



# Belfast

In Northern Ireland all roads really do lead to Belfast, a city reborn from the loins of peace and prosperity. Here we visit the city to give you the lowdown on what to see and do

**Once renowned for its sectarian unrest, Belfast is putting the turbulence of its political history behind it and embracing a dynamic of regeneration and innovation.**

**Tensions between communities still exist, but visitors are largely unaffected, and Belfast is buoyant with investment and energy. Now is a great time to witness Belfast's transformation, and explore the new bars, restaurants and attractions springing up.**

**From the gritty Gaeltach Quarter to the witty University Quarter, major regeneration projects are bringing change on a scale which amazes the locals and which will enthrall visitors.**

## GETTING THERE

Belfast has two airports – George Best Belfast City Airport ([www.belfastcityairport.com](http://www.belfastcityairport.com)) and Belfast International ([www.belfastairport.com](http://www.belfastairport.com)).

There are direct flights to Belfast from Aberdeen, Birmingham, Blackpool, Bristol, Cardiff, Doncaster, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Gloucester, Inverness, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool, all London airports, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, Nottingham and Southampton.

The following airlines operate routes:

[www.aerlingus.com](http://www.aerlingus.com)    [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com)  
[www.bmibaby.com](http://www.bmibaby.com)    [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)  
[www.flybe.com](http://www.flybe.com)    [www.jet2.com](http://www.jet2.com)  
[www.manx2.com](http://www.manx2.com)    [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)

From George Best Belfast City Airport, an Airlink bus operates every 20 minutes from the airport terminal to the Belfast Europa Bus

Centre in the heart of the city. The service, Flexibus route No. 600, operates between 6am and 9.50pm, takes about 15 minutes, and costs £2.20 for a return journey.

From Belfast International Airport, the Airport Express 300 bus is a 24-hour service between the airport and Belfast Europa Bus Centre with buses departing every 10 minutes throughout the day. The journey time is approximately 30-40 minutes and the cost £9 return.

Car ferries also operate to Belfast from Liverpool ([www.norfolkline.com](http://www.norfolkline.com)) and Stranraer ([www.stenline.co.uk](http://www.stenline.co.uk)).

## GETTING AROUND

If you fancy a day trip out of Belfast, most places in Northern Ireland can be reached by public transport within a couple of hours. For bus and train timetable information and advice on the best connections see [www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk) or call 02890 666630.

There are taxi ranks in most towns, but unlike other parts of the UK, you can't hail a black taxi. Many taxis will not leave a rank until they are full of people all heading the same direction – a good way to meet locals! Otherwise, hiring a local minicab may be more convenient. We recommend Value Cabs (Tel 02890 809080, [www.valuecabs.co.uk](http://www.valuecabs.co.uk)).

## THINGS TO SEE AND DO

### OUT OF THE CITY CENTRE

#### Stormont

Tel 02890 521333

[www.niassembly.gov.uk](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk)  
Those with an interest in Northern Irish politics may like to visit Stormont, the site of the Northern Ireland Assembly. For security

reasons, the neo-classical building itself is not open to the public, but the grounds are. Take bus 20A or 23 from Donegall Square in the city centre for about 30 minutes to get there.

#### Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Tel 02890 428428

[www.uftm.org.uk](http://www.uftm.org.uk)

Set in more than 170 acres of countryside, the outdoor Folk Museum tells the story of life in early 20th-century Ulster. The Transport Museum displays a comprehensive transport collection, from horse-drawn carts to mighty steam locomotives, as well as the history of ship and aircraft building. The nearest rail station to the Museum is Cultra Halt – take the train there from the Europa Bus/Rail Station. Buses stop outside the Museum entrance (Ulsterbus No 502 from the Europa Bus Station). **£5.50**

#### Dublin

If you fancy a day trip to Dublin, the Enterprise train service from Belfast's Central Station operates eight journeys on most days to and from Dublin's Connolly station. The journey time is just over two hours and costs £36 return ([www.translink.co.uk](http://www.translink.co.uk)).



Only the grounds of Stormont are open to the public

**For the full magazine report on Belfast,  
see p40 of the May 2008 issue of Which? Holiday**

## EVENING ENTERTAINMENT

Some of our favourite venues are:

### Odyssey Arena

Tel 02890 739074

[www.odysseyarena.com](http://www.odysseyarena.com)

The Odyssey Arena is Belfast's showcase entertainments venue, built in the redeveloped Laganside area, otherwise known as the 'Titanic Quarter'. As well as being the home of the Belfast Giants ice skating team, events in 2008 include concerts by Cliff Richard, the musical *Mama Mia!* and acrobatics show Cirque du Soleil.

### Empire

Tel 02890 249276

[www.thebelfastempire.com](http://www.thebelfastempire.com)

Host to tribute bands such as The Rollin Clones, 'real' artists such as Nanci Griffiths and Belle and Sebastian, and with a regular stand-up comedy gig on Tuesday nights, this entertainments venue, housed in a former church in the University Quarter, is a long standing favourite on Belfast's night scene.

### The John Hewitt

Tel 02890 233768

[www.thejohnhewitt.com](http://www.thejohnhewitt.com)

There's live music every night at the John Hewitt, much of it traditional Irish, but with the occasional night of jazz or Cajun thrown in for good measure.

### Grand Opera House

Tel 02890 241919

[www.goh.co.uk](http://www.goh.co.uk)

Northern Ireland's premier theatre venue was built in 1895, but its ornate facade is mostly restoration work as it was badly damaged in bombs during the Troubles. Many top class productions can be seen here.

## PLACES TO EAT AND DRINK

If you're visiting Belfast at the weekend, make sure your accommodation includes breakfast on Sunday morning, as you won't find many eateries open before midday.

### am:pm

Tel 02890 240009

[www.amppmbelfast.com](http://www.amppmbelfast.com)

Describing itself as a multi-appeal venue for students, couples or friends, this casual café-bar serves wraps and sandwiches for lunch (£5.95) and more substantial dishes in the evening, accompanied by live music. There are two branches – one in the university area and one in the city centre.

### Apartment

Tel 02890 509777

[www.apartmentbelfast.com](http://www.apartmentbelfast.com)

This stylish venue has great views from its picture windows over the wedding cake

splendour of the City Hall. If you're shopping in the city centre it's a great place for lunch, with bar food such as pork and cranberry sausages on onion mash available for £7.75. After dark, a trendy young crowd comes here to pose with their cocktails.

### James Street South

Tel 02890 434310

[www.jamesstreetsouth.co.uk](http://www.jamesstreetsouth.co.uk)

Northern Irish regional finalist for 'Readers' Restaurant of the Year' category in the 2007 Which? awards, this city centre venue is a popular local haunt, so booking is essential. Dishes such as roast monkfish with crayfish and spiced crab foam cost in the region of £15-£18, though a two course pre-theatre menu is available Mon-Thurs for £15.50.

## TOUR COMPANIES

### Belfast Safaris

Tel 02890 310610

[www.belfastsafaris.com](http://www.belfastsafaris.com)

Special interest tours include tours of the Belfast of author CS Lewis, footballer George Best or singer Van Morrison and a 'Meet the People' tour. Historical interest tours include 'Aristocracy and Rebellion' and '1700s and the United Irishmen', there's a 'Maritime Trail', 'Natural Belfast' and a 'Shankill Tour'. Prices vary according to the tour and group numbers.

### Historic pub tours

Tel 02892 683665

[www.belfastpubtours.com](http://www.belfastpubtours.com)

Two-hour walking tours visiting six pubs in the city centre, run by Belfast Licensed Vintners' Association. £6

### Black taxi tours

Tel 02890 642264/315777

[www.belfasttours.com](http://www.belfasttours.com), [www.wbta.net](http://www.wbta.net)

Local taxi drivers take you all around the city centre, and give you some good stories and 'craic' along the way. Tours last 90 minutes. Two-passenger tour £25.

### Titanic boat tour

Tel 02890 330844

[www.laganboatcompany.com](http://www.laganboatcompany.com)

A 75-minute boat trip to the Harland and Wolff shipyard shows you where the *Titanic* was designed, built and launched. £8

### Literary walking tour

Tel 02890 321707

[www.linenhall.com](http://www.linenhall.com)

An irreverent romp through the many sites in Belfast associated with artistic figures from 'famous Seamus' (Heaney) to Jonathan Swift. Guided by a local BBC producer who simply loves both Belfast and literature, the tour price includes a pint of Guinness. £5



There's live music every night at the John Hewitt – traditional Irish and some jazz and Cajun

### Open top bus tour

Tel 02890 626888

[www.city-sightseeing.com](http://www.city-sightseeing.com)

A neat and diplomatic summary of Belfast's history, including its politics, but also the importance of the linen, rope-making, tobacco and shipbuilding industries. £10

### Political tours of West Belfast

Tel 02890 200770

[www.coiste.ie](http://www.coiste.ie)

Run by Republican ex-prisoners trained as tour guides, these tours could never be described as politically neutral, but the first-hand accounts of the history of the Troubles are fascinating. £12

## ESSENTIAL INFORMATION


**When to go** It's best to go from May to October, as many tours only run in the spring and summer months. You may also wish to avoid the marching season around 12 July, as tensions can rise.


### Currency Sterling


**TIP** When returning to Great Britain, change any Northern Bank or Bank of Ireland notes at the airport into Bank of England ones.


Although Northern Irish notes are sterling and so still legal tender, many shops on the mainland refuse to take them.

## GUIDEBOOKS


 **Belfast and the North of Ireland**, Footprint £6.99 (ISBN 9-781904777397)

 **Divorcing Jack** by Colin Bateman, £6.99 (ISBN 978-1559703598)

 **Eureka Street** by Robert McLiam Wilson, £7.99 (ISBN 978-0749396725)


 **The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne** by Brian Moore, £7.99 (ISBN 978-0007255610)

### For teenagers

 **The Twelfth Day of July**, £5.99 (ISBN 978-0140372366) and

**Across the Barricades**, £5.99 (ISBN 9780140371796) both by Joan Lingard

### Historical

 **The Green Flag: A History of Irish Nationalism** by Robert Kee, £12.99 (ISBN 978-0140291650)