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# The Faith Tourism Action Plan for Wales



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Cover image:  
Llandaff Cathedral

## Introduction

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Wales is rightly proud of its iconic ecclesiastical heritage – from Tintern Abbey to Epstein’s Majestas in Llandaff Cathedral – a constant reminder of Wales’ developing culture over the centuries. Wales’ Places of Worship tell of its diverse and fascinating religious history but they also represent a spirituality found in buildings and in the landscape. What elevates a mound of rubble on Twmbarlwm into a place of spiritual significance? Why are the ancient stones of Strata Florida attractive to those seeking tranquillity?

## What does Faith Tourism mean in Wales?

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Wales offers the opportunity to experience the full range of Christian and other faiths’ beliefs and practices with an increasing understanding of pre-Christian religions. Non-conformity is more visible in Wales than across the border in England within the balance of Christian denominations and the Welsh language has a prominent place within the tapestry of the Christian landscape. It is important to acknowledge the unique or special Welsh identity and ‘Sense of Place’ that the visitor might find when arriving in a Welsh community in terms of its ecclesiastical-built heritage. Tim Hughes sums it up in his book ‘Wales Best 100 Churches’ by identifying that many of the Places of Worship reflect the rural life of Wales from “hendref to hafod” and are often built in strategic locations enabling far-flung farmsteads to come together once a week or once a month – one of the few expressions of a larger sense of community still in evidence today.

Faith groups, primarily within the Christian church, are unique in having a physical presence in almost every community across Wales and are called upon by many people at the most important times in their lives. Their social importance is mirrored in the value of their built heritage and Places of Worship are very often the most architecturally-significant buildings in the landscape or townscape in which they are found. For many communities throughout Wales, it is Places of Worship that gives the hamlets, villages, towns and cities their Sense of Place.

In addition to the heritage significance, Wales has the opportunity to feature its religious sites as places that can contribute to the Health and Wellbeing agenda. Selecting Places of Worship to visit on recognised walks (especially the coastal path) can add value to planned and unplanned walks. Wales as an entity can present itself as a “gallery” of heritage, culture and spirituality all bound up in the sacred buildings and landscapes. All this is very much in the DNA of Wales and has the potential to draw out the authentic culture from the communities surrounding the individual places – offering excellent examples of a real sense of place.

## The Faith Tourism Action Plan for Wales

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The Faith Tourism Action Plan will aim to identify ways in which this significant part of our heritage can be enhanced as an attraction to visitors and locals alike. This action plan will focus on developing the Faith Tourism product as part of the wider visitor experience, although there could be scope to develop the niche religious tourism market where visitors travel for a religious purpose.

This action plan will use a broad interpretation of Faith Tourism under the following definition:

**Faith Tourism in Wales refers to places of faith and sacred sites (including the people and narratives connected to them and the landscape that surrounds them), which inspire and enhance visits to, and within, Wales.**

The Faith Tourism action plan is written for two key stakeholder groups:

- The tourism sector and related agencies who establish and lead tourism strategies: Visit Wales as the lead agency in relation to the visitor economy in Wales, the Regional Tourism Partnerships (RTPs), Local Authority Tourism Departments, Destination Management Partnerships across Wales, National Parks and other protected areas, Wales Tourism Alliance, Ramblers and other amenity groups, Cadw, The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), National Museum Wales and other heritage bodies.
- Faith groups, particularly the leaders of the major faiths and interest groups from within the faiths.

## A vision for Faith Tourism in Wales 2020

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A vision for Faith Tourism in Wales should be bold to exploit the full potential of Wales' Places of Worship and sacred sites for the visitor economy and to exploit the visitor economy for the purpose of sustaining Wales' Places of Worship. It must be prepared to embrace the spiritual aspects identified in and around places of special sacred interest from a variety of faith traditions. This vision can be encapsulated as follows:

**By 2020 Faith Tourism is recognised as an integral component of the visitor experience in Wales, adding significant value to the destination offer, contributing to the well-being of the visitor and host community and enhancing local, regional and national 'Sense of Place'.**

This vision could be achieved by considering the following:

- Identifying why Places of Worship, saints, sacred sites and landscapes play an important part in promoting Wales as a destination.
- Recognising that people visit destinations for a variety of reasons and that Places of Worship can be part of the attraction.
- Making Places of Worship and sites of special significance from a spiritual perspective more visible.
- Fully integrating Places of Worship into the destination provision – linking with accommodation providers, transport, catering outlets and other visitor attractions.
- Identifying opportunities for development (entrepreneurship) for the communities through making the heritage explicit for the community and for the visitor.
- Sharing best practice (e.g. digital technologies and approaches to interpretation) between communities.
- Widening the appreciation of Places of Worship by faith communities, as well as wider communities and visitors.
- Encouraging faith communities to raise their expectations of themselves and visitors by adding a creative and active dimension to visits.

The specific actions for achieving the vision for the Faith Tourism in Wales 2020 are presented under three objectives:

**Objective 1:** Attract more visitors to Wales' Places of Worship and sacred sites;

**Objective 2:** Enhance the quality of the Welsh Faith Tourism product and the experiences of visitors to Wales' Places of Worship;

**Objective 3:** Increase the yield from visitors to Wales' Places of Worship.

### Visits to Places of Worship

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We know that visitors to Wales are increasingly interested in visiting historical attractions and for overseas visitors, visiting historical sites is the most mentioned main reason for visiting Wales. Visit Britain figures show that religious buildings are a huge draw for international visitors to Britain.

Furthermore, Places of Worship are amongst the most visited visitor attractions in Wales. In 2011, St David's Cathedral was the 7th most popular free visitor attraction in Wales.

**Table 1 – Top five Places of Worship in Wales, 2011.**

St David's Cathedral	262,000
Norwegian Church	148,547
Brecon Cathedral and Heritage Centre	120,000
Tintern Abbey	69,631
Llandaff Cathedral	40,372

Source: Visit Wales Attractions Survey (2011).

Although there is very little published research data about why people visit churches, some unpublished research undertaken amongst visitors to churches in England (Keeling 2000) has shed some light on people's motivations for visiting churches. These include:

- Spiritual motivations.
- Impulse visits – the majority of visits, encountered when passing, as part of a day out. For many, visiting a church will be part of another activity relating to the village or the surrounding area. They may be on a walk or cycle ride or visiting other attractions in the area.
- Family connections – relatives may be buried there, or the churches hold special memories of christenings and weddings.
- Connections with famous people.
- Interest in church architecture, often in stained glass or other such features.

The profile of these visitors appears to be predominantly ABC1, empty nesters and early-retired couples (Keeling, 2000).

### **Why a Faith Tourism Action Plan?**

Since the turn of the new millennium, an increasing amount of support has been made available to help Places of Worship open their doors to visitors. Having opened the doors, the next focus must be on finding ways to encourage and improve the product. Part of this process is exploring ways to widen the range of people and organisations involved in making this happen.

It is widely acknowledged that there are various deficits in the Faith Tourism product in Wales: its quality, its presentation, its marketing and the skills of its stakeholders. The result is that there are potential markets which are currently not catered for and opportunities are lost.

Partnership for Growth – The Welsh Government's Tourism Strategy 2013 – 2020 identifies heritage and culture as areas of competitive advantage for Wales and highlights their importance in attracting new visitors to Wales. Both our tangible and intangible heritage tell an informative and entertaining story about Wales that sets us apart from

others, and it will be the experiences that differentiate Wales from other destinations that will resonate most memorably with our visitors. Faith Tourism, as a significant part of Wales' heritage, could feature prominently in the way we promote Wales as a visitor destination, as was recently highlighted in the Welsh Government's Cultural Tourism Action Plan (2012).

If the full story of Wales is to be told for the benefit of the visitor and local people, then it has to include the story of how ancient British religions, Christianity and, more recently, other world faiths have significantly influenced society in Wales. It is at the local level that the stories to be told are identified. Working with, and through the organisations mentioned above, the Faith Tourism product can be interwoven into other aspects of the visitor economy.

Cadw have prepared two interpretation plans that should be read in conjunction with this action plan. Chapels, Churches, Monastic Landscapes and The Legacy of the Celtic Saints provide a framework to interpret the history, architecture and landscapes associated with Wales' Christian beliefs. In addition, Cadw are in the process of preparing guidance for the conservation, care, conversion and adaptation of Places of Worship.

The following table summarises the current strengths and weaknesses of the Faith Tourism product in Wales.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>A long history of religious diversity that differentiates it from its neighbours.</p> <p>Non-conformity and its impact on societal change, such as after <i>The Great Revival</i> at the turn of the twentieth century.</p> <p>Faith leaders accept the notion of sharing Places of Worship with the visitor.</p> <p>A language and landscape closely intermingled, e.g. the word Llan is reflected in place names across Wales and emphasises religious influences across the centuries.</p> <p>'Thin' places where the atmosphere is tangibly spiritual (or peaceful, tranquil, healing, depending on your perspective).</p>	<p>There is no organisation that is adequately funded to drive Faith Tourism in Wales forward.</p> <p>There is a lack of coherence, cohesion and coordination between many of the Faith Tourism projects that have emerged in Wales.</p> <p>Many Places of Worship are still closed, or look as if they are closed, to visitors.</p> <p>There is no branding of Open Places of Worship for visitors to indicate the quality of Wales' Faith Tourism product.</p>

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Pilgrimage routes throughout Wales are being re-developed and have potential for connecting Faith Tourism and the wellbeing agenda. Cadw's Heritage Tourism Project includes a Heritage Churches Trail in Ceredigion and the Basingwerk-Bardsey Pilgrimage Trail. Obvious routes with development potential include the route used by the Cultural Olympiad from Llanthony to St Davids and the Cistercian Way.</p> <p>Musical traditions – what gospel music does for America, choirs (especially male voice choirs) do for Wales.</p> <p>Increasing interest in Holy Wells and related landscapes and the merger of Cymdeithas Ffynhonnau Cymru and Wellsprings Fellowship into Ffynnon to preserve, conserve and interpret Wales' Holy Wells.</p> <p>Growing support from Visit Wales, the RTPs, many unitary and National Park authorities for tourism projects dedicated to, or including, Places of Worship.</p> <p>Faith Tourism academics of international renown.</p> <p>Expertise and resources available for training faith communities to welcome visitors.</p> <p>Places of Worship are free to enter.</p> <p>The Open Church Day ran in September for six years. It was discontinued in 2012 because Open Doors seemed a more inclusive project.</p>	<p>The support from both tourism and faith organisations can be characterised as tactical, short-term intermittent and unstructured.</p> <p>Training materials are currently unaccredited.</p> <p>There is a paucity of quantitative and qualitative research data on Faith Tourism in Wales. Currently VW has raw visitor footfall data for only six Places of Worship. More Places of Worship should monitor their visitor numbers. More data is needed on the quality of the visitor experience.</p> <p>The lack of 'packaged Faith Tourism products'.</p> <p>Lack of support to Places of Worship which wish to make their records more accessible.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Faith Tourism can play a significant role in destination management and marketing. All destinations are served by Places of Worship.</p> <p>Places of Worship can contribute to the growth of the local economy in rural areas. They are very often the only (or one of a few) attractions for visitors and can hold visitors in the area for longer.</p>	<p>Diminishing resources – all Places of Worship rely heavily on volunteers to survive.</p> <p>Effective development of the Faith Tourism product requires a fully-resourced organisation to ensure the work of the volunteers is effectively harnessed.</p>



Opportunities	Threats
<p>Development of Place of Worship-based social enterprises can provide visitor services.</p> <p>International links can be made to places where Celtic saints established cradles of education – the universities – in Wales.</p> <p>A current feasibility study funded by Visit Wales Digital Tourism Business Framework Programme offers Places of Worship the opportunity to be at the forefront of technological developments in the cultural tourism sector.</p> <p>Developing thematic cultural routes through and between destinations in Wales to minimise duplication and encourage the wider spread of economic and community benefit.</p> <p>With an increased emphasis on Sense of Place, Places of Worship are key. They often hold local registers, tell the unfolding stories of communities and particularly in rural locations are the only places that can display a community’s art and heritage collections.</p> <p>People are looking for experiences that enhance their wellbeing. Places of Worship and Holy Wells can play a major part in this.</p> <p>Places of Worship can become more enterprising by finding new, appropriate uses that would generate income and retain some aspects of the building that might enhance mission and ministry.</p> <p>Places of Worship can create a systematic approach and framework within which the opportunities for the future of Wales’ built heritage can be considered in a rational, disciplined and logical manner.</p> <p>There are opportunities to share best practice in relation to product development, marketing, interpretation and visitor management between faith communities.</p>	<p>The accelerating closure of Places of Worship often leaves unsightly disused buildings at the heart of communities to blight urban and rural environments and impact on community self-esteem.</p>

Objective 1: Attract more visitors to Wales' Places of Worship.					
Action	Output	Possible Lead(s)	Priority short, medium, long term	Costs Low (< £5k) Medium (£5-£50K) High (>£50k)	
1.1 Develop a symbol to indicate that a Place of Worship is open to visitors that can also be used as branding on all promotional materials.	A symbol indicating an open Place of Worship – recognisable across Wales.	Church in Wales (CIW) Church Tourism Network Wales (CTNW) Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)	S	M	
1.2 Develop an internet based self help toolkit which combines the best elements of the VAQAS accreditation scheme.	Places of Worship working to improve the visitor experience.	CTNW Visit Wales (VW) Wales Association of Visitor Attractions (WAVA) RTPs	M	M	
1.3 Develop promotional content for the Faith Tourism product and integrate Faith Tourism as a product offer in national and local marketing campaigns.	Increased marketing coverage for the Faith Tourism product.	VW Marketing Area Partnerships RTPs Cadw	S	M	

Objective 1: Attract more visitors to Wales' Places of Worship.					
Action	Output	Possible Lead(s)	Priority	Costs	
1.4	<p>Research the potential of encouraging more overseas visitors to specific Places of Worship across Wales.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Korean Connection at Llanover (pilgrimage site for Korean Christians).</li> <li>Places associated with the Welsh Religious revival of 1904-05 and links with Christianity in the US.</li> </ul>	<p>The places concerned should be open more often and the story properly interpreted.</p> <p>Evangelical Alliance (EA) CTNW Unitary authorities VW RTPs Cadw</p>	L	<p>Low (&lt; £5k) Medium (£5-£50K) High (&gt;£50k)</p> <p>L</p>	
1.5	<p>Further develop the scope of Open Church Day inviting Places of Worship to open their doors on a specific date.</p>	<p>A date settled for 2014/15 with suitable materials for the Places of Worship based upon a theme.</p> <p>CTNW CIW Cadw Civic Trust RTPs</p>	S	M	
1.6	<p>Encourage Tourism Businesses and Destinations to become better acquainted with the Faith Tourism product of their area.</p>	<p>Faith Tourism sections on the Sense of Place toolkit.</p> <p>VW RTPs Local Tourism Groups</p>	M	M	

**Objective 2: Enhance the quality of the Welsh Faith Tourism product and the experience of visitors to Wales' Places of Worship.**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Possible Lead(s)</b>	<b>Priority</b> short, medium, long term	<b>Costs</b> Low (< £5k) Medium (£5-£50K) High (>£50k)
2.1	Undertake visitor surveys (qualitative and quantitative) to increase the understanding of current and future demand for Places of Worship as attractions.	Raw figures of number of visitors. A range of views about the product.	VW RTPs CTNW	M	M
2.2	Benchmark Welsh Faith Tourism against international best practice by creating links with Faith Tourism internationally.	Understanding of best practice from other countries.	All partners	L	L
2.3	Development of a "purple badge" for site guides at Wales' Places of Worship and a suitable welcoming programme based on the Valleys Regional Park ambassador scheme thereby improving the visitor experience when a building is staffed or unstaffed.	More homogeneity in the quality of welcome and guiding in Places of Worship.	Wales Official Tourist Guides Association (WOTGA) Higher Education Institutions (HEI) CTNW	M	M

**Objective 2: Enhance the quality of the Welsh Faith Tourism product and the experience of visitors to Wales' Places of Worship.**

	Action	Output	Possible Lead(s)	Priority short, medium, long term	Costs Low (< £5k) Medium (£5-£50K) High (>£50k)
2.4	Increase the range and quality of events held in Places of Worship e.g. the celebration of local Saint's days and help local faith groups with events management.	A greater range of events held in Places of Worship linked to the destination programme of events.	RTPs Unitary authorities	M	L
2.5	Develop packaged products e.g. trails around Places of Worship and other heritage attractions.	Increase to 20 of the 15 trails available now.	Unitary authorities VW RTPs	M	M
2.6	Enhance support for genealogy by making records more accessible to visitors.	Training materials for local Places of Worship.	CyMAL Local archive services National Library of Wales RCAHMW Local libraries where relevant	M	L
2.7	Develop a multi-faith guided tour in South Cardiff as an exemplar for other appropriate places in Wales.	A fully resourced multi faith trail in Cardiff.	Bay ministers Lightship Cardiff County RTP	S	M

**Objective 2: Enhance the quality of the Welsh Faith Tourism product and the experience of visitors to Wales' Places of Worship.**

	Action	Output	Possible Lead(s)	Priority <b>short,</b> medium, <b>long term</b>	Costs <b>Low (&lt; £5k)</b> <b>Medium (£5-£50K)</b> <b>High (&gt;£50k)</b>
2.8	Develop Faith Tourism education programmes in Higher Education Institutions across Wales.	A module on Faith Tourism in a university.	HEI CIW	<b>M</b>	<b>L</b>
2.9	Develop links to the Lleoli Llenyddiaeth / Locating Literature project to use Places of Worship to make Wales' literary heritage visible and accessible to visitors.	Places of Worship identified as locations for telling the story of Wales' literary giants.	Arts Council Wales People's Collection Wales VW Cadw CTNW CIW	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>
2.10	Encourage the use of digital technologies in the marketing and interpretation of Places of Worship based on the results of a feasibility study into what digital technology can be used within a place of worship to enhance its interpretation and its marketing.	A discrete project developing Digital Interpretation and Marketing of Places of Worship.	VW People's Collection HEI CTNW	<b>M</b>	<b>M</b>

### Objective 3: Increase yield from visitors to Wales' Places of Worship

	Action	Output	Possible Lead(s)	Priority <b>short,</b> medium, <b>long term</b>	Costs <b>Low (&lt; £5k)</b> <b>Medium (£5-£50K)</b> <b>High (&gt;£50k)</b>
3.1	Develop a common approach to encouraging donations, buying mementos and encouraging visits in the surrounding area to buy food and drink and for accommodation.	Preparation of a guidance note.	EA CTNW Cytun	<b>M</b>	<b>M</b>
3.2	Promote innovation through the Encouraging Enterprising Churches scheme which encourages the Places of Worship to maximise the use of their building.	A 15% increase on 2013 in the number of Places of Worship submitting ideas.	CIW CTNW Ecclesiastical Insurance	<b>S</b>	<b>M</b>
3.3	Develop more pilgrimage trails, building on existing walking routes.	The creation of a new Pilgrims Trail to St Davids to complement the existing trail in North Wales to Bardsey Island.	Ramblers RTPs CTNW VW Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	<b>M</b>	<b>M</b>

