



Belfast Product Update

Marketing

Belfast Visitors to bask in Luxury

A campaign designed to make the city appeal to the most discerning visitors is being launched by the **Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau** and **Belfast City Council**, supported by the **International Fund for Ireland** and the **Northern Ireland Tourist Board**. Outlining options available to those who want to experience the best of Belfast, Susie McCullough, Director of Marketing at the Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau says; "We have an exciting range of luxury hotels and tourism products in Belfast, with outstanding five star properties offering wonderful and indulgent treats. The new packages that we have put together will ensure a unique and luxurious experience, not only for the most discerning but also for those who just want to indulge themselves,"

The **luxurybelfast.com** website features a range of top end shopping and dining experiences, and a section described as 'perfect diversions' with everything from helicopter rides to golfing and sailing excursions. It also includes 'inspirational itineraries' for romantic getaways, ways to mix business and pleasure with days out for the girls and itineraries just for the boys. For further information on Luxury Belfast visit luxurybelfast.com



Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Jim Rodgers and Allison Ofor of Diageo joined Celebrity chef Paul Rankin and model Jude Nabney at Roscoff Brasserie to launch 'Luxury Belfast', a new programme that will showcase Belfast to the most discerning visitors looking for a high end break.

Victoria Square opens in Belfast

Belfast is now home to the new £400 million **Victoria Square** which opened 6 March. This state of the art shopping complex cements Belfast's place as a major European city as it is one of the largest inner city retail developments in Europe, spanning a massive 800,000 sq ft and brings many big names in British and International retailing to the city.



**Victoria Square Image: Credit to BBC
New Guide to assist in drive to increase conference business**

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau is publishing a new edition of the Belfast and Northern Ireland Conference, Meetings and Incentives Guide, designed to assist those planning to host major events here. The guide, which is used extensively by association and meeting planners, corporate agents and event management companies, is just one of a number of tools provided by BVCB in the drive to increase conference and business tourism.

Lisa McMurray, Director of Communications joins Allison Ofor, Head of Corporate Relations, DIAGEO NI to launch the latest Conference Guide

Sister Cities International Conference win for Belfast and Northern Ireland

The City of Belfast will play host to delegates from all over the world at the Sister Cities international conference to be staged in July and August 2009. A group that includes Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau and Belfast City Council along with local ambassadors and other partners has secured the high profile event against stiff competition from destinations such as Calgary, Casablanca, Morocco and Mexico. This is the first time that Sister Cities, which promotes partnership through town twinning between cities in the United States and other countries, has held its international conference outside the U.S.A. and the event, which is expected to make a contribution of around £2.5 million to the local economy is set to attract up to 1,000 delegates.

Mark Mohan from Armagh and Down Tourism Partnership (left), Lord Mayor of Belfast Councillor Jim Rodgers, Aubrey Irwin of Tourism Ireland (centre), Alan Chambers Chair of the Sister Cities organising committee, and BVCB's Lisa McMurray (right), met representatives from Sister Cities International during an audience with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister at the signing of a contract in Stormont that will bring a major international conference to Belfast and Northern Ireland in 2009.

Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau welcomes first Aer Lingus flight from Heathrow

BVCB in partnership with [Aer Lingus](#) and [Tourism Ireland](#) organised a familiarisation trip for 16 leisure tour operators and travel agents and 34 business incentive representatives who flew into Belfast International Airport on the inaugural Aer Lingus flight from London Heathrow.



Claire Bradshaw and Martha Robb(BVCB) join the group at [Belfast International Airport](#)

Lonely Planet guide praises cosmopolitan Belfast

The [Lonely Planet](#) travel guide has commended Belfast as an up and coming cosmopolitan city. The latest edition of the Lonely Planet welcomed Belfast's "influx" skyline and embraced the city's new culture "from bombs and bullet pariah to hip hotels and hedonism party town". West Belfast is described as "one of the most compelling places to visit in Northern Ireland". And [Belfast Zoo](#) is also commended as "one of the most appealing zoos in Britain and Ireland."

City hostel celebrates record year

The [International Youth Hostel](#) located just off Shaftesbury Square has announced record breaking figures for last year. Attracting visitors from all over the world, the hostel had almost 40,000 visitors and increased their bed nights by 11% on 2006. The largest market was from the United States which saw 5,202 visitors stay at the hostel, 13.1 % of the total number. Other big sections came from England Wales, the Republic

of Ireland, Canada and Australia.. The hostel also works with cross community groups and is involved in coordinating international language schools and volunteers where young people can work at the hostel to help develop language skills.

iSpyNI offers a virtual prelude to real-world experiences

I Spy Northern Ireland is a uniquely contented travel and tourism portal for Belfast and Northern Ireland businesses, showcasing the best that Northern Ireland has to offer in stunning, high-resolution virtual tours.

iSpyNI.com provides the most immersive and engaging experience of Northern Ireland on the internet, bringing the real world to desktops across the globe and maximising the visibility and effectiveness of businesses online. It also allows businesses to reach a highly valuable audience of consumers and increase customer conversion through the effective use of digital content and rich media.

BVCB Members can avail of an exclusive offer providing **25% discount** on first year feature cost of high resolution virtual tours for your business and location and up to six months free advertising on Google, the internet's biggest search engine. [Click here](#) to download a pdf flyer and for more information.

Awards

Hastings Win Four Major Awards in London

The Hastings group swept the board at the inaugural HotelClub Awards in the best hotels in Northern Ireland category - with the Culloden Estate and Spa, the Slieve Donard Resort and Spa and the Europa Hotel all picking up awards. The biggest coup of the night was won by the five star [Culloden](#), which won Best Business Hotel in the UK.

Award win for Coca Cola and Belfast Waterfront

Coca-Cola Bottlers (Ulster) Ltd and [Belfast Waterfront](#) have won the `Arts, Business & Community` award at the Allianz Arts & Business Northern Ireland

Awards 2008. This Award recognises and celebrates the partnership between Coca-Cola and Belfast Waterfront in developing the Waterfront's Urban Arts Academy, one of Belfast's most innovative and ground breaking creative arts programmes. Other winners included Ulster Journals Ltd and [Ulster Museum](#) who won the Arts, Business & Sustainability award for effective and advantageous development of a longstanding partnership between a business and an arts organisation.

Clandeboyne Lodge Hotel First Ever Winner of Quality Award

[The Clandeboyne Lodge Hotel](#) won two prestigious awards at a gala ceremony in Belfast's [Ramada Hotel](#) in January. The establishment, based 15 minutes from Belfast in North Down, is the first hotel in Ireland to receive the highly regarded Northern Ireland Quality Award, whilst proprietor and General Manager, Pim Dalm, was selected by the judges to win the individual award for Corporate Leadership. The ceremony was organised by Centre for Competiveness (CforC) in association with Invest Northern Ireland.

Flame burns brightly after awards win

[Flame, the Gasworks Museum of Ireland](#) has once again put Carrickfergus on the map when it was recognised by the The Industrial Heritage Association of Ireland IHAI in Dublin at a ceremony to award it the "Best Site/Museum Award in Ireland". The awards now in their third year, were established to honour and reward initiatives by organisations and individuals working across the island of Ireland, to preserve and promote our rich industrial heritage.

Awards win for airline Manx2

[Manx2](#) has been named as the "Isle of Man Bank Small Sized Organisation of the Year", at a recent awards ceremony organised by Isle of Man newspapers. The airline currently offers flights to Belfast from Blackpool and the Isle of Man and is based at both [Belfast International Airport](#) and [George Best Belfast City Airport](#).

Michael Deane cooks up 12th Michelin star

Michael Deane has been awarded an illustrious Michelin Star - for the 12th consecutive year. The Belfast restaurateur scooped the accolade for his [Deane's Restaurant](#).

14 of Northern Ireland's restaurants make Bridgestone's Top 100

The latest Bridgestone Guide names 14 of Northern Ireland's restaurants in its top 100. [James Street South](#) is listed as one of the top 10 Places for Business Entertaining, [Cayenne](#) is one of the Top 10 Places to Dress Up For and [Ginger](#) is lauded as one of the Top 10 Great Value Restaurants. Other restaurants in the Top 100 include [Alden's](#) (Upper Newtownards Road), [Deane's Deli](#) (Bedford Street) [Shu](#) (Lisburn Road) (Linenhall Street), [Nick's Warehouse](#) (Hill Street).

Bridgestone 100 Best Places to stay 2008

The latest edition of the Bridgestone guide has named seven accommodation providers in Northern Ireland in its 100 Best Places to Stay 2008 including [Marlagh Lodge](#) (Ballymena) [Malmaison](#) (Belfast) and [Anna's House](#) (Comber).

Tourism Awards to mark 30th Anniversary

The Northern Ireland Tourism Awards will mark their 30th anniversary with a number of new categories and an anticipated record entry list. The awards organised by the [Northern Ireland Tourist Board](#) in association with [bmi](#) will take place in the [Culloden Hotel](#) on May 28 will include 11 categories including best hotel, marketing initiative and visitor attraction. New categories will include awards for Tourism Innovation and Tourist Information Centre.

Access

Stena Line upgrades Plus service with £2m lounge

[Stena Line](#) is investing £2 million in refurbishing its HSS fast ferry, expanding its popular Stena Plus service with a 160 seater at the front of the vessel. Passengers

choosing a premium ticket or paying an additional £14 for access to the Stena Plus lounge will enjoy comfortable seating, snacks refreshments, newspapers and a separate family area incorporating Playstation 3 consoles and PSPs, a new treatment zone, two barista coffee houses children's play area. A "Teen Town" section and Metropolitan Bar will also be added.

Airport set for record 6 million passengers

Belfast International Airport is heading towards a record throughput of six million passengers this year, according to airport chiefs. John Doran, Chief Executive at BIA said that with Aer Lingus expecting to handle 500,000 people on its nine routes from Aldergrove, and growth by other carriers, total passenger numbers were set to increase from 5.25 million last year to six million in 2008. Passenger numbers are also on the increase at **George Best Belfast City Airport**, which handled 2.2 million passengers last year.

It's 'Take Off' as Aer Lingus launches four new routes

Aer Lingus have launched four new routes to Malaga, Faro, Rome and Budapest from Belfast International Airport. Flights have begun to Rome and Malaga operating four times a week, with flights to Faro and Budapest, operating three times weekly. This expansion brings to eight the number of routes introduced by the airline since December 10, 2007 when Aer Lingus began flying from its new base at Belfast International Airport to Amsterdam, Barcelona, Geneva and London Heathrow. On 30 March, a new daily service will commence to Paris and on April 1, flights to Nice will take off marking the complete network to ten destinations.

Attractions

Record animals and visitors for the Zoo

The annual stock take of animals at **Belfast Zoo** show a record number of endangered species, attracting a record 293,500 visitors in 2007. During the annual stock take by keepers, the number of endangered animals on Cave Hill has also increased.

The Zoo now cares for 138 species and takes part in 94 international breeding programmes designed to save endangered animals from extinction. Over the past year the Zoo had 150 births, transferred 70 animals to global breeding programmes, and won three awards for best visitor attraction.

The Zoo received its third award in just six months when it was named 'Visitor Attraction of the Year' at the Go Belfast GONGs, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board Awards in May and the Northern Ireland Travel and Tourism Awards.

Plans for development continue with a New Visitors Centre. The entrance pavilion will include a new souvenir shop, visitors centre, pay-booths and payment systems, and a covered walkway for shelter in wet weather.

Extension granted for Belfast's Big Wheel

An application to keep [Belfast's Big Wheel](#) in place until the end of the year has been backed by Belfast City Council. Demand for the attraction has been so high that its operators asked to extend its current planning permission from the end of March until December.

Belfast Giants enjoy recent successes

The [Coors Belfast Giants](#) have set a record with the longest winning streak in league and franchise history this season. Two big wins over league leaders Coventry Blaze set the pace during a winning streak that saw them win decisively over the Blaze, two big wins over their biggest rivals the Nottingham Panthers and complete domination in back to back games against the Cardiff Devils. Player/Coach Ed Courtenay currently leads the league in total points with superstar scoring machine Peter Campbell leading the team with 30 goals in as many games.

Development

Belfast City Council give £1.25m boost to Lyric's funding as the curtain falls on old theatre

Belfast City Council has agreed to a grant of £1.25 million to the **Lyric Theatre** meaning that the theatre has to date raised for its new £17 million landmark theatre which will have state-of-the-art facilities and is scheduled to open in early 2010. Funders include the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure, Arts Council of Northern Ireland and Belfast City Council, as well as private donors, trusts and foundations, and the corporate sector. It is hoped that the final £1million will be raised before construction begins on the new theatre in summer 2008. Full details of how you can help raise funds can be found on supportthelyric.com

New Premises for The Wicker Man

After 12 successful years in Donegall Arcade in Belfast city centre , The Wicker Man - a well established craft and gift retailer has moved to larger and more prominent premises in High Street. Specialising in Irish and Celtic products, The Wicker Man has long been a favourite destination for local shoppers as well as many of the tourists visiting Belfast and the shop now boasts a dedicated gallery space. Additionally, the close proximity of Belfast's main Post Office was a factor in the choice of location due to the high volume of sales through thewickerman.co.uk

Crescent Arts Centre to relocate for building renovation

The **Crescent Arts Centre** will close at the end of March for a £6.8 million renovation. However, classes will continue at temporary premises on Ormeau Road. It has been in existence since 1980 but the building dates back to 1874 when it was used by Belfast girls' school Victoria College.

New £5 million centre for health

Queen's University has been awarded £5 million to develop research into major public health issues in Northern Ireland such as obesity, diet and smoking. The new centre is expected to uncover significant improvements in the health and

well being of the UK's population. The Queen's based centre is one of only five in the UK is part of a £20 million investment under the umbrella of the UK Clinical Research Collaboration (UKCRC).

New State of the Art Exhibition Centre at the Europa Hotel

The Europa Hotel has announced plans for a dynamic new conference and exhibition centre which is set to open in March. It will be equipped with the latest state-of-the-art technology and will offer clients some of the largest conference and exhibition space in Northern Ireland. The new exhibition centre will add to the already extensive conference facilities of the city centre hotel, which boasts a grand ballroom, a rooftop banqueting facility with panoramic views over the city, and a 9 syndicate room Eurobusiness centre. The opening of the new centre complements the refurbishment of the existing Brasserie Restaurant on the ground floor, into a new open plan restaurant called 'The Causerie'

Events

| Event | Venue | Date | For more information on these and other events |
|---|------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Give my Head Peace - Back From The Grave | Grand Opera House | 24-29 Feb | Grand Opera House |
| St Patrick-an evening of celebration | Waterfront Hall | 15 March | Waterfront Hall |
| Mamma Mia | Odyssey Arena | 10-29 March | Odyssey Arena |
| The Great Eggscape III – Jurassegg Park | W5 | 15- 30 March | W5 |
| Ulster Youth Jazz Orchestra Concert | Crescent Arts Centre | 28 March | Crescent Arts Centre |
| A Poet's Pictures - An Evening with T.P. Flanagan | Linenhall Library | 13 March | Linenhall Library |
| Blue Evening Will Pollard | Old Museum Arts Centre | 12 March-19 April | Old Museum Arts Centre |
| Parent and Toddler Coffee Morning | Belfast Zoo | 20 March | Belfast Zoo |
| Monthly Céili | Cultúrlann | 30 March | Culturlann |
| Residency | Belfast Exposed | 21 March to 25 April | Belfast Exposed |
| Passion 2008 | King's Hall | 16 March | King's Hall |
| Layla Curtis | Ormeau Baths Gallery | 14 March -3 May | Ormeau Baths Gallery |

Miscellaneous

BVCB News & Information

BVCB New Staff Appointments

Angela McGahan - Executive Secretary

Carolyn Hunter - Administrative Assistant

Eimear Lewis - Events/Marketing Assistant

Josephine McGurk - Communications Executive

Advertise in WhatAbout

WhatAbout is a full colour high quality publication with an annual circulation of over 410,000 copies and is the only guide sent out through the Belfast Welcome Centre. [Find out more about WhatAbout Advertising Rates here](#) or contact [Eimear Lewis](#)

Tickets currently on sale at Belfast Welcome Centre

Titanic Made in Belfast Festival - 22-29 Mar, free bus & walking tours & tours of Thompson Dry Dock & Pumphouse (£3.50)

Ulster Orchestra range of events Black Box presents 'kila'13th Mar £12

Black Box Hill St - March Bachannal Festival 19th-22nd Mar £4-£10

Moving On Music Festival Black Box 27th to 30th Mar

Black Box presents Edi Reader 01 Apr

Lyric Theatre & Rough Magic Theatre Company (Dublin) present The Parker Project, the late Belfast playwright Stewart Parker's 1st play 'Spokesong' & his last 'Pentecost' in the old Northern Bank building Waring Street 22nd Apr to 17th may

The Undertones Live in Belfast @ Mandela Hall QUB SU 25th apr £20

Emmerdale Extravaganza @ UFTM sat 7th June all day event £4/£7/£13/£19

Coiste political walking tours £8 (daily must be booked in advance)

Minicoach/Allens/Paddywagon causeway tours £17/£15/£25

Belfast city sightseeing £12 Belfast city centre historical walking tours £6

Wed,Fri,Sat,Sun Magners 'Spring into Fashion' 15/16Apr in St George's Market £10

Thinking of having a St Patrick's Day Party? Let us help you celebrate in style! For a special 10% discount just quote bcc2, valid 1st Feb - 17th March.

As spring approaches, why not capitalise on the increasing numbers of visitors to the Belfast Welcome Centre and promote your business to over 330,000 people per annum through our poster sites? A few sites are still available in prime locations by our entrances. Prices start at just £150 + VAT. For information on any of the extensive promotional opportunities in the Belfast Welcome Centre, please contact [Lisa Prior](#) or please do not hesitate to call in to experience the full range of services and facilities offered by our team of multi-lingual, friendly staff.

Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau, 47 Donegall Place, Belfast. BT1 5AD. 028 9023 9026.