



The Northern Standard

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



TRAVEL 2016

BY GEORGE KEEGAN



TITANIC BELFAST CONTINUES TO DRAW THE CROWDS

Titanic Belfast is fast becoming one of the most iconic buildings in the city. Standing six floors high and situated close to where the ship was built in 1912, the commemorative building cost £77m to construct and features 9 interpretive and interactive galleries exploring the sights, sounds, smells and stories of the ill-fated liner, as well as the city and people which made her. There are also regular temporary exhibitions, a banquetting suite, education / community facilities, catering and retail space plus a basement car park.

On the 15th August Titanic Belfast, which opened four years ago, welcomed the 3 millionth visitor through its doors. Kathy Jefferson from Telford in England travelled to Northern Ireland with her family for the first time and booked tickets on line. She was greeted by Belfast's Lord Mayor Alderman Brian Kingston and the Chief Executive of the Centre Tim Husbards MBE. A celebratory cake was cut in her honour. Speaking at the event Tim Husbards said "although the Titanic lies in 13,000ft of water the enduring story still captures minds and hearts throughout the world, Titanic Belfast is living proof of this. In the four years we are delighted to have welcomed three million visitors from over 145 countries, who have discovered the story of Belfast, the home of Titanic". Alderman Brian Kingston added "Titanic certainly put Belfast on the map and in the minds of the world and the Titanic Experience and the Titanic Quarter generally has proved an outstanding success in attracting visitors to our shores". Among the many VIP guests who have visited during the past 4 years are Queen Elizabeth, Hillary Clinton (former Secretary of State USA), Enda Kenny (Taoiseach), and Dr. Robert Ballard (who discovered the Titanic wreck). Celebrities Adele and Michael Buble are also on the list.

Other attractions in the Titanic Quarter include:

SS.Nomadic - known as Titanic's little sister. Built in Belfast at the same time and used to ferry passengers from Cherbourg in France to the ship ahead of the ill-fated Atlantic voyage.

HMS Caroline - the brand new attraction, a World War 1 floating exhibition with state of the art special effects.

Titanic & Thompson Dry Docks, plus the Pump House Visitor Centre. Visitors to the area can also avail of Discovery Walking Tours and Boat trips. Check out www.titanicbelfast.com www.visitbelfast.com www.discovernorthernireland.com

TOUR OPERATOR SPECIAL OFFERS

Topflight End of Summer Sale
Fancy a trip to beautiful Madeira or Sicily, perhaps a special holiday in fabulous Sorrento, a stay on the Venetian Riviera or a relaxing beach holiday break on Lanzarote then check out the Topflight 'End of Season Clearance Sale' now on. The fully Irish owned award winning operator is widely regarded as the Italian Specialists and just now has some outstanding value for anyone thinking of taking a last minute summer break.

Highlights include;

Sorrento - stay on a half board basis at the 4* Hotel Majestic Palace priced now at just €789pps. (Departure 28th August).

Lido di Jesolo, Venetian Riviera - half board also applies in the 3* Hotel Trevi situated just a few steps from the beach and 10 minutes from Aqualandia water park. Now €599pps, (departure on 3rd September).

Lake Garda the largest of the Italian lakes, surrounded by lovely towns and villages to explore. There are offers during September at two separate locations - Torbole, staying in the 3* Hotel Eden on B&B basis now €499pps, (Departs 3rd Sept), or the 4* Hotel Sogno del Benaco in Limone, (half Board), now €699pps (departs 24th Sept).

Prices for all End of Summer deals include return flights, 7 night's accommodation, return resort transfers, generous luggage allowance, taxes, and Topflight representative service. Full details on www.topflight.ie.



Majestic Palace overlooking Bay of Naples. Pic courtesy Topflight



Poolside at Hotel Trevi. Pic courtesy Topflight

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Experience Washington DC

American Holidays have some excellent packages available for anyone wishing to visit Washington DC, the centre of political power, history and activity in America. The city contains some of the most iconic buildings in the US among them the White House and the Pentagon. Packages include a 4 night stay at the Capitol Skyline Hotel from €989pp (based on 2 adults sharing) including return direct flights exDublin with United airlines, accommodation, taxes & charges. Travel Sept 2016 (other dates and durations available). In April 2017 a 3 night stay at the Hyatt Place Hotel costs from €899pps, including flights accommodation, taxes & charges. Other dates & durations are available. Full details from American Holidays on tel 01 673 3804 or www.americanholidays.com.

Camino Ways Autumn Walking Escapes

With a milder climate and less crowded tracks September and October are ideal for taking one of the Camino pilgrim walks and [Camino Ways.com](http://CaminoWays.com) are suggesting 3 separate routes. The first is the Camino Portugues which they say is quickly increasing in popularity and the final section between Tui and Santiago de Compostela can be achieved in one week. The company has a Superior Collection option on this particular route staying in historic Paradores and the more casual 'Casas Rurales'. During September is a good time to catch the last of the local festivals.

The second suggestion is the Via Francigena, an epic route starting in Canterbury and ending in Rome covering some 2000km. The section through Tuscany is one of the most beautiful passing through medieval towns and taking tracks through rolling hills and lush vineyards.

The third suggestion from CaminoWays.com is Rota Vicentina Fisherman's Trail a coastal route along the Atlantic shores of Southern Portugal with panoramic views, majestic cliffs and quaint villages. Cabo de Sao Vicente (Cape St.Vincent) on this route is a privileged spot to do some bird watching. For details and prices of all their walks go to www.caminoways.com or e-mail info@caminoways.com. Note flights, transport or travel insurance are not included in prices.

New Caribbean Operator

Good to report a new tour operator has entered the market. Caribbean Blue is the all new Irish based operator offering the Caribbean exclusively, specialising in exceptional stand out tailor- made holidays, weddings and experiences. The team consists of Sue Power and Peter Conway and they guarantee an exceptional selection of experiences backed up by deep product knowledge. Sue Power who has spent more than 11 years selling and travelling in the region says "we have featured over 150 properties on our informative website. Selections were made based on location, quality of service and a certain X-factor that makes them truly stand out properties". The company are currently offering Cuba, Dominican Republic and St.Lucia. Caribbean Blue is licensed and bonded in Ireland. For full details, click on www.caribbeanblue.ie.

TRAVEL BITES

Signs for The Ancient East The first phase of the Ireland Ancient East orientation signage is under way according to Fáilte Ireland. Signs have been installed at the Drumbody Famine Ship Experience in New Ross, Ferns Castle also in Wexford and at Wicklow Gaol. In total 80 strategic sites are due to have signage in place by the end of 2016. Meanwhile in the West two projects have been designated for award funding of over €1.1m through the 2016 Capital Grant Scheme. They are the Connemara Greenway and the first phase of the OPW's 'The Great Blasket Island's' project.

Top Visitor Attractions The top visitor attractions for 2015 were announced recently with the Guinness Storehouse again the top choice in the fee paying category with 1.5 million visitors – an increase of 18% on the previous year. In second place was the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience followed by Dublin Zoo. The top 'free to enter' attraction was the National Gallery of Ireland with an increase of 21% followed by the National Botanic Gardens. Third spot went to the Irish Museum of Modern Art with an impressive 58% increase in numbers. Commenting, the Minister for Tourism & Sport Patrick O'Donovan said, "the wealth of the variety of our visitor attractions whether free or fee paying plays a significant part in adding to the positive experiences enjoyed by tourists when in Ireland. The government has committed significant investment over the last few years to develop both new and existing attractions and these figures highlight how much such investment can return dividends".

Bristol To Host Cycle Race Bristol is one of the UK's most exciting cities and is easily reached from Ireland by air or taking a ferry. It is an excellent location for a city break. All year round numerous festivals and events are held, probably the most well known internationally being the Balloon Fiesta in mid August. The city is currently gearing up for the Tour of Britain cycle race which will take place there on Saturday 10th September. Some of the World's best racers will speed along a route taking in the famous Clifton Suspension Bridge, Ashton Court Estate (home to the Balloon Fiesta), along Bristol Harbourside before finishing at The Downs. On the same week-end Bristol Doors Open Day takes place with free entry to over 80 buildings offering the public exclusive access to many secret lesser known architectural treasures. Venues for 2016 include Bottleyard Film & TV studios, Bristol Hippodrome, BBC Bristol and the Clifton Suspension Bridge vaults. Go to www.visitbristol.co.uk.

TOURISM NORTH

Exploris Aquarium Re-Opens The Exploris Aquarium at Portaferry in Co.Down recently re-opened following a £2million investment, creating over 20 jobs. The re-development and re-modelling has created a first class visitor attraction allowing people to explore the fascinating world of Strangford Lough plus learn more about tropical oceans and exotic rain forests. The Exploris visitor journey begins in Strangford Lough with some of Northern Ireland's native fish before moving to the colourful coral reefs of the tropical oceans and then to the dark depths of the Amazon rain forest. A separate conservation area with nursery seal pens is also available for viewing where seal pups are rehabilitated before being released back to the wild. There is a brand new café and restaurant overlooking the sea pools plus a gift shop to purchase a fun souvenir. Tourism Northern Ireland's Officer (ROI) explained why everyone should experience Exploris – "it is fantastic to see this popular tourist attraction re-open after two years. The aquarium maintains its strong focus on Strangford Lough and includes many new features such as tropical fish, a shark tank and reptile area along with colourful animation within the display tanks and outdoor pool area It is a fantastic location for a family short break to get away from it all". For full details about the aquarium, click on www.discovernorthernireland.com.

AIRSIDE NEWS

One Million Passengers Use US Pre-Clearance Facility Earlier this month the US Pre-Clearance facility at T2 in Dublin reached a significant milestone when the one millionth passenger used the Automatic Passport Control (APC) kiosk before boarding an Aer Lingus flight to New York. The kiosks were introduced in 2014 to improve efficiency in processing times and the overall passenger experience through US Pre-Clearance. This year to date over half of all passengers travelling through the airport have used the technology. Dublin currently has four airlines flying to 11 destinations in the US with an average of 20 flights each day using the facility in T2. A record 2.4 million passengers travelled to and from North America last year.