcs. The effect is charming, unless you're trying to get somewhere.

Pembrokeshire is gorgeous, featuring hundreds of shades of green countryside and hundreds more shades of pink in the locals' faces.

This is where Elvis Presley's ancestors lived – both are common Welsh names – and they advertise it in the oddest places. One village has an Elvis souvenir shop in the post office.

But, beautiful as Pembrokeshire is, 'road' exaggerates what you're driving on. Most roads are barely wider than a king-size bed except for passing spaces – paved wedges grudgingly extended into the farmers' fields every few hundred yards – where the less aggressive driver halts until the other zips past, maybe acknowledging you with a slight nod.

Driving here produces an emotional first: quaintness with terror.

Imagine dropping a plate of spaghetti on your front steps. Congratulations: You've just engineered the Pembrokeshire road system! Bring a map and PhD in geography. It's hilly, curvy and baffling.

A sudden bend around a bump and you're often face-to-face with another driver on a 14-degree incline. You may need to reverse, curving uphill to find a passing wedge.

Furthermore, roads are often flanked by 20-foot hedgerows. You feel like Luke Skywalker zipping through the surface channels of the Deathstar without the benefit of the Force.

Not that any of that slows the local drivers. If you ever make it as high as 4th gear, you're either suicidal or local.

The coasteering experience began in Britain's smallest city.

Great Britain is composed of three nations: England, Scotland and Wales. Each has its own customs, accents and eccentricities but all three share certain laws and rules.

A side-effect of this national mash-up is some bizarre laws. Take their definition of a city: that's any place with a cathedral, population be damned!

St Davids is an attractive settlement of just 1,600 – a few hilly streets so quaint you'd swear the place just leapt off a toffee tin. But it's a 'city' because of its marvelous medieval cathedral.

Given St Davids' size, it's easy to find the adventure tour-guide companies: they're on the road. For instance ours, **TYF Adventures**, is at 1 High Street, the British equivalent of Main Street.

TYF Adventures is very granola

"TYF are the first Carbon Neutral Adventure Company In the World," says their Customer Services Manager, Ross. "Protecting the environment is at the core of everything we do."

Translation? We would hike the extra mile to the coast from their base, rather than chugging there in some TYF-branded Hummer.

But the upside was our tour guide. While expecting a Welshman called David or Gwyn, I wasn't disappointed



We stayed at this Victorian baronial mansion on the Welsh coast. St Brides Castle (which we nicknamed St Brideshead) is now a privately owned hotel. Only members of the UK's **Holiday Property Bond** can rent its fully equipped apartments. Photo by Steven Bochenek



St Davids ancient cathedral was restored and reopened by Charles, the Prince of Wales, in June 2008. It's magnificent if somewhat creepy. Photo by Steven Bochenek

Follow @gonoma

Share GoNOMAD
with your friends

+ reddit this!

with Dean, a transplanted English surf-dude with a Swedish surname. His knowledge of the local flora and fauna was intimate, almost infinite.



Invented by the Welsh, coasteering combines extreme sport and environmental consciousness-raising amidst the cliffs of the breath-taking Pembrokeshire coast. As these adventurers are demonstrating, the first jump is the hardest. Photo courtesy of TYF Adventures

Our group of six included a researcher from the tourism board in Wales' capital, Cardiff. Dean didn't miss a beat when questioned about the nature of the moss clinging to the cliffs, the animals in the local food chain or the history of a broken down and malodorous water pump whose miraculous healing powers feature in local legend. (None of us drank, though I blessed myself just in case.)

Dean kitted us out in wetsuits and helmets. If you wanted, you were welcome to squeeze into old running shoes left by previous coasteerers. We didn't.

Our party hiked, squidgily, downhill to the coast. Several times, Dean pointed out interesting birds and wildflowers. The sun came out. Pembrokeshire pamphlets love to boast that they're Britain's third sunniest spot. Not a headlining selling point.

Still, in our black, form-fitting wetsuits, it actually became hot, a rare experience in Wales. Minutes later, the Atlantic remedied that.

Ever notice how similar 'dive' and 'die' sound?

"Who wants to go first?" Dean asked. The path along the dramatic bluffs off the Pembrokeshire coast are dotted with simple graphic signs that show a silhouetted hiker plunging head-first amidst crumbling cliffs. No words, English or Welsh, are necessary.

Upon our arrival, we gingerly descended a cliff to a seven-foot jump towards the onrushing surf. I volunteered to go first.

"Geronimoooooh!" Splash!

Later there were much higher jumps, but this first one was for most of us the hardest. The tourism rep had brought his nephew along as a treat but, at this point, it probably seemed more of a punishment. The kid didn't find the pluck to jump until after both my daughters had leaped. He imitated my Canadian accent.

"Gerahnimooooaaah!"

You hit the water and suddenly you're in a blender. We slammed into one another, like peas and carrots in a boiling pot of vegetable soup. The buoyant wetsuits were insulating and further buoyed by life preservers. So there was no chance of being sucked away by undertows.

The current dragged us, floating, into a tight circular inlet. Because of its wave action, this fascinating geographic formation was dubbed the Toilet. Like wind tunnels created between skyscrapers, heavy waves would squeeze into this cliff-bowl and instantly elevate all six of us.

Then when the waves receded, we descend by 15-20 feet within 2.5 seconds.

"Fluuushshsh!" We all sang, plunging, as it were. Then we screamed like schoolgirls when shot upwards again. We milked this heart-stopping toiletry fun for about 10 minutes, then following Dean, swam out to another jumping spot.

"See the seals?"

Dean pointed to a narrow inaccessible beach between sheer cliffs nearby. Two seals were sunning themselves, aware of us but unconcerned from nearly 100 feet away.

We moved away from them, over out-jutting spurs of rock and through a couple of inlets to a gentle whirlpool whose diameter was about 18 feet. Riding it was like being on a carousel, only we were the crazed carnies, cackling meaninglessly.

For two more hours we explored caves and climbed steep jagged rocks to leap into the crashing sea. The highest jump was a vertebra-rattling 25 feet. Our extremities were yellowy and numb by then and we were hoarse.

Remember that wobbly, thankful feeling when you're back on firm land after being at sea? Being in sea, amplifies it. The mile hike back was uphill. That was okay.

A medieval thanksgiving

My wife and her parents met us back in St Davids where, somewhat dizzy, we toured the magnificent cathedral. It lies in a plunging ravine, flanked on two sides by dozens of ancient tombstones.

Just two weeks before Charles, the Prince of Wales, had officially reopened it after a complete restoration.



You climb cliffs and leap off. After an hour your fingers are so cold, you need to be sure they're actually gripping the rock. Coasteering is only scary if you think about it. Photo courtesy of TYF Adventures

Pin it

0

Stumble

Digg it!



Whether you're religious or not, it's an inspiring place to give thanks, after a morning spent leaping from cliffs into the frothing Atlantic. Photo by Steven Bochenek

Outside, it still felt creepy at noon during one of the longest days of the year. I didn't want to contemplate what it would be like midnight on Hallowe'en after a couple drinks.

Inside it was as grand as any European church I've ever seen. I was dumbfounded. Funny how intense physical experiences can awaken our non-physical spiritual side. Not at all religious, I nodded to the splendid stained glass window in the soaring spire mumbled gave thanks for the morning's experience.



Steven Bochenek is a veteran marketing writer who has dabbled in editorial the past couple of years, and recently added travel to his portfolio.

Read more GoNOMAD stories by Steve Bochenek:

[Summitting A Swiss Mountain With Your Kids: Challenging, but Not Difficult](#)

[Summer Solstice on the Orkney Islands](#)



Read more GoNOMAD stories about Wales:

[North Wales: Rock-Climbing in Snowdonia](#)

[Exploring Wales: Beautiful Castles and Golf Courses](#)

Read more [GoNOMAD stories about Wales](#)

Like this on Facebook:

Like Send 10 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

GoNOMAD Travel Checklist:

- Travel Insurance
- Cruises
- RV and Mobile Homes
- Medevac Programs
- Ship Your Luggage
- Travel Medicine
- Reserve Airport Parking
- What to Pack
- Before You Go
- Around the World Tickets
- Cell Phones Abroad
- Find Lowest Airfares
- Find Discount Hotels
- Search for Hostels

- Family Travel
- Destination Guides
- Feature Articles
- Find Cool Lodgings
- Festivals Around the World
- Women's Travel



Server at Claire's Restaurant, Hardwick VT
Click to read about Climbing Trees in Vermont.



Send this page to a friend

About Us

- Contact Us
- GoNOMAD Authors
- Home
- About GoNOMAD
- Awards
- Link to Us
- Press Room
- Writer's Guidelines
- GoNOMAD Staff
- Advertising Opportunities
- PR/Press Opportunities
- Reader Comments
- Privacy Policy
- Useful Travel Links
- Listen to Us: Travel Radio

Travel

- Buy Airline Tickets
- Read More Articles
- Sitemap
- Our Travel eBooks
- Report Broken Links
- GoNOMAD Blogs
- GoNOMAD Contributors
- GoNOMAD Media Kit
- Newsletter Back Issues
- Around the World Airline Tickets
- Hotel Reviews by Trip Advisor

Travel Resources

- Find Budget Hotel Rooms
- Car Rentals
- Family Tours
- Travel Videos
- Travel Special Deals
- Airport Shuttles
- Airport Hotels
- US Canada Airport Parking
- Reservations
- Car Rentals in Europe

@Copyright 2012 GoNOMAD.com - All Rights Reserved.