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Cardiff homecoming reveals tourism gems

MANSOOR LADHA
Special to the News

It was like homecoming for me when I visited Cardiff, Wales, recently. Yours truly studied journalism in Cardiff in 1970.

And what a homecoming it was. I was amazed to see the growth, prosperity, tremendous tourist potential of south Wales and experience it as a No. 1 tourist destination. Tourists usually go to England, Scotland and Ireland, not realizing that Wales has a lot to offer.

Unfortunately, there are no direct flights to Cardiff from Calgary, so one has to fly into London's Heathrow Airport and take a train from Paddington Station to Cardiff — a comfortable two-hour journey. I stayed at the Maldron Hotel, a Best Western Plus chain, which was walking distance from the rail station and very conveniently located close to restaurants, cafes, pubs, entertainment and shopping areas and the Millennium Stadium, home to the Welsh rugby stadium.

According to National Geographic, Cardiff is the sixth most popular tourist destination in the UK, with more than 18 million people visiting Cardiff each year. The city is not only the country's chief commercial centre, the base for most national cultural and sporting institutions, the Welsh national media, and the seat of the national Assembly for Wales, but also has the distinction of having the uniqueness and distinctiveness of having some of the best characteristics outside London.

Spillers: "The oldest record shop in the world"

I visited Spillers in Cardiff, which claims to be "the oldest record shop in the world." Founded in 1894 by Henry Spiller, it serves musical needs of residents and visitors. According to co-owner Ashli, Spillers has "all sorts of clients," including average music fans, regular customers and tourists. They will also order any record not in stock.

Cardiff Bay

Cardiff bay is Wales' oldest multi-ethnic community, thanks to sailors and workers who settled there. It has been transformed by the Cardiff Barrage to form a massive fresh water lake. A number of boat trips are available from Mermaid Quay, including a water taxi service available throughout the year from the bay to the city centre. Cardiff Bay is home to a number of tourist attractions such as Techniquest Science Discovery Centre, Craft in the Bay, The Welsh Assembly, Butetown History and Arts Centre, Goleulong 2000 Lightship, the Norwegian Church Arts Centre and the Wales Millennium Centre, a stunning international arts centre.

The Norwegian Church Arts Centre

An ideal place to break your journey to rest and have a delicious lunch in its cafe. Started as a church for Norwegian sailors, it is a landmark building located on the waterfront. The centre has become a cultural venue holding workshops, music functions, classes, art and photography exhibitions.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS
MANSOOR LADHA

Above: Millennium Stadium, the second largest stadium in the world. **Right:** Cardiff's famous landmark, Cardiff Castle.

Millennium Stadium

Millennium Stadium is one of the few international sports arenas located right in the city centre. Residents told me that there's nothing like watching international rugby and football games in the Millennium Stadium as the whole city takes on a carnival atmosphere. It is the second largest stadium in the world, with a roof that closes and holding 74,500 fans.

Next to the Millennium Centre is the impressive Welsh Senedd (Parliament) building, with its wave-like roof jutting into the sky and its glass walls providing a clear view inside the building.

Cardiff Indoor Market

This is the place to get the cheapest fried breakfast in the city centre and a great place to buy vegetables, meat, cakes, fabrics, second hand records and books. Established in 1891, it has two shopping levels for shoppers. The stalls provide just about anything you need.

Cardiff Castle

Cardiff Castle should be on the must-see list of every tourist. Built in 50 AD, this imposing building was created by renowned architect William Burges for the third Marquis of Bute, reputedly the richest man in the world at the time. Located within beautiful parklands in the heart of the city, it is one of Wales' leading heritage attractions and a site of international importance.

Doctor Who

Lovers of the long-running BBC series "Doctor Who" will enjoy visiting here and immerse themselves in the world of "Doctor Who." Cardiff is the home of "Doctor Who," the longest running science fiction TV program in the world and the BBC's most popular TV show.

The Wye Valley

My trip took me outside the city to the Wye Valley and Hay-on-Wye. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is famous internationally as a protected landscape area straddling the historic border between Wales and England and regarded as one of the most dramatic and scenic landscape areas in southern Britain.

Big Pit Blaenafon

Here you get a chance to pop down to the pit and take an underground tour 300 feet below with a real miner as your guide. Big Pit, a real coalmine, is one of Britain's leading mining museums, with facilities to educate and entertain all ages. It's one of the favourite places to visit, as we had to wait for an hour before spending an exciting and informative day at the Big Pit.

Hay-on-Wye

The best part of my tour was visiting this small town bordering England and Wales, as it is a paradise for book lovers and writers. Regarded as the secondhand book capital of the world, it has 39 bookstores and is famous for its internationally acclaimed literary festival held May 26 to June 5. I could have spent days devouring books to satisfy my appetite for books.

Brains Beer

While a student, I cultivated a taste for Welsh food and beer. Brains is the national brewer of Wales, based in Cardiff, brewed the first beer in 2012. Their range of draught beers includes traditional cask ales, smooth beers, Welsh stout Brains Black and a range of seasonal ales, which are available for limited periods throughout the year. The also have the Brains Craft Brewery, which produces a varied and exciting range of limited edition beers.

Wales has a strong tradition of living off the land, stretching back as far as the ancient times. Historically, Welsh food is simple and designed to satisfy the hearty appetites of those working the land: farmers, quarry workers, coal miners and fishermen.

World famous topping the list would be Welsh lamb. Cattle farmers produce Welsh beef and the coastline offers the best fish, mussels and oysters.

Welsh cakes are a real Welsh treat. They have been popular since the late 19th Century with the addition of fat, sugar and dried fruit to a longer standing recipe for flatbread baked on a griddle. The cakes are also known as bake stones within Wales because they are traditionally cooked on a bake stone, a cast iron griddle which is placed on the fire or cooker. Sometimes they are referred to as griddle scones.

My favourite Welsh dish is cawl, a traditional Welsh stew with potatoes. Depending on the part of Wales you happen to be in, Cawl will be made in many ways. If you are inland or up in the hills, you will be served lamb or mutton cawl where as on the coast, you will get seafood cawl.

I always had difficulty pronouncing Welsh words, but I made a list of common greetings on a piece of paper and always kept it in my shirt pocket for easy accessibility. Whenever I was at a restaurant or at dinner with someone, I would discreetly take out my list, practice saying the appropriate words and thank the waitress or my companion in Welsh. This impressed everyone.

Following are the Welsh words that I found handy to learn.

Cheers! lechyd da!
Good night - nos da
Thank you - diolch

I hope you enjoyed the above article. Goodbye (hwyl fawr.)

Mansoor Ladha is a Calgary-based journalist, travel writer and author of Portrait in Pluralism: Aga Khan's Shia Ismaili Muslims.

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NEWS OFFICE CLOSED
MONDAY, OCTOBER 12th, 2015

We will not be publishing a paper on Monday October 12, 2015

Our office will be closed and we will not be publishing a paper on Monday October 12th, 2015. Circulation phone lines will be closed Thanksgiving Day and will reopen Tuesday, October, 13th, 2015 @ 6:00 a.m.

The following are revised deadlines for placing your advertisements.

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Publishing Day	Advertising Deadline
Tues. October 13	Thrus. October 8 @ 5pm
Wed. October 14	Fri. October 9 @ 11am
Thurs. October 15	Fri. October 9 @ 5pm
Select TV	
Fri. October 16	Wed. October 7 @ 4pm

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Publishing Day	Advertising Deadline
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