

# North west Wales itinerary: the castles and town walls of Edward I

From 1276 Edward I, King of England, established a mighty set of castles and towns in north Wales as part of his military campaign to defeat the Welsh princes. Amongst the castles built by Edward I are Caernarfon, Conwy, Beaumaris and Harlech, which collectively hold World Heritage site status.

The castles represent the best castle building skills in Western Europe at the time, which were built over a short timescale and on a hugely ambitious scale. With massive curtain walls and towers and powerful gatehouses, the ring of castles has a powerful presence in the landscape of Snowdonia and symbolises the huge effort by Edward I to dominate north Wales and fight against the Welsh resilience.

Each castle has individual stories to tell...



Caernarfon Castle and Town Walls

After all these years Caernarfon's immense strength remains undimmed. A brute of a fortress, **Caernarfon Castle's** pumped-up appearance is unashamedly muscle-bound and intimidating. King Edward I created what is without a doubt one of the most impressive castles in Wales and beyond, and the castle and town walls provided means to keep some communities in and others out.



Conwy Castle and Town Walls

**Conwy Castle** was built by Master James of St George and is amongst the finest surviving medieval fortifications in Britain. It's hard to believe that it was built at breakneck speed in four short building seasons between 1283 and 1287. Climb the towers and turrets and find out how the Welsh captured the castle in the 15th century from the English rule. To get the full picture, head for the battlements, where there are breathtaking views across mountains and sea.



Harlech Castle

**Harlech Castle's** battlements spring out of a near-vertical cliff-face. Edward's tried and tested 'walls within walls' model was put together in super-fast time between 1283 and 1295 by an army of nearly a thousand skilled craftsman and labourers. 'Men of Harlech', Wales's unofficial anthem loved by rugby fans and regimental bands alike, is said to describe the longest siege in British history (1461 – 1468) which took place here during the War of the Roses.

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**Beaumaris Castle**

**Beaumaris Castle** on Anglesey, is described as the most technically perfect castle in Britain, and the last hurrah of Edward I's massive building project in north Wales. It was the 13th-century hi-tech equivalent of a spaceship landing unceremoniously on Anglesey today. However Edward I's huge building effort ended up proving too costly and Beaumaris Castle was never finished, however the new town continued to thrive.

These spectacular monuments are a gateway for exploring the history of Wales in the heartland of the traditional Welsh princes' stronghold. Interpretation on site helps visitors to explore the fascinating stories, from people to military and religious power, as well as home and spiritual life. Harlech to Caernarfon, Caernarfon to Conwy and Conwy to Beaumaris, each journey is approximately 45 minutes by car or coach.

Six other Cadw sites are also in the network of castles built or influenced by Edward I's regime, his predecessors and subjects in north Wales: **Flint Castle**, **Denbigh Castle** and **Town Walls**, **Rhuddlan**, **Criccieth**, **Dolbadarn** and **Dolwyddelan**.

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The journey time between each site is a maximum of approx. 45 minutes.