



## The Northern Standard

Circulating in Counties Monaghan, Cavan, Armagh, Louth and Fermanagh



# TRAVEL 2016

## BY GEORGE KEEGAN



### AN ALTERNATIVE BELFAST

Most visitors to Belfast will know about or have been to see the city's so called Main Attractions. I am thinking of The City Hall, Titanic Belfast Building, Crumlin Road Gaol etc., etc., There are however a host of other interesting places to see and to explore. The first port of call when you arrive is the gleaming new Belfast Visitor Centre conveniently located in the city centre on Donegall Square North, directly opposite the City Hall. Here you can pick up a copy of their excellent visitor guide (updated regularly) containing all the latest information about the city. Another must have is a free copy of the Translink Metro booklet 'See Belfast by Metro'. This booklet contains listings of attractions, trip planner and map of Metro routes. An all day ticket costs just £3.50. Another card worth considering is a Belfast Visitor pass (available from 1 to 3 days) to include unlimited travel, discounted entrance rates to various places of interest plus discount for city bus tours. As mentioned in a previous column 2016 has been named the 'Year of Food & Drink' throughout Northern Ireland so I am including some eateries and food shops in the list.

### ATTRACTIONS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT

**Belfast Castle** - situated on a commanding position along the slopes of Cave Hill overlooking the city. It was built in 1870. The original building was in the city centre but was destroyed by a fire in the early 1700s. Today the castle is owned by Belfast City Council and has an antique shop and visitor information centre. There is also the Cellar restaurant serving snacks and traditional Sunday lunch.

**SS Nomadic** - A 100 years old tender ship used during the maiden voyage of Titanic by carrying first and second class passengers from the port of Cherbourg to the ship. The Nomadic was also built at Belfast's Harland and Wolff shipyard and is the last of the famous White Star Line. A few years ago it opened to the public in the Titanic Quarter following superb restoration work and now contains an on-board museum complete with interactive equipment telling the fascinating story of the ship's chequered career, which included service in both World Wars. Look for the names of the many famous celebrities she carried during her working life as a tender ship. Although the Nomadic is quite small in size it is easy to spend an hour or so here on a visit. Recommended.

**Parliament Buildings** - while everyone will know about Stormont some readers may not know that it is possible to enter the building and see the Great Hall (public tours twice daily). Anyone who has contacts with an Assembly member can arrange for a private guided tour at certain times. The grounds of the buildings are also worth a visit.

**The Mac (Metropolitan Arts Centre)** at 10 Exchange Street - this very modern building was created in the Cathedral Quarter as an arts centre. There are 2 theatres, 3 galleries, a dance studio and workshop rooms. A great spot for a coffee, or lunch.

**Culturlann**, 216 Falls Road in the Gaeltacht Quarter - another Arts Centre this time celebrating the Irish language and culture. Used for a range of concerts, exhibitions and poetry readings. There is also a book shop stocking a large range of Irish language titles.

**The Big Fish** at Donegall Quay - one of the most photographed attractions in the city. The 10m 'Big Fish' was commissioned in 1999 to celebrate both the re-generation of the River Lagan and the importance of this particular site historically where Belfast got its name. Note the cladding of ceramic tiles all decorated with images and words relating to the city's history.

**Cyprus Avenue** - the street which will be forever associated with Belfast singer Van Morrison. A song written by the artist and included in his album released in the late sixties named 'Astral Weeks'. Van returned here in 2015 for a special televised concert mainly attended by local people living on the avenue.

**NOTE:** HMS Caroline is a brand new attraction scheduled to open to the public on 1st June 2016, part of the centenary commemorations of the Battle of Jutland. This World War 1 light battle cruiser has been completely restored and visitors will experience on three decks special effects and interactive exhibits about her history. There will be visits as well to view Captain Crooke's cabin, the Royal Marine mess and seamen's Wash, plus the gallery kitchen and the engine room.

### YEAR OF FOOD AND DRINK

**Sawyers Deli, Fountain Centre, College Street** - mentioned before in the column this amazing specialty food emporium was established in 1897. It stocks over 200 cheeses, fresh fish and a large selection of take-away foods.

**Arcadia**, on the Lisburn Road - a specialist deli importing exotic foods. Also has large selection of cheeses, local artisan produce and a fish counter.

**Mourne Seafood Bar, Bank Street** - very popular award winning restaurant serving great seafood. Shellfish is sourced from their own shellfish beds and there is fresh fish daily from the local ports of Anmalong & Kilkee.

**Co Couture** in Chichester Street - a small intimate basement shop selling home-made chocolates, brownies, really delicious hot chocolate and other treats. A must visit for all chocolate addicts.

### CLASSIC PUBS

**The John Hewitt**, 51 Donegall Street - an old world styled pub which opened in 1999 and is owned by The Belfast Unemployment Resource Centre. Great place to check out some real ales, ciders on tap and enjoy live traditional Irish music. Very popular venue.

**Kelly's Cellars** - situated on Bank Street next door to the famous eatery the Mourne Seafood Bar. Claims to be the oldest Traditional Irish pub in Belfast. It was built in 1720.

### ACCOMMODATION

**The Europa Hotel** in Great Victoria Street is one of my favourite Belfast hotels. There are over 270 newly re-furnished bedrooms all to the highest standards. These include 92 executive bedrooms and suites. This hotel is continually busy with a great atmosphere especially in the Piano Bar situated on the second floor.

**The Causarie** restaurant on the ground floor serves excellent breakfasts, lunches, afternoon teas and evening meals. A special pre-theatre menu is also available for early evening. Situation is another great plus when choosing to stay in the Europa. It is the centre of town next door to the Grand Opera House. Across the street is the well known Crown Bar and main shopping areas are just a short walk. The Europa is part of the Hastings Group.



The 'Big Fish' in Belfast. Pic by G. Keegan

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### USEFUL CONTACTS

[www.belfast.com](http://www.belfast.com)   [www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk)   [www.visit-belfast.com](http://www.visit-belfast.com)   [www.belfast-harbour.co.uk](http://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk)  
[www.nomadicbelfast.com](http://www.nomadicbelfast.com)   [www.hastingshotels.com](http://www.hastingshotels.com)   [www.mourneseafood.com](http://www.mourneseafood.com)

### TOUR OPERATORS

**Special Camino Tour For Women:** As part of the celebrations for International Women's Day walking and cycling specialists [CaminoWays.com](http://CaminoWays.com) have launched their first ever women only Camino guided tour. The departure date is set for 17th September 2016 and the unique tour sets off from Galicia's Rias Baixas region famous for fresh seafood and the Albarino white wine. The walk takes in the final 100km of the Portuguese Coastal Way offering great views of the Atlantic Ocean, sandy beaches and interesting towns which include the historic Pontevedra and Baiona. Along the way the group will travel through forest walks, peaceful hamlets and picturesque villages meeting fellow Camino pilgrims on route to the fascinating city of Santiago de Compostela with its superb Cathedral. On arrival the team, led by their experienced local guide, can request their Compostela certificate awarded to pilgrims walking at least 100km to the city. The price for 7 nights is €740pps. Included is accommodation on half board basis, English speaking guide, airport transfers and luggage transfers from hotel to hotel. All participants will also receive a special holiday pack with information on the route. Note: tour does not include flights or travel insurance. For booking click on [www.caminoways.com](http://www.caminoways.com) or e-mail [info@caminoways.com](mailto:info@caminoways.com).

**Topflight Sale Ends Today:** If you got your Northern Standard early there is still time to book a sun holiday with Topflight. Their 5 day Sun Holiday sale ends today Thursday. They are offering a range of exciting destinations during the May/June 2016 period including The Algarve, Lake Garda, Sorrento and Sicily with savings of over €300pp on selected packages. Click on [www.topflight.ie](http://www.topflight.ie)

**Early Summer In Menorca:** Menorca is a lovely island and the Northern Coast in particular is the perfect place for an early summer family break. Sunway are offering holiday packages there from just €449pps at the 3\* Beach Club Apartments on self catering basis for 7 nights. They also have the Playa Parc Apartments from €459. Prices include flights, airport transfers, 7 nights' accom, checked in baggage and resort representative. Full details on [www.sunway.ie](http://www.sunway.ie)

**Holidays In Florida:** North American specialists American Holidays have some great savings and family deals to Florida. Whether you are seeking fun filled family holidays, romantic getaway breaks or a trip with friends the Sunshine state is a great holiday destination and this company has a choice of locations there in May or July. These include Orlando (May & July) or Orlando and St. Petes (in May) Flights are exDublin. Visit [www.americanholidays.com](http://www.americanholidays.com) or call into their office in Duke Street, Dublin.



Sign on the Camino.  
Pic by G. Keegan

### TRAVEL BITES

**Knockranny Hotel Spring Offers:** The really excellent family owned 4\* Knockranny House Hotel & Spa overlooking Westport town has some great offers for Golden Year guests this springtime. Packages can be booked for 3x B&B plus 3 dinners or 5 B&B and 4 dinners. Check [www.knockrannyhousehotel.ie](http://www.knockrannyhousehotel.ie)

### AIRSIDE UPDATES

**€15ml Invested In Dublin's Terminal 1:** A total of €15 million has been invested in modernising the Departures Floor and Security Screening area at TI in Dublin. A significant part of this investment relates to 15 new automatic tray return system machines, five of which have been installed with the remainder expected to be in place by the end of May. These machines are 6m longer than previous ones and the extra length includes a parallel loading area at the start of each lane, giving extra preparation space to allow four people to load trays comfortably at the same time.

Airport MD Vincent Harrison points out that since the terminal opened for airport operations 44 years ago almost 400 million passengers have used it, "the building has endured much wear and tear over that time and we are renovating it on a phased basis starting with Departures and the Security screening area .... we understand the security screening can be a stressful element of the departing journey and we are constantly looking at ways to improve that area in particular". Among other improvements are the removal of airline ticket desks from window areas allowing more natural light to flow and a new façade on the walls has brought a fresh look to the Terminal.

**DAA International Secures Major Contract:** DAA International a subsidiary of DAA (formerly Dublin Airport Authority) has secured a multi million euro contract in Saudi Arabia to manage and operate the T5 passenger terminal at King Khaled International airport. It was chosen to operate 106,500 sq metre building ahead of 5 other International airport operators. The contract is for an initial period of five years. Chief Executive of DAA International Colm Moran commented, "this is DAA International's first airport management contract and our intention is to build on this win by adding further significant contracts in the months and years ahead".

### CRUISE & FERRY NEWS

**A 'Friend Friendly' Offer From Irish Ferries:** If planning to take a short Spring break to Britain Irish Ferries are currently offering a '3 for the price of 1' deal meaning motorists who book by 22nd March can bring two friends with them free of charge. The offer is valid on all cruise ferry sailings from Dublin to Holyhead & Rosslare to Pembroke until 30th June 2016. Meanwhile motorists travelling on the French routes from Rosslare to Cherbourg & Roscoff can also avail of the 'friend friendly' offer bringing a friend for free up to 24th April and between 3rd September 2016 by booking before 22nd March. Visit [www.irishferries.com](http://www.irishferries.com)