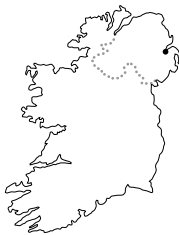


Belfast



The countdown to 2012 has begun. No, not the London Olympics; 2012 is also the 100th anniversary of the maiden voyage of the RMS *Titanic*, the iconic ocean liner that was built by Belfast's Harland and Wolff shipyards. And it is that year that Belfast has chosen to showcase the city's heritage to the world.

It may seem strange for a city to identify with a ship that is famous for sinking on its maiden voyage, but Belfast built what was the most advanced piece of technology in the world at that time and takes pride in the innovation, skill and engineering genius that went into making the *Titanic*. And as the locals constantly remind you, 'She was fine when she left here'.

Once lumped with Beirut, Baghdad and Bosnia as one the four 'B's for travellers to avoid, Belfast has pulled off a remarkable transformation from bombs-and-bullets pariah to hip-hotels-and-hedonism party town. The city's skyline is in a constant state of flux as redevelopment continues apace. The old shipyards are giving way to the luxury waterfront apartments of the Titanic Quarter, and Victoria Sq, Europe's biggest urban regeneration project, has added a massive city-centre shopping mall to a list of tourist attractions that includes Victorian architecture, a glittering waterfront lined with modern art, foot-stomping music in packed-out pubs and the UK's second-biggest arts festival.

So as 2012 approaches it seems somehow fitting that Belfast should celebrate the *Titanic's* creation, building new pride and optimism out of the wreckage of past disaster. Get here early and enjoy it before the rest of the world arrives.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Ah Go On, Take A Drink** Supping a Guinness or three in Belfast's beautiful Victorian pubs (p600)
- **The Writing on the Walls** The powerful political murals in West Belfast (p589)
- **Titanic Town** Learning about the shipyards that gave birth to the *Titanic* on a boat trip around Belfast's docklands (p593)
- **Head for the Hills** A panoramic view over the city from the top of Cave Hill (p588)
- **Back to the Future** The iconic DeLorean DMC at the Ulster Transport Museum (p609)



■ TELEPHONE AREA CODE: 028 FROM BRITAIN AND REST OF WORLD, 048 FROM REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

■ POPULATION: 277,000

HISTORY

Belfast is a relatively young city, with few reminders of its pre-19th-century history. The city takes its name from the River Farset (from the Gaelic *feirste*, meaning sandbank, or sandy ford) which flows into the River Lagan at Donegall Quay (it is now channelled through a culvert). The old Gaelic name, Beál Feirste, means 'Mouth of the Farset'.

In 1177 the Norman lord John de Courcy built a castle here, and a small settlement grew up around it. Both were destroyed 20 years later, and the town did not begin to develop in earnest until 1611 when Baron Arthur Chichester built a castle and promoted the growth of the settlement.

The early-17th-century Plantation of Ulster brought in the first waves of Scottish and English settlers, followed in the late 17th century by an influx of Huguenots (French Protestants) fleeing persecution in France, who laid the foundations of a thriving linen industry. More Scottish and English settlers arrived, and other industries such as rope-making, tobacco, engineering and shipbuilding developed.

With its textile mills and shipyards, Belfast was the one city in Ireland that felt the full force of the Industrial Revolution. Sturdy rows of brick terrace houses were built for the factory and shipyard workers, and a town of around 20,000 people in 1800 grew steadily into a city of 400,000 by the start of WWI, by which time Belfast had nearly overtaken Dublin in size.

The partition of Ireland in 1920 gave Belfast a new role as the capital of Northern Ireland. It also marked the end of the city's industrial growth, although decline didn't really set in until after WWII. With the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969, the city saw more than its fair share of violence and bloodshed, and shocking news images of terrorist bombings, sectarian murders and security forces' brutality made Belfast a household name around the world.

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which laid the groundwork for power-sharing among the various political factions in a devolved Northern Ireland Assembly, raised hopes for the future and since then Belfast has seen a huge influx of investment, especially from the EU. Massive swathes of the city centre have been (or are being) redeveloped, unemployment is low, house prices continue to rise faster than in any other UK city, and tourism has taken off.

A historic milestone was passed on 8 May 2007 when the Reverend Ian Paisley (fire-brand Protestant preacher, and leader of the Democratic Unionist Party) and Martin McGuinness (Sinn Féin MP and former IRA commander) were sworn in at Stormont as first minister and deputy first minister of a new power-sharing government.

There are still plenty of reminders of the Troubles – notably the 'peace lines' that still divide communities – and the passions that have torn Northern Ireland apart over the decades still run deep. But despite occasional

BELFAST IN...

One Day

Start your day with breakfast in one of the many cafés on Botanic Ave – **Maggie May's** (p599) will do nicely – then stroll north into the city centre and take a free guided tour of **City Hall** (p582). Take a black-taxi tour of the **West Belfast murals** (p589), then ask the taxi driver to drop you off at the **John Hewitt Bar & Restaurant** (p599) for lunch. Catch a 2pm **Titanic Tour** (p593) boat trip around the harbour, then walk across the **Lagan Weir** (p585) to visit the **Odyssey Complex** (p586). Round off the day with dinner at **Deane's Restaurant** (p598) or **Roscoff** (p598).

Two Days

On your second day take a look at **Queen's University** (p586), wander around the Early Ireland exhibit in the **Ulster Museum** (p587) and stroll through the **Botanic Gardens** (p587), then walk south along the river for lunch at **Cutters River Grill** (p600). In the afternoon either continue walking south along the **Lagan Towpath** (p587) to Shaw's Bridge and catch a bus back to town, or go for a hike up **Cave Hill** (p588). Spend the evening crawling traditional pubs such as the **Crown Liquor Saloon** (p601), **Kelly's Cellars** (p601) and the **Duke of York** (p601).

1 INFORMATION

- 1 Internet Library..... (see 63)
- 2 Belfast Welcome Centre..... 2 D4
- 3 Bookshops..... 40 C3
- 4 City Hospital..... 5 B6
- 5 Eason..... 6 D3
- 6 Flöte Ireland..... 7 C3
- 7 Globe Dye/laundry & Laundrette..... 8 C6
- 8 Main Post Office..... 9 D3
- 9 Mater Hospital..... 10 C1
- 10 Mike's Laundrette..... 11 D8
- 11 Robinson & Cleaver Building..... 48 C7
- 12 Royal Courts of Justice..... 50 E4
- 13 Post Office..... (see 146)
- 14 Scottish Provident Building..... 51 D4
- 15 Shankill Rd People's Taxis..... 52 C2
- 16 Revelations..... (see 84)
- 17 STA Travel..... 53 E2
- 18 Thomas Cook..... 54 D3
- 19 TSO Bookshop..... 55 F2
- 20 USIT..... 17 D4
- 21 Ulster Museum..... 56 D2
- 22 Waterstones..... 18 D4
- 23 Whistle Laundrette..... 19 C4
- 24..... 57 E4
- 25..... 58 C8
- 26..... 59 C8
- 27..... 60 D7
- 28..... 61 F2

2 SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- 1 Albert Memorial Clocktower..... 22 E3
- 2 Bank of Ireland Building..... 23 D3
- 3 Belfast City Sightseeing..... 24 D3
- 4 Big Fish Sculpture..... 25 E3
- 5 City Hall Gardens..... 26 C6
- 6 City Hall..... 27 C6
- 7 Clarendon Dock..... 28 E2
- 8 Clifton House..... 29 D1
- 9 Commercial Building..... 30 D3
- 10 Crown Liquor Saloon..... (see 103)
- 11 Custom House..... 31 E3
- 12 Falls Rd People's Taxis..... 32 C3
- 13 Former Methodist Church..... 33 D4
- 14 Grand Opera House..... (see 120)
- 15 Harbour Commissioner's Office..... 34 E2
- 16 Lagan Boat Tours - River Lagan Tour..... 35 E3
- 17 Lagan Boat Tours - Titanic Tour..... 36 E3
- 18 Life Centre..... 37 C3
- 19 Lord Kelvin Statue..... 38 D4
- 20 Northern Bank Building..... 40 C1
- 21 Northern Bank Head Office..... 42 E3
- 22 Odyssey Complex..... 43 F2
- 23 Ormeau Baths Gallery..... 44 D5
- 24 Pearl Assurance Building..... 45 C7
- 25 Queen's University..... 46 D4
- 26 Robinson & Cleaver Building..... 48 C7
- 27 Royal Courts of Justice..... 50 E4
- 28 Scottish Provident Building..... 51 D4
- 29 Shankill Rd People's Taxis..... 52 C2
- 30 Sinclair Seaman's Church..... 53 E2
- 31 St Anne's Cathedral..... 54 D3
- 32 St Anne's Market..... 55 F2
- 33 St George's Market..... 56 D2
- 34 Tropical Ravine..... 57 E4
- 35 Ulster Museum..... 58 C8
- 36 Whistle Laundrette..... 59 C8
- 37..... 60 D7
- 38..... 61 F2

3 SLEEPING

- 1 Ark..... 62 C7
- 2 Arks Backpackers..... 63 B7
- 3 Belfast International Youth Hostel..... 64 C6
- 4 Berlitz..... 65 C6
- 5 Best Western Wellington Park Hotel..... 66 B8
- 6 Camden Guesthouse..... 67 B8
- 7 Clifton House..... 29 D1
- 8 Commercial Building..... 30 D3
- 9 Crown Liquor Saloon..... (see 103)
- 10 Custom House..... 31 E3
- 11 Falls Rd People's Taxis..... 32 C3
- 12 Malson Hotel..... 70 D7
- 13 Malone Lodge Hotel..... 72 D8
- 14 Merchant Hotel..... 73 D3
- 15 Grand Opera House..... (see 120)
- 16 Paddy's Palace Belfast..... 74 B7
- 17 Tara Lodge..... 75 D6
- 18 Ten Square..... 76 D4
- 19 To Royal Victoria Hospital (11km)..... 77 D4
- 20 Cullinstown McAAdam O'Fench (2.1km)..... 78 D4
- 21 Forest International (2.4km)..... 79 D4

4 TOURS

- 1 To AG, A22, Coney Hill (4.8km)..... 10
- 2 To Belfast Cable (4km)..... Belfast 2.00 (5.5km)..... 10
- 3 To AG, A22, Coney Hill (4.8km)..... 10
- 4 To Belfast Cable (4km)..... Belfast 2.00 (5.5km)..... 10
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- 72 To Belfast Cable (4km)..... Belfast 2.00 (5.5km)..... 10
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- 98 To Belfast Cable (4km)..... Belfast 2.00 (5.5km)..... 10
- 99 To AG, A22, Coney Hill (4.8km)..... 10
- 100 To Belfast Cable (4km)..... Belfast 2.00 (5.5km)..... 10

5 EATING

- 1 Allot..... 77 D3
- 2 Ann's Pantry..... 78 D4
- 3 Archana..... 79 C5
- 4 Beatrice Kennedy's..... 80 C7
- 5 Cafe Conor..... 81 C8
- 6 Cafe India..... 82 B8
- 7 Cafe Paul Rankin..... 83 D3
- 8 Cayenne..... 84 C6
- 9 Charlie's Gourmet Sandwich Bar..... 85 C4
- 10 Deane's at Queen's..... 86 C7
- 11 Deane's Restaurant..... 87 C4
- 12 Flour..... (see 85)
- 13 Great Room..... 88 C5
- 14 Hill Street Brasserie..... (see 73)
- 15 Jimmie's Bar & Restaurant..... (see 89)
- 16 M-High's Bar & Restaurant..... (see 90)
- 17 McHugh's Bar & Restaurant..... 91 E3
- 18 Molly's Yard..... 92 C7
- 19 Morning Star..... (see 112)
- 20 Mourne Seafood Bar..... 93 D3
- 21 Other Place..... 94 C7
- 22 Oxford Exchange..... 95 E4
- 23 Roscoff..... 97 C7
- 24 Serai..... 98 A8
- 25 Speranza 2..... 99 C6
- 26 Water Margin..... 100 D6
- 27 Brittle's Bar..... 101 E3
- 28 Crown Liquor Saloon..... 102 B8
- 29 Duke of York..... 103 C4
- 30 Eglantine..... 104 D3
- 31 Eglantine..... 105 C8
- 32 Garrick Bar..... 106 D4

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- 1 Globe..... 107 C7
- 2 Irene & Nan's..... 108 C4
- 3 John Hewitt Bar & Restaurant..... 109 D3
- 4 Kelly's Cellars..... 110 D3
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- 6 Molly's Yard..... (see 92)
- 7 Morning Star..... 112 D3
- 8 Northern Whig..... (see 30)
- 9 Cayenne..... 84 C6
- 10 Charlie's Gourmet Sandwich Bar..... 85 C4
- 11 Deane's at Queen's..... 86 C7
- 12 Deane's Restaurant..... 87 C4
- 13 Flour..... (see 85)
- 14 Great Room..... 88 C5
- 15 Hill Street Brasserie..... (see 73)
- 16 Jimmie's Bar & Restaurant..... (see 89)
- 17 M-High's Bar & Restaurant..... (see 90)
- 18 McHugh's Bar & Restaurant..... 91 E3
- 19 Molly's Yard..... 92 C7
- 20 Morning Star..... (see 112)
- 21 Mourne Seafood Bar..... 93 D3
- 22 Other Place..... 94 C7
- 23 Oxford Exchange..... 95 E4
- 24 Roscoff..... 97 C7
- 25 Serai..... 98 A8
- 26 Speranza 2..... 99 C6
- 27 Water Margin..... 100 D6

7 DRINKING

- 1 Brittle's Bar..... 101 E3
- 2 Crown Liquor Saloon..... 102 B8
- 3 Duke of York..... 103 C4
- 4 Eglantine..... 104 D3
- 5 Eglantine..... 105 C8
- 6 Garrick Bar..... 106 D4

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- 1 Limelight..... 125 D5
- 2 Milk..... 126 E2
- 3 Movie House..... 127 D5
- 4 Mynt..... 128 E3
- 5 Old Museum Arts Centre..... 130 E2
- 6 Old Student Union..... 131 C2
- 7 QUB Student Union..... 132 C7
- 8 Queen's Film Theatre..... 133 C7
- 9 Sir William Whitall..... 134 C7
- 10 Sonic Arts Research Centre..... 135 C8
- 11 Spring and Airbrake..... 136 D5
- 12 Stiff Kitchen..... 137 D5
- 13 Storm Cinemas..... 138 F2
- 14 Ulster Hall..... 139 D5
- 15 Union Street..... 140 D2
- 16 Waterfront Hall..... 141 E4
- 17 Archive's Antique Centre..... 142 D6
- 18 Black & Lizars..... (see 51)
- 19 Castle Court Centre..... 143 C3
- 20 Fresh Garbage..... 144 D3
- 21 Phoenix Records..... (see 51)
- 22 Phonex Records..... 145 D4
- 23 Steensons..... 146 D4
- 24 Surf Mountain..... 147 C4
- 25 Teo..... 148 D3
- 26 Victoria Square..... 149 E4
- 27 Wicker Man..... 150 D3
- 28 Ais..... 151 C5
- 29 Budget..... 152 C5
- 30 Buses to Lishum..... 152 (52)
- 31 Euro Bus Centre..... 153 C4
- 32 Lagapade Bus Centre..... 154 E4
- 33 McCompye Cycles..... 155 E7
- 34 Metro Kiosk..... (see 51)
- 35 NIR Travel Shop..... (see 153)
- 36 Steam Packet Company Ferry Terminal..... 156 E2

setbacks there is an atmosphere of determined optimism that will hopefully propel Belfast towards a peaceful future.

ORIENTATION

Belfast sits at the head of Belfast Lough, straddling the lower reaches of the River Lagan and hemmed in to the west by the steep slopes of Black Mountain and Cave Hill. The city centre lies on the west bank of the Lagan, with the imposing City Hall in Donegall Sq as a convenient central landmark. The principal shopping district is north of the square along Donegall Pl and Royal Ave. North again, the once run-down area around Donegall St and St Anne's Cathedral forms the bohemian Cathedral Quarter.

South of Donegall Sq, the so-called Golden Mile stretches for 1km along Great Victoria St, Shaftesbury Sq and Botanic Ave to Queen's University and the leafy suburbs of South Belfast. This area has dozens of restaurants and bars and most of the city's budget and midrange accommodation. Northwest of Donegall Sq, Divis St leads across the Westlink Motorway to the Falls Rd and West Belfast. East of the river rise the huge yellow cranes of the Harland & Wolff shipyards in East Belfast.

The Europa BusCentre and Great Victoria St train station are behind the Europa Hotel on Great Victoria St, 300m southwest of City Hall (access through Great Northern Mall); the Laganside BusCentre is near the Albert Memorial Clock Tower, 600m northeast of City Hall. Belfast Central train station (which isn't very central!) is 800m east of City Hall on East Bridge St.

Steam Packet ferries dock at Donegall Quay, 1km north of City Hall. The Stena Line car-ferry terminal is 2km north of the city centre, and the Norfolkline ferry terminal is 5km north of the city centre (see p605).

Maps

The Belfast Welcome Centre provides a free map of the city centre. The *Collins Belfast Streetfinder Atlas* (available at most bookshops) is more detailed and includes a full index of street names. Most detailed of all, but in the form of an unwieldy folded sheet, is the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland's 1:12,000 *Belfast Street Map* (available at TSO bookshop).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bookfinders (☎ 9032 8269; 47 University Rd, South Belfast; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) A studenty second-hand bookshop and book-finding service with a gallery, café and regular poetry readings.

Bookshop at Queen's (☎ 9066 6302; 91 University Rd, South Belfast; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat) Irish literature, history and politics.

Eason (☎ 9023 5070; 20 Donegall Pl; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, to 9pm Thu) Books, magazines and stationery.

TSO Bookshop (☎ 9023 8451; 16 Arthur St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) Good for Ordnance Survey maps, street plans and Lonely Planet guidebooks.

Waterstones (☎ 9024 0159; 44-46 Fountain St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 9am-9pm Thu, 1-5.30pm Sun) General bookshop with a café on the first floor.

Emergency

For national emergency phone numbers, see inside the front cover.

Rape Crisis & Sexual Abuse Centre (☎ 9032 9002; www.rapecrisisni.com)

Victim Support (☎ 0845 30 30 900; www.victimsupport.org)

Internet Access

You can use British Telecom's blue, internet-enabled phone boxes around Donegall Sq and at Central Station, for 10p a minute (50p minimum).

Ark Internet (☎ 9032 9626; 44 University St; per min from 2.1p) High speed broadband, no minimum charge. At the Ark Hostel.

Belfast Welcome Centre (☎ 9024 6609; www.gotobelfast.com; 47 Donegall Pl; per 15 min/hr £1/3; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Linen Hall Library (☎ 9032 1707; cnr Fountain St & Donegall Sq; per 30min £1 minimum; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat) One computer on each floor; ask at desk before using.

net-one (☎ 9032 5400; Great Northern Mall, Great Victoria St; per 15min £1; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat, 11am-9pm Sun) Twelve PCs; in mall leading to Europa BusCentre.

Revelations (☎ 9032 0337; 27 Shaftesbury Sq; per 15min £1; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 11am-7pm Sun) Eighteen PCs, laptop access, printers available. Concession rate of £1 per 20 minutes for holders of student and hostelling ID cards.

Laundry

Expect to pay around £4 to £5 total to wash and dry one load.

Globe Drycleaning & Laundrette (37 Botanic Ave)

Mike's Laundrette (46 Agincourt Ave, South Belfast)

Whistle Laundrette (160 Lisburn Rd, South Belfast)

Offers service washes only; no self-service.

Left Luggage

Because of security concerns, there are no left-luggage facilities at Belfast's airports, train stations and bus stations. However, most hotels and hostels allow guests to leave their bags for the day, and the Belfast Welcome Centre (below) also offers a daytime left-luggage service.

Libraries

Belfast Central Library (☎ 9050 9150; Royal Ave;

☎ 9am-8pm Mon, Wed & Thu, to 5.30pm Tue & Fri, to 4.30pm Sat)

Linen Hall Library (☎ 9032 1707; cnr Fountain St & Donegall Sq; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat) See p582.

Medical Services

Accident and emergency services are available at these hospitals:

City Hospital (☎ 9032 9241; 51 Lisburn Rd)

Mater Hospital (☎ 9074 1211; 45-51 Crumlin Rd) Near the junction of Antrim Rd and Clifton St.

Royal Victoria Hospital (☎ 9024 0503; 274 Grosvenor Rd) West of the city centre.

Ulster Hospital (☎ 9048 4511; Upper Newtownards Rd, Dundonald) Near Stormont Castle.

For advice on medical and dental emergencies, call **NHS Direct** (☎ 0845 4647; ☎ 24hr).

Money

There are plenty of ATMs around town. There are currency-exchange facilities at the Belfast Welcome Centre, the post offices on Bridge St and Shaftesbury Sq, and the Thomas Cook branches.

Post

Post office Main post office (12-16 Bridge St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat); Bedford St (16-22 Bedford St); Botanic Gardens (cnr University Rd & College Gardens, South Belfast); Shaftesbury Sq (1-5 Botanic Ave)

Tourist Information Centre

Belfast Welcome Centre (☎ 9024 6609; www.gotobelfast.com; 47 Donegall Pl; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) Provides information about the whole of Northern Ireland, and books accommodation anywhere in Ireland and Brit-

ain. Services include left luggage (not overnight), currency exchange and internet access.

Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich (☎ 9096 4188; 216 Falls Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) This cultural centre (p588) in West Belfast has a Tourist information desk.

Fáilte Ireland (Irish Tourist Board; ☎ 9032 7888; www ireland.ie; 53 Castle St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri year-round, to 12.30pm Sat Jun-Aug) Can book accommodation in the Republic of Ireland.

Tourist information desks Belfast City Airport (☎ 9045 7745; ☎ 5.30am-10pm); Belfast International Airport (☎ 9448 4677; ☎ 24hr)

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (☎ 9024 1469; 92-94 Botanic Ave;

☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat)

Thomas Cook City centre (☎ 9088 3900; 11 Donegall Pl;

☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-5.30pm Thu);

Belfast International Airport (☎ 9442 2536; ☎ 5.30am-9.30pm Mon-Fri, to midnight Sat & Sun) Times vary slightly in winter and during the summer peak to reflect flight activity.

Traifinders (☎ 9027 1888; 47-49 Fountain St;

☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun)

USIT (☎ 9032 7111; 13b Fountain Centre, College St;

☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Even at the height of the Troubles, Belfast wasn't a particularly dangerous city for tourists, and today you're less at risk from crime here than you are in London. It's best, however, to avoid the so-called 'interface areas' – near the Peace Lines in West Belfast, Crumlin Rd and the Short Strand (just east of Queen's Bridge) – after dark; if in doubt about any area, ask at your hotel or hostel.

One irritating legacy of the Troubles is the absence of left-luggage facilities at bus and train stations. You will also notice a more obvious security presence than elsewhere in the UK and Ireland, in the form of armoured police Land Rovers, fortified police stations, and security doors on some shops (mostly outside the city centre) where you have to press the buzzer to be allowed in. There are doormen on many city-centre shops.

If you want to take photos of fortified police stations, army posts or other military or quasi-military paraphernalia, get permission first to be on the safe side. In the Protestant and Catholic strongholds of West Belfast it's best not to photograph people without permission; always ask first and be prepared to accept a refusal. Taking pictures of the murals is not a problem.

SIGHTS

City Centre

CITY HALL

The Industrial Revolution transformed Belfast in the 19th century, and its rapid rise to muck-and-brass prosperity is manifested in the extravagance of **City Hall** (☎ 9027 0456; www.belfastcity.gov.uk; Donegall Sq; admission free; 🕒 guided tours 11am, 2pm & 3pm Mon-Fri, 2pm & 3pm Sat). Built in classical Renaissance style in fine, white Portland stone, it was completed in 1906 and paid for from the profits of the gas supply company. It is equipped with facilities for the disabled. (Note that City Hall will be closed for major renovation work until summer 2009.)

The hall is fronted by a statue of a rather dour 'we are not amused' **Queen Victoria**. The bronze figures on either side of her symbolise the textile and shipbuilding industries, while the child at the back represents education. At the northeastern corner of the grounds is a statue of **Sir Edward Harland**, the Yorkshire-born marine engineer who founded the Harland & Wolff shipyards and who served as mayor of Belfast in 1885–86. To his south stands a memorial to the victims of the *Titanic*.

The **Marquess of Dufferin** (1826–1902), whose career included postings as ambassador to Turkey, Russia, Paris and Rome, governor-general of Canada and viceroy to India, has an ornate, temple-like memorial flanked by an Indian and a Turkish warrior, on the western side of the City Hall. By the time this book is published, the marquess should be joined by a life-size bronze statue of George Best (1946–2005), Northern Ireland's most famous footballer. Belfast's City Airport has already been renamed in his honour.

The highlights of the free **guided tour** of City Hall include the sumptuous, wedding-cake

Italian marble and colourful stained glass of the entrance hall and rotunda, an opportunity to sit on the mayor's throne in the council chamber, and the idiosyncratic portraits of past lord mayors. Each lord mayor is allowed to choose his or her own artist, and the variations in personal style are intriguing.

LINEN HALL LIBRARY

Opposite City Hall, on North Donegall Sq, is the **Linen Hall Library** (☎ 9032 1707; www.linenhall.com; 17 Donegall Sq N; admission free; 🕒 9.30am–5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat; ♿). Established in 1788 to 'improve the mind and excite a spirit of general inquiry', the library was moved from its original home in the White Linen Hall (the site is now occupied by City Hall) to the present building a century later. Thomas Russell, the first librarian, was a founding member of the United Irishmen and a close friend of Wolfe Tone – a reminder that this movement for independence from Britain had its origins in Belfast. Russell was hanged in 1803 after Robert Emmet's abortive rebellion.

The library houses some 260,000 books, more than half of which are part of its important Irish and local-studies collection. The political collection consists of pretty much everything that has been written about Northern Irish politics since 1966. The library also has a small **coffee shop** (🕒 10am–4pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) and all the daily newspapers. The visitors' entrance is on Fountain St, around the corner from the main door.

OTHER DONEGALL SQ BUILDINGS

On Donegall Sq West is the ornate **Scottish Provident Building** (1897–1902). It's decorated with a veritable riot of fascinating statuary, including several allusions to the industries that

assured Victorian Belfast's prosperity, as well as sphinxes, dolphins and lions' heads. The building was the work of the architectural partnership of Young and MacKenzie, who counterbalanced it in 1902 with the red sandstone **Pearl Assurance Building** on Donegall Sq East. Also on the east side of the square is the Classical Greek portico of the former **Methodist Church** (1847), now occupied by the Ulster Bank.

On the north side of square is the equally fine **Robinson & Cleaver Building** (1888), once the Royal Irish Linen Warehouse and later home to Belfast's finest department store (now occupied by Marks & Spencer). There are 50 busts adorning the façade, representing patrons of the Royal Irish Linen company – look out for Queen Victoria and the Maharajah of Cooch Behar, both former customers.

CROWN LIQUOR SALOON

There are not too many historical monuments that you can enjoy while savouring a pint of beer, but the National Trust's **Crown Liquor Saloon** (☎ 9027 9901; 46 Great Victoria St; admission free; 🕒 11.30am–11pm Mon-Sat, 12.30–10pm Sun) is one. Belfast's most famous bar was refurbished by Patrick Flanagan in the late 19th century and displays Victorian decorative flamboyance at its best (your man was looking to pull in a posh clientele from the new-fangled train station and Grand Opera House across the street).

The exterior (1885) is decorated with ornate and colourful Italian tiles, and a mosaic of a crown on the pavement outside the entrance. Legend has it that Flanagan, a Catholic, argued with his Protestant wife over what the pub's name should be. His wife prevailed and it was named the Crown in honour of the British monarchy. Flanagan took his sneaky revenge by placing the crown mosaic where customers would tread it underfoot every day.

The interior (1898) sports a mass of stained and cut glass, marble, ceramics, mirrors and mahogany, all atmospherically lit by genuine gas mantles. A long, highly decorated bar dominates one side of the pub, while on the other is a row of ornate wooden snugs. The snugs come equipped with gunmetal plates (from the Crimean War) for striking matches, and bell-pushes that once allowed drinkers to order top-ups without leaving their seats (alas, no longer).

Above the Crown is **Flannigan's** (☎ 9027 9901), another interesting bar with *Titanic* and other maritime memorabilia.

GRAND OPERA HOUSE

One of Belfast's great Victorian landmarks is the **Grand Opera House** (☎ 9024 1919; www.goh.co.uk; Great Victoria St; guided tours adult/child £5/3; 🕒 tours available 11am–noon Wed-Sat), across the road from the Crown Liquor Saloon. Opened in 1895, and completely refurbished in the 1970s, it suffered grievously at the hands of the IRA, having sustained severe bomb damage in 1991 and 1993. It has been suggested that as the Europa Hotel next door was the home of the media during the Troubles, the IRA brought the bombs to them so they wouldn't have to leave the bar.

The interior has been restored to its original, over-the-top Victorian pomp, with swirling wood and plasterwork, fancy gilt-work in abundance and carved elephant heads framing the private boxes in the auditorium. See also p604.

ORMEAU BATHS GALLERY

Housed in a converted 19th-century public bathhouse, the **Ormeau Baths Gallery** (☎ 9032 1402; www.ormeaubaths.co.uk; 18a Ormeau Ave; admission free; 🕒 10am–5.30pm Tue-Sat) is Northern Ireland's principal exhibition space for contemporary visual art. The gallery stages changing exhibitions of work by Irish and international artists, and has hosted controversial showings of works by Gilbert and George, and Yoko Ono. The gallery is a few blocks south of Donegall Sq.

THE ENTRIES

The oldest part of Belfast, around High St, suffered considerable damage from WWII bombing. The narrow alleyways running off High and Ann Sts, known as the Entries, were once bustling commercial and residential centres: **Pottinger's Entry**, for example, had 34 houses in 1822.

Joy's Entry is named after Francis Joy, who founded the *Belfast News Letter* in 1737, the first daily newspaper in the British Isles (and still in business). One of his grandsons, Henry Joy McCracken, was executed for supporting the 1798 United Irishmen's revolt.

The United Irishmen were founded in 1791 by Wolfe Tone in Peggy Barclay's tavern in **Crown Entry**, and used to meet in Kelly's Cellars

RED HAND OF ULSTER

According to legend, the chief of a raiding party – O'Neills or O'Donnells, take your pick – approaching the coast by boat decided to fire up his troops by decreeing that Ulster would belong to the first man to lay his right hand upon it. As they neared land one particularly competitive chap cut off his own right hand and lobbed it to the shore, thus claiming Ulster as his own. The O'Neill clan later adopted the Red Hand as their emblem and it went on to become the symbol of the Irish province of Ulster.

You'll see the Red Hand of Ulster in many places: on the official Northern Irish flag, in the Ulster coat of arms, above the entrance to the Linen Hall Library (above) on Donegall Sq, and laid out in red flowers in the garden of Mount Stewart House & Gardens (p618) in County Down. It also appears in many political murals in the badges of loyalist terrorist groups, and as a clenched red fist in the badge of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

(1720; p601) on Bank St, off Royal Ave; see p36 for more on the United Irishmen).

White's Tavern (1630; p601), on **Wine Cellar Entry**, is the oldest tavern in the city and is still a popular lunch-time meeting spot.

Cathedral Quarter

The district north of the centre around St Anne's Cathedral, bounded roughly by Donegall, Waring, Dunbar and York Sts, has been promoted as Belfast's Left Bank, a bohemian district of restored red-brick warehouses and cobbled lanes lined with artists' studios, design offices, and stylish bars and restaurants. It's home to the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival (p594).

Built in imposing Hiberno-Romanesque style, **St Anne's Cathedral** (☎ 9033 2328; www.belfastcathedral.org; Donegall St; admission free, donations accepted; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri; Ⓡ) was started in 1899 but did not reach its final form until 1981. As you enter you'll see the black-and-white marble floor is laid out in a maze pattern – the black route leads to a dead end, the white to the sanctuary and salvation. The 10 pillars of the nave are topped by carvings symbolising aspects of Belfast life; look out for the Freemasons' pillar (the central one on the right, or south, side). In the south aisle is the tomb of unionist hero Sir Edward Carson (1854–1935). The stunning mosaic of *The Creation* in the baptistry contains 150,000 pieces of coloured glass; it and the mosaic above the west door are the result of seven years' work by sisters Gertrude and Margaret Martin.

A 10-minute walk northwest from the cathedral along Donegall and Clifton Sts leads to **Clifton House** (2a Hopewell Ave, Carlisle Circus), built in 1774 by Robert Joy (Henry Joy McCracken's uncle) as a poorhouse. The finest surviving Georgian building in Belfast, it now houses a nursing home.

South of the cathedral at the end of Donegall St lies the elegant Georgian **Commercial Building** (1822) ahead, easily identified by the prominent name of the Northern Whig Printing Company, with a modern bar on the ground floor. Opposite is the **Northern Bank Building**, the oldest public building in the city, which started life as the one-storey Exchange in 1769, became the Assembly Rooms with the addition of an upper storey in 1777, and was remodelled in Italianate style in 1845 by Sir Charles Lanyon, Belfast's

pre-eminent Victorian architect, to become a bank.

The most flamboyant legacy of Belfast's Victorian era is the grandiose **Ulster Bank Building** (1860), now home to the Merchant Hotel (p595), this Italianate extravaganza has a portico of soaring columns and sculpted figures depicting Britannia, Justice and Commerce, and iron railings decorated with the Red Hand of Ulster and Irish wolfhounds.

To the west of the cathedral, at the junction of Royal Ave and North St, is the **Bank of Ireland Building** (1929), a fine example of Art Deco architecture. The former **Sindair Store** (1935), diagonally opposite the bank, is also in Deco style.

Laganside & Lanyon Place

The ambitious **Laganside Project** (www.laganside.com) to redevelop and regenerate the centre of Belfast saw the building of the Waterfront Hall, British Telecom's Riverside Tower and the Belfast Hilton in the 1990s. Projects completed since then include several clusters of riverside apartments, the Lanyon Quay office development next to the Waterfront Hall and the restoration of listed buildings such as McHugh's bar on Queen's Sq, the ornate Victorian warehouses now housing the Malmaison Hotel on Victoria St and the Albert Memorial Clock Tower.

The latest stage is the 29-storey **Obel**, Belfast's tallest building, which soars above the waterfront at Donegall Quay. All 182 apartments in the building were sold in advance, within 48 hours of being released; it's due for completion some time in 2008.

A few blocks to the south is the brand new £320 million retail complex of **Victoria Square** (www.victoriasquare.com), whose centrepiece is a shopping mall topped by a vast glass dome (due to open in 2008).

CLARENDON DOCK

Near the ferry terminal on Donegall Quay is the Italianate **Harbour Commissioner's Office** (1854). The striking marble and stained-glass interior features art and sculpture inspired by Belfast's maritime history. The captain's table built for the *Titanic* survives here – completed behind schedule, it never made it on board. Guided tours of the office are available during the Belfast Maritime Festival in early July. It's also open on European Heritage Open Days, which take place over a weekend in

September or October (see the Events section on www.ehsni.gov.uk).

Sindair Seamen's Church (☎ 9086 8568; Corporation Sq; admission free; ☎ 2-4pm Wed, 11.30am-7pm Sun), next to the Harbour Commissioner's Office, was built by Charles Lanyon in 1857–58 and was intended to meet the spiritual needs of visiting sailors. Part church, part maritime museum, it has a pulpit in the shape of a ship's prow (complete with red-and-green port and starboard lights), a brass ship's wheel and binnacle (used as a baptismal font) salvaged from a WWI wreck and, hanging on the wall behind the wheel, the ship's bell from HMS *Hood*.

North of the Harbour Commissioner's Office is the restored **Clarendon Dock**. Leading off it are the dry docks where Belfast's ship-building industry was born – No 1 Dry Dock (1796–1800) is Ireland's oldest, and remained in use until the 1960s; No 2 (1826) is still used occasionally. Between the two sits the pretty little **Clarendon Building**, now home to the offices of the Laganside Corporation.

CUSTOM HOUSE SQ

South along the river is the elegant **Custom House**, built by Lanyon in Italianate style between 1854 and 1857; the writer Anthony Trollope once worked in the post office here. On the waterfront side the pediment carries sculpted portrayals of Britannia, Neptune and Mercury. The Custom House steps were once Belfast's equivalent of London's Speakers' Corner, a tradition memorialised in a bronze statue preaching to an invisible crowd.

Looking across the River Lagan from the Custom House, East Belfast is dominated by the huge yellow cranes of the Harland & Wolff shipyards. The modern Queen Elizabeth Bridge crosses the Lagan just to the south, but immediately south again is **Queen's Bridge** (1843) with its ornate lamps, Sir Charles Lanyon's first important contribution to Belfast's cityscape.

QUEEN'S SQ

At the east end of High St is Belfast's very own leaning tower, the **Albert Memorial Clock Tower**. Erected in 1867 in honour of Queen Victoria's dear departed husband, it is not so dramatically out of kilter as the more famously tilted tower in Pisa but does, nevertheless, lean noticeably to the south – as the locals say, 'Old Albert not only has the time, he also has the

inclination.' Restoration work has stabilised its foundations and left its Scrabo sandstone masonry sparkling white.

Many of the buildings around the clock tower are the work of Sir Charles Lanyon. The white stone building immediately north of the clock tower was completed in 1852 by Lanyon as head office for the **Northern Bank**.

South of the tower on Victoria St is the Malmaison Hotel (1868; p595), formerly two seed warehouses – look for the friezes of exotic birds, plants and nut-munching squirrels on the left half of the façade.

LAGAN WEIR

Across the street from the Custom House is *Bigfish* (1999), the most prominent of the many modern artworks that grace the riverbank between Clarendon Dock and Ormeau Bridge. The giant ceramic salmon – a symbol of the regeneration of the River Lagan – is covered with tiles depicting the history of Belfast.

It sits beside **Lagan Weir**, the first stage of the Laganside Project, completed in 1994. Years of neglect and industrial decline had turned the River Lagan, the original lifeblood of the city, into an open sewer flanked by smelly, unsightly mudflats. The weir, along with a programme of dredging and aeration, has improved the water quality so much that salmon, eels and sea trout migrate up the river once again.

For details of the boat tours that depart from here, see p593.

LANYON PLACE

A five-minute walk south from the Lagan Weir leads to Lanyon Pl, the Laganside Project's flagship site, dominated by the 2235-seat Waterfront Hall (p603). Across Oxford St lie the neoclassical **Royal Courts of Justice** (1933), bombed by the IRA in 1990 but now emerging from behind the massive security screens that once concealed them.

South of the courts is the elegant Victorian **St George's Market** (☎ 9043 5704; cnr Oxford & May Sts; admission free; ☎ 6am-1pm Fri, 9am-3pm Sat), built in 1896 for the sale of fruit, butter, eggs and poultry, and the oldest continually operating market in Ireland. Restored in 1999, it now hosts a variety market on Friday, selling fresh flowers, fruit, vegetables, meat and fish, plus general household and second-hand goods, and the City Food and Garden Market on

Saturday. There's also a two-day Christmas Fair and Market in early December.

Titanic Quarter

Belfast's former shipbuilding yards – the birthplace of the RMS *Titanic* – stretch along the east side of the River Lagan, dominated by the towering yellow cranes known as Samson and Goliath. The area is currently undergoing a £1 billion regeneration project known as **Titanic Quarter** (www.titanicquarter.com), which plans to develop the long-derelect docklands over the next 15 to 20 years.

There are plans to build an 'iconic attraction' in the Titanic Quarter in time for the centenary of the *Titanic*'s launch in 2012. In the meantime, the informative and entertaining commentary on the Lagan Boat Company's Titanic Tour (p593) is the best way to learn about the history of the shipyards.

ODYSSEY COMPLEX

The Odyssey Complex is a huge sporting and entertainment centre on the eastern side of the river across from Clarendon Dock. The complex features a hands-on science centre, a 10,000-seater sports arena (home to the Belfast Giants ice-hockey team), a multiplex cinema with an IMAX screen, a video-games centre and a dozen restaurants, cafés and bars.

Also known as *whowhatwherewhenwhy*, **W5** ([☎](tel) 9046 7700; www.w5online.co.uk; adult/child £6.50/4.50, 2 adults & 2 children £19; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat & noon–6pm Sun, last admission 1hr before closing;) is an interactive science centre aimed at children of all ages. Kids can compose their own tunes by biffing the 'air harp' with a foam rubber bat, try to beat a lie detector, create cloud rings and tornadoes, and design and build their own robots and racing cars.

The Odyssey Complex is a five-minute walk across the weir from the Lagan Lookout. Metro bus 26 from Donegall Sq West to Holywood stops at the complex (£1, 5 minutes, hourly Monday to Friday only); the rather inconspicuous bus stop is on Sydenham Rd.

SS NOMADIC

In 2006 the **SS Nomadic** ([☎](tel) 9024 6609; www.save-nomadic.com; adult/child £5/3; 10am–6pm May–Sep) – the only surviving vessel of the White Star Line (the shipping company that owned the *Titanic*) – was rescued from the breaker's yard and brought to Belfast where she is being restored. The little steamship, which once served

as a tender ferrying first- and second-class passengers between Cherbourg harbour and the giant Olympic Class ocean liners (which were too big to dock at the French port), will eventually be berthed in the Hamilton Dock, just north of the Odyssey Complex. In the meantime, she can be visited at the quay next to the Odyssey Complex.

South Belfast

The Golden Mile – the 1km stretch of Great Victoria St and Shaftesbury Sq that links the city centre to the university district – was once the focus for much of Belfast's nightlife. These days, with the regeneration of the city centre, it's more tarnished brass than gold, but it still has several decent pubs and eateries.

Metro buses 8A, 8B and 8C run from Donegall Sq East along Bradbury Pl and University Rd to Queen's University.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

If you think that Charles Lanyon's Queen's College (1849), a Tudor Revival building in red brick and honey-coloured sandstone, has something of an Oxbridge air about it, that may be because he based the design of the central tower on the 15th-century Founder's Tower at Oxford's Magdalen College. Northern Ireland's most prestigious university was founded by Queen Victoria in 1845, one of three Queen's colleges (the others, still around but no longer called Queen's colleges, are in Cork and Galway) created to provide a nondenominational alternative to the Anglican Church's Trinity College in Dublin. In 1908 the college became the Queen's University of Belfast, and today its campus spreads across some 250 buildings. Queen's has around 25,000 students and enjoys a strong reputation in medicine, engineering and law.

Just inside the main entrance is a small **visitor centre** ([☎](tel) 9097 5252; www.qub.ac.uk/vcentre; University Rd; admission free; 10am–4pm Mon–Sat May–Sep, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr;) with exhibitions and a souvenir shop. You can arrange a guided tour by phoning in advance.

The university quarter is an attractive district of quiet, tree-lined streets. Georgian-style **University Sq** (1848–53), on the northern side of the campus, is one of the most beautiful terraced streets in Ireland. Opposite its eastern end is the grand, neo-Renaissance

Union Theological College (1853), originally the Presbyterian College and yet another Lanyon design. It housed the Northern Ireland Parliament from the partition of Ireland until 1932, when the Parliament Buildings at Stormont were opened.

BOTANIC GARDENS

The green oasis of Belfast's **Botanic Gardens** ([☎](tel) 9031 4762; Stranmillis Rd; admission free; 7.30am–sunset) is a short stroll away from the university. Just inside the Stranmillis Rd gate is a statue of Belfast-born William Thomson, **Lord Kelvin**, who helped lay the foundation of modern physics and who invented the Kelvin scale that measures temperatures from absolute zero (-273°C or 0°K).

The gardens' centrepiece is Charles Lanyon's beautiful **Palm House** (admission free; 10am–noon & 1–5pm Mon–Fri, 2–5pm Sat, Sun & bank holidays, closes 4pm Mon–Fri Oct–Mar), built in 1839 and completed in 1852, with its birdcage dome, a masterpiece in cast-iron and curvilinear glass. Nearby is the unique **Tropical Ravine** (admission free; same as Palm House), a huge red-brick greenhouse designed by the garden's curator Charles McKimm and completed in 1889. Inside, a raised walkway overlooks a jungle of tropical ferns, orchids, lilies and banana plants growing in a sunken glen.

ULSTER MUSEUM

If the weather washes out a walk in the gardens, head instead for the nearby **Ulster Museum** ([☎](tel) 9038 3000; www.ulstermuseum.org.uk; Stranmillis Rd; admission free; 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 1–5pm Sat, 2–5pm Sun). Note that the museum will be closed for redevelopment until spring 2009.

WALK: LAGAN TOWPATH

Part of Belfast's Lagan-side redevelopment project has been the restoration of the towpath along the west bank of the River Lagan. You can now walk or cycle for 20km along the winding riverbank from central Belfast to Lisburn. The Belfast Welcome Centre provides the *Lagan Valley Regional Park – Towpath Leaflet*, which has a detailed map.

A shorter walk (10km) that you can easily do in half a day starts from **Shaw's Bridge** on the southern edge of the city. Take bus 8A or 8B from Donegall Sq East to the stop just before the Malone roundabout (where Malone Rd becomes Upper Malone Rd). Bear left at the roundabout (signposted Outer Ring A55) and in five minutes or so you will reach the River Lagan at Shaw's Bridge.

Turn left and follow the cycle-/walkway downstream on the left bank of the river (waymarked with red '9' signs). After 30 minutes you will arrive at the most attractive part of the walk: **Lagan Meadows**, a tree-fringed loop in the river to the right of the path and a good place for a picnic on a summer's day. Another half-hour will bring you to **Cutters River Grill** (p600), a great place for a lunch break. From the pub it's another hour of pleasant walking to Lagan Weir in the city centre.

Don't miss the **Early Ireland gallery**, a series of tableaux explaining Irish prehistory combined with a spectacular collection of prehistoric stone and bronze artefacts that help provide a cultural context for Northern Ireland's many archaeological sites. The exhibits are beautifully displayed – the Malone Hoard, a clutch of 16 polished, Neolithic stone axes discovered only a few kilometres from the museum, looks more like a modern sculpture than a museum exhibit.

Other highlights include the **Industrial History gallery**, based around Belfast's 19th-century linen industry, and the **Treasures of the Armada**, a display of artefacts and jewellery recovered from the 1588 wreck of the *Girona* (see the boxed text, p661) and other Spanish Armada vessels. Among the treasures is a ruby-encrusted golden salamander.

The centrepiece of the **Egyptian collection** is the mummy of Princess Takabuti. She was unwrapped in Belfast in 1835, the first mummy ever to be displayed outside Egypt; more recently, her bleached hair has led the locals to dub her 'Belfast's oldest bleached blonde'.

The top floors are given over to 19th- and 20th-century **Irish and British art**, notably the works of Belfast-born Sir John Lavery (1856–1941), who became one of the most fashionable and expensive portraitists of Victorian London.

West Belfast

Though scarred by three decades of civil unrest, the former battleground of West Belfast is one of the most compelling places to visit in Northern Ireland. Recent history hangs

heavy in the air, but there is a noticeable air of optimism and hope for the future.

The main attractions are the powerful murals that chart the history of the conflict as well as the political passions of the moment, and for visitors from mainland Britain there is a grim fascination to be found in wandering through the former 'war zone' in their own backyard.

West Belfast grew up around the linen mills that propelled the city into late 19th-century prosperity. It was an area of low-cost, working-class housing and even in the Victorian era was divided along religious lines. The advent of the Troubles in 1968 solidified the sectarian divide, and since 1970 the ironically named 'Peace Line' has separated the Loyalist and Protestant Shankill district from the republican and Catholic Falls.

Despite its past reputation the area is safe to visit. The best way to see West Belfast is on a black-taxi tour (see p593). The cabs visit the more spectacular murals as well as the Peace Line (where you can write a message on the wall) and other significant sites, while the drivers provide a colourful commentary on the history of the area.

There's nothing to stop you visiting under your own steam, either walking or using the shared black taxis along the Falls or Shankill Rds (see the boxed text, p607). Alternatively, buses 10A to 10F from Queen St will take you along the Falls Rd; buses 11A to 11D from Wellington Pl go along Shankill Rd.

You can also pick up a free *West Belfast and Shankill Arts and Heritage Trail* leaflet at the Belfast Welcome Centre, which has maps detailing two waymarked walks around the Falls and Shankill districts. It doesn't list political murals.

FALLS ROAD

Although the signs of past conflict are inescapable, the Falls today is an unexpectedly lively, colourful and optimistic place. Local people are friendly and welcoming, and community ventures such as Conway Mill, the Cultúrlann centre and black-taxi tours have seen tourist numbers increase dramatically in recent years.

The focus for community activity is the Irish language and cultural centre **Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich** (☎ 9096 4180; www.culturlann.ie; 216 Falls Rd; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat). Housed

in a red-brick, former Presbyterian church, it's a cosy and welcoming place with a tourist information desk, a shop selling a wide selection of books on Ireland, Irish-language material, crafts, and Irish music tapes and CDs, and an excellent café-restaurant (p600). The centre also has an art gallery and a theatre that stages music, drama and poetry events.

A few blocks away is **Conway Mill** (☎ 9024 7276; www.conwaymill.org; 5-7 Conway St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat), a 19th-century flax mill that now houses more than 20 small shops and studios making and selling arts, crafts and furniture, an art gallery and an exhibition on the mill's history. There's also the **Irish Republican History Museum** (☎ 10am-2pm Tue-Sat), a collection of artefacts, newspaper articles, photos and archives relating to the republican struggle from 1798 to the Troubles.

See also the Walking Tour, p591.

SHANKILL ROAD

Although the Protestant Shankill district (from the Irish *sean chill*, meaning 'old church') has received less media and tourist attention than the Falls, it also contains many interesting murals. The people here are just as friendly, but the Shankill has far fewer tourists than the Falls. Loyalist communities seem to have more difficulty in presenting their side of the story than the republicans, who have a far more polished approach to propaganda and public relations.

To reach Shankill Rd on foot, set off north from City Hall along Donegall Pl and Royal Ave, then turn left on Peter's Hill and keep straight on across the Westlink dual carriageway.

Beyond Shankill Rd, about 500m up Glencairn Rd, is **Fernhill House: The People's Museum** (☎ 9071 5599; www.fernhillhouse.co.uk; Glencairn Rd; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 1-4pm Sun). Set in a wealthy Victorian merchant's villa, the museum contains a re-creation of a 1930s working-class terraced house, exhibitions detailing the history of the Shankill district and the Home Rule crisis, and the largest collection of Orange Order memorabilia in the world. To get there, take bus 11B, 11C or 11D from Wellington Pl, at the northwest corner of Donegall Sq.

Outside the Centre

CAVE HILL

The best way to get a feel for Belfast's natural setting is to view it from above. In the

THE MURALS OF BELFAST

Belfast's tradition of political murals is a century old, dating from 1908 when images of King Billy (William III, Protestant victor over the Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690) were painted by unionists protesting against home rule for Ireland. The tradition was revived in the late 1970s as the Troubles wore on, with murals used to mark out sectarian territory, make political points, commemorate historical events and glorify terrorist groups. As the 'voice of the community' the murals were rarely permanent, but changed to reflect the issues of the day.

Republican Murals

The first republican murals appeared in 1981, when the hunger strike at the Maze prison saw the emergence of dozens of murals supporting the hunger strikers. In later years republican muralists broadened their scope to cover wider political issues, Irish legends and historical events. After the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the murals came to demand police reform and the protection of nationalists from sectarian attacks.

Common images seen in republican murals include the phoenix rising from the flames (symbolising Ireland reborn from the flames of the 1916 Easter Rising), the face of hunger-striker Bobby Sands, and scenes and figures from Irish mythology. Common slogans include 'Free Ireland', the Irish Gaelic 'Éirí Amach na Cáscá 1916' (The Easter Rising of 1916) and 'Tíocfaidh Ár Lá' ('Our Day Will Come').

The main areas for republican murals are Falls Rd, Beechmount Ave, Donegall Rd, Shaw's Rd and the Ballymurphy district in West Belfast; New Lodge Rd in North Belfast; and Ormeau Rd in South Belfast.

Loyalist Murals

Whereas republican murals were often artistic and rich in symbolic imagery, the loyalist ones have traditionally been more militaristic and defiant in tone. The loyalist battle cry of 'No Surrender!' is everywhere, along with red, white and blue painted kerbstones, paramilitary insignia and images of King Billy, usually shown on a prancing white horse.

You will also see the Red Hand of Ulster, sometimes shown as a clenched fist (the symbol of the Ulster Freedom Fighters, UFF), and references to the WWI Battle of the Somme in 1916 in which many Ulster soldiers died; it is seen as a symbol of Ulster's loyalty to the British crown, in contrast to the republican Easter Rising of 1916. Common mottoes include 'Quis Separabit' (Who Shall Divide Us?), the motto of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA); and the defiant 'We will maintain our faith and our nationality'.

Murals Today

In recent years there has been a lot of debate about what to do with Belfast's murals. Some see them as an ugly and unpleasant reminder of a violent past, others claim they are a vital part of Northern Ireland's history. There's no doubt they have become an important tourist attraction, but there is now a move to replace the more aggressive and militaristic images with murals dedicated to local heroes and famous figures such as footballer George Best and *Narnia* novelist CS Lewis.

There are also some off-beat and amusing artworks, including one that has been baffling passers-by for years. A gable-end on Balfour Ave, off the Ormeau Rd, asks the question 'How can quantum gravity help explain the origin of the universe?' It was part of an art installation in 2001, one of 10 questions selected by scientists as the most important unsolved problems in physics. Perhaps it has survived so long as it reflects the still unsolved and – to outsiders, equally baffling – problem of Northern Ireland's sectarian divide.

If you want to find out more about Northern Ireland's murals, look out for the books *Drawing Support* (three volumes) by Bill Rolston, *The Peoples' Gallery* by the Bogside Artists and the Mural Directory website (www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/murals).

absence of a private aircraft, head for Cave Hill (368m) which looms over the northern fringes of the city. The view from its summit takes in the whole sprawl of the city, the docks and the creeping fingers of urbanisation along the shores of Belfast Lough. On a clear day you can even spot Scotland lurking on the horizon. For information on climbing to the summit, see the boxed text, below.

The hill was originally called Ben Madigan, after the 9th-century Ulster king, Matudhain. Its distinctive, craggy profile, seen from the south, has been known to locals for two centuries as 'Napoleon's Nose' – it supposedly bears some resemblance to Bonaparte's hooter, but you might take some convincing. On the summit is an Iron Age earthwork known as McArt's Fort where members of the United Irishmen, including Wolfe Tone, looked down over the city in 1795 and pledged to fight for Irish independence.

Cave Hill Country Park (☎ 9077 6925; Antrim Rd; admission free; ☞ 7.30am-dusk) spreads across the hill's eastern slopes, with several waymarked walks and an adventure playground for kids aged three to 14 years.

To get there, take buses 1A to 1H from Donegall Sq West to Belfast Castle or Belfast Zoo.

BELFAST CASTLE

Built in 1870 for the third Marquess of Donegall, in the Scottish Baronial style made fashionable by Queen Victoria's then recently

built Balmoral, the multiturreted pomp of **Belfast Castle** (☎ 9077 6925; www.belfastcastle.co.uk; Antrim Rd; admission free; ☞ 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 5.30pm Sun) commands the southeastern slopes of Cave Hill. It was presented to the City of Belfast in 1934.

Extensive renovation between 1978 and 1988 has left the interior comfortably modern rather than intriguingly antique, and the castle is now a popular venue for wedding receptions. Upstairs is the **Cave Hill Visitor Centre** with a few displays on the folklore, history, archaeology and natural history of the park. Downstairs is the Cellar Restaurant and a small **antiques shop** (☞ noon-10pm Mon-Sat, to 5pm Sun).

Legend has it that the castle's residents will experience good fortune only as long as a white cat lives there, a tale commemorated in the beautiful formal gardens by nine portrayals of cats in mosaic, painting, sculpture and garden furniture.

BELFAST ZOO

Belfast Zoo (☎ 9077 6277; www.belfastzoo.co.uk; Antrim Rd; adult/child Apr-Sep £7.80/4.10, Oct-Mar £6.30/3.20, children under 4, senior & visitors with disabilities free; ☞ 10am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar, last admission 2hr before closing) is one of the most appealing zoos in Britain and Ireland, with spacious enclosures set on an attractive, sloping site; the sea lion and penguin pool with its underwater viewing is particularly good. Some of the more unusual animals include tamarins,

spectacled bears and red pandas, but the biggest attractions are 'Jack' the blue-eyed white tiger, the ultracut meerkats and the colony of ring-tailed lemurs.

MALONE HOUSE

Malone House (☎ 9068 1246; www.malonehouse.co.uk; Upper Malone Rd; admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun) is a late-Georgian mansion in the grounds of Barnett Demesne. Built in the 1820s for local merchant William Legge, the house is now used mainly for social functions and conferences, with art exhibitions staged in the Higgin Gallery. The surrounding gardens are planted with azaleas and rhododendrons, with paths leading down to the Lagan Towpath (see boxed text, p587).

The house is about 5km south of the centre; take bus 8A or 8B to Dub Lane, Upper Malone Rd.

SIR THOMAS & LADY DIXON PARK

This **park** (Upper Malone Rd; admission free; ☞ 7.30am-dusk year round) consists of rolling meadows, woodland, riverside fields and formal gardens. The main draw is its spectacular **Rose Garden**, which contains more than 20,000 blooms. Among other displays, a spiral-shaped garden traces the development of the rose from early shrub roses up to modern hybrids; the roses are in bloom from late July. The park also contains a walled garden, a Japanese-style garden, a children's playground and a café.

The park is 1.5km south of Malone House.

GIANT'S RING

This huge **prehistoric earthwork** (admission free; ☞ 24hr), nearly 200m in diameter, is a circular Neolithic ritual complex with a dolmen (known as the Druid's Altar) in the centre. Prehistoric rings were commonly believed to be the home of fairies and consequently treated with respect, but this one was commandeered in the 19th century as a race-track, the 4m-high embankment serving as a natural grandstand. The site is 6.5km south of Belfast city centre, off Milltown Rd near Shaw's Bridge.

STORMONT

The dazzling white neoclassical façade of **Parliament House** at Stormont is one of Belfast's most iconic buildings; in the North, 'Stormont' carries the same connotation as 'Westminster' does in Britain and 'Washing-

ton' in the USA – the seat of power. For 40 years, from its completion in 1932 until the introduction of direct rule in 1972, it was the seat of the parliament of Northern Ireland. More recently, on 8 May 2007, it returned to the forefront of Irish politics when Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness – who had been the best of enemies for decades – laughed and smiled as they were sworn in as first minister and deputy first minister respectively.

The building occupies a dramatic position at the end of a gently rising, 1.5km-long avenue and is fronted by a defiant statue of the arch unionist Sir Edward Carson. Parliament House is not open to the public, but you are free to walk around the extensive grounds, and you can take a virtual tour at www.niassembly.gov.uk. Nearby, 19th-century **Stormont Castle** is, like Hillsborough in County Down, an official residence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Stormont is 8km east of the city centre, off the A20 Newtonards road. Take bus 4A or 4B from Donegall Sq West.

WALKING TOUR

WALK FACTS

Start City Hall
End Milltown Cemetery
Distance 4km
Duration one hour

This walk leads through the heart of republican West Belfast from the city centre to Milltown Cemetery. Starting from **City Hall** (p582) go north along Donegall Pl and turn left on Castle St. Keep straight ahead along Divis St.

As you cross the busy Westlink dual carriageway you will see the infamous **Divis Tower**, a 20-storey apartment block. The security forces took over the top two floors of the tower block as an observation post in the 1970s, and continued to use it to monitor people's movements until it was decommissioned in 2005.

As you pass the Divis Tower, look to the right along the side street opposite and you'll see steel gates that mark the beginning of the so-called **Peace Line**, the 6m-high wall of corrugated steel, concrete and chain link that has divided the Protestant and Catholic communities of West Belfast for almost 40 years. Begun in 1970 as a 'temporary measure', it

WALK: CAVE HILL

Start from the public car park just before the gates of Belfast Castle. Take the path that leads up from the car park. After 150m you reach a horizontal path at a T-junction; go right and follow this trail as it continues uphill through the woods. After about 800m you emerge from the trees beneath Cave Hill's eastern crags. Fork left beneath the obvious caves that give the hill its name; if you keep straight on here, the path continues north for 1km to the Belfast Zoo car park and traverse to the north (right) beneath the cliffs then climb up to a shoulder (muddy). The path then doubles back to the south (left) and follows the cliff tops to the summit.

A little bridge and some steps lead up to the summit proper, an Iron Age fort surrounded by crags. There's a superb view across the city, harbour and lough, with Scrabo Hill and Tower prominent on the eastern horizon, and the rounded forms of the Mourne Mountains far away to the south.

Continue south then west on a broad, well-made trail for almost 1km. At a sharp bend to the right, beside a wooden bench, leave the trail on the left via a stile, and go downhill on a faint path through a field. Pass through another stile at an old quarry and turn left, keeping the quarry on your left. The path then descends more steeply through woods; at a T-junction go left on a better path which leads to the T-junction above the castle car park; turn right here to finish. (Total 5.5km; allow two hours)

has now outlasted the Berlin Wall, and zig-zags for some 4km from the Westlink to the lower slopes of Black Mountain. These days the gates in the wall remain open during the day, but most are still closed from 5pm to 8am. There are now more than 20 such barriers in Belfast, and a total of more than 40 throughout Northern Ireland, the most visible sign of the divisions that have scarred the province for so long.

Next, you pass the **Solidarity Wall**, a collection of murals expressing republican sympathies with, among others, the Palestinians, the Kurds and the Basques, along with several anti-George W Bush murals. Just past here Divis St becomes Falls Rd, and Conway St, on the right at the Celtic Bar, leads to **Conway Mill** (p588).

On the corner of Falls Rd and Sevastopol St is the red-brick **Sinn Féin headquarters**, with its famous mural of a smiling Bobby Sands, the hunger striker who was elected as MP for West Belfast just a few weeks before he died in 1981. The text reads, in Sands' own words, 'Our revenge will be the laughter of our children'. A few blocks further on, on the right between Waterford St and Springfield Rd, look out for the **Ruby Emerald Take-Away** at 105 Falls Rd – it was on the pavement outside this shop (known as Clinton's Hot Food from 1996 to 2003) that the historic handshake between Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams and US president Bill Clinton took place in November 1995.

On the left now are the artwork railings of the **Royal Victoria Hospital**, dating from 1906 and claiming to be the world's first air-conditioned building. Known locally as the RVH, it played an important role in creating the first ever portable defibrillator and, in the 1970s and '80s, developed a well-earned reputation for expertise in the treatment of gunshot wounds. The wavy form of the railings mimics the structure of DNA – look for the little yellow Xs and Ys for X- and Y-chromosomes – and the portraits (laser-cut in sheet steel) chart the progress of a human life from birth to the age of 100. Just beyond the hospital is the **Cultúrann MacAdam Ófiaich** (p588).

All along Falls Rd you'll see republican murals, as well as memorials in honour of people who have died during the conflict. At Islandbawn St on the right, the **Plastic Bullet Mural** commemorates the 17 people, including eight children, who were killed by plastic baton rounds (now banned) fired by the se-

curity services. Two streets on, on the right, is **Beechmount Ave**, with a huge 'Éirí Amach na Cásca' (Easter Rising) mural. Look at the street name – a hand-painted sign reads 'RPG Avenue'. 'RPG' stands for 'rocket-propelled grenade', and the street earned its nickname because it offered a line of sight for IRA rocket attacks on the security forces base in nearby Springfield Rd.

Another 15 minutes of walking will take you past the **City Cemetery** and Falls Park to **Milltown Cemetery** where the 1981 hunger strikers are buried. You'll see lots of green Hs attached to lamp posts (in memory of the H-blocks at the Maze prison where the hunger strikers were incarcerated); at Hugo St, opposite the City Cemetery, there's a large mural entitled 'St James's Support the Hunger Strikers'.

Return by the same route or catch any bus or taxi back to the city centre. There's a bus stop across the road from the Milltown Cemetery entrance.

BELFAST FOR CHILDREN

W5 (p586) is the city's biggest draw for kids – it's hard to drag them away once they get started on the hands-on exhibits – and the Odyssey Complex houses other attractions including a video-games arcade, a ten-pin bowling rink and an IMAX cinema. **Belfast Zoo** (p590) is a perennial favourite, and the **Ulster Museum** (p587) also has plenty of exhibits and special events designed for children of all ages.

For outdoor fun, head for the **Botanic Gardens** (p587), or the adventure playground in **Cave Hill Country Park** (p590). Or you can try crazy golf with a difference at **Pirates Adventure Golf** (☎ 9048 0220; www.piratesadventuregolf.com; 111A Dundonald Touring Caravan Park, Dundonald Rd; adult/child £5.50/3.75; ☹ 10am-10pm), a landscaped, 36-hole course decked out with waterfalls, fountains and a giant pirate ship.

Sweeties may not be at the top of parents' shopping lists these days, but you might be prepared to make an exception for **Aunt Sandra's Candy Factory** (☎ 9073 2868; www.irishcandyfactory.com; 60 Castlereagh Rd; ☹ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat). This 1950s-style shop sells fudge, candy, chocolates, toffee apples and other traditional sweets which have been made by hand, and you can get a tour of the workshop before buying the goods.

Located outside of town but near enough for a day trip, you'll find the **Ulster Folk & Trans-**

VOICES: KEN HARPER, BLACK-TAXI DRIVER

What do you do for a living? I do black-taxi tours. I started work in Belfast in 1968 – that was just the start of the so-called Troubles – and qualified as a taxi driver in 1979. I remember, just before the ceasefires of 1994, the odd tourist coming through Belfast and asking me for a tour. Now it's a major industry.

What do people want to see?

The most popular sights, without doubt, are the Shankill Rd and Falls Rd areas. For example, the murals, the so-called peace line and the general area around those roads which the Troubles affected greatly.

Do visitors understand the situation here?

Some tourists do and some don't understand the conflict and divisions in Northern Ireland, but I can explain to the majority of my tourists the background to the problem. The daftest question I have been asked was, 'Who is Sinn Féin?', thinking it was a person. Another tourist asked, on seeing a statue of Queen Victoria, 'Is that the bad Queen?'.

port Museums (p609), and the **Ark Open Farm** (p619), both of which are hugely popular with kids.

The free monthly *Whatabout?* booklet (available from the Belfast Welcome Centre) has a 'Family Fun' section, which lists events and attractions of interest to travellers with children. If you're in town in late May, look out for the **Belfast Children's Festival** (www.belfastchildrensfestival.com), which is packed with cultural and educational events.

TOURS

You can find full details of organised tours at the Belfast Welcome Centre (p580). If you want to hire a personal guide, call the Welcome Centre or contact the **Northern Ireland Tourist Guide Association** (☎ 9753 3370; www.bluebadgeireland.org; half-/full-day tours £75/130).

Boat Tours

Lagan Boat Company (☎ 9033 0844; www.laganboatcompany.com; adult/child £8/6) offers two 1½-hour boat tours: the **River Lagan Tour** (☹ 2pm & 3.30pm Mon, 12.30pm, 2pm & 3.30pm Tue-Thu Apr-Sep, 12.30pm & 2pm Tue-Thu Mar & Oct) heads upstream to Stranmillis, departing from the Lagan Lookout.

The excellent **Titanic Tour** (☹ 12.30pm & 2pm Fri-Mon Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov & Dec, also 3pm Fri-Mon May-Sep) explores the derelict docklands downstream of the weir, taking in the huge dry-dock where the liners *Titanic* and *Olympic* could fit with just nine inches to spare. The Titanic Tour departs from Donegall Quay near the *Bigfish* sculpture, and picks up passengers at the Odyssey Complex.

These tours are popular – it's safest to book in advance.

Bus Tours

Belfast City Sightseeing (☎ 9045 9035; www.belfastcitysightseeing.com; adult/child £11/5) Runs 1½-hour open-top bus tours that take in City Hall, the Albert Clock, the Titanic Quarter, the Botanic Gardens, and the Falls Rd and Shankill Rd murals in West Belfast. There are departures from Castle Pl every 30 minutes from 9.30am to 4.30pm from May to September, hourly from 10am to 4pm from October to March.

Belfast International Youth Hostel (☎ 9032 4733; www.minicoachni.co.uk; 22 Donegall Rd; tour adult/child £9/6) Recommended by many readers for its two-hour minibus tour that takes in all the city's main sights. Tours depart from the hostel (p595) daily at noon, and can be booked at the Belfast Welcome Centre.

Cycling Tours

Life Cycles (☎ 9043 9959; www.lifecycles.co.uk; 36-37 Smithfield Market; per person £12-16) Offers three-hour guided tours (minimum five people) of the city centre, South Belfast and the Lagan Towpath. The cost includes bike and helmet rental. Call to arrange a tour at least one day in advance. There are entrances on West St and Winetavern St.

Taxi Tours

Black-taxi tours of West Belfast's murals – known locally as the 'bombs and bullets' or 'doom and gloom' tours – are being offered by an increasing number of taxi companies and local cabbies. These can vary in quality and content, but in general they're an intimate and entertaining way to see the

sights and can be customised to suit your own interests. There are also historical taxi tours of the city centre. For a one-hour tour expect to pay £25 total for one or two people, and £8 per person for three to six. Call and they will pick you up anywhere in the city centre.

The following are recommended.

Harpers Taxi Tours (☎ 9074 2711, 07711-757178; www.harperstaxitours.co.nr)

Official Black Taxi Tours (☎ 9064 2262, toll-free ☎ 0800 052 3914; www.belfasttours.com)

Original Belfast Black Taxi Tours (☎ 9058 6996, 07751-565359)

Walking Tours

Belfast Pub Tours (☎ 9268 3665; www.belfastpubtours.com; per person £6; 🕒 departs 7pm Thu & 4pm Sat May-Oct) A two-hour tour (not including drinks) taking in six of the city's historic pubs, departing from the Crown Dining Rooms, above the Crown Liquor Saloon (p601) on Great Victoria St.

Blackstaff Way (☎ 9029 2631; per person £6; 🕒 departs 11am Sat) A fascinating 1½-hour historical tour through the city along the route of the Blackstaff River, which was channelled underground in 1881. Departs from the Belfast Welcome Centre.

Historic Belfast Walk (☎ 9024 6609; per person £6; 🕒 departs 2pm Wed & Fri-Sun) A 1½-hour tour that explores the architecture and history of the Victorian city centre and Lagside. Departs from the Belfast Welcome Centre.

Titanic Trail (☎ 9024 6609; one/two people £8/10) A state-of-the-art, self-guided trail which allows you to explore the city centre and Titanic Quarter at your own pace. A hand-held media player provides an audio-visual commentary, and shows you where to go using GPS technology. On hire from the Belfast Welcome Centre (two people can share one media player).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Belfast City Council** (☎ 9024 6609; www.belfastcity.gov.uk/events) organises a wide range of events throughout the year, covering everything from the St Patrick's Day parade to the Lord Mayor's Show, and has a very useful online events calendar.

March

Between the Lines (Crescent Arts Centre; ☎ 9024 2338; www.crescentarts.org) Ten-day literary festival.

St Patrick's Carnival (☎ 9031 3440; www.feilbelfast.com) A celebration of Ireland's patron saint marked by various community festivals and culminating in a grand city-centre parade on 17 March.

Belfast Film Festival (☎ 9032 5913; www.belfastfilmfestival.org) A week-long celebration of Irish and international film-making held in late March.

April

Titanic Made In Belfast Festival (☎ 9024 6609) A week-long celebration of the world's most famous ship, and the city that built her, with special exhibitions, tours, lectures and film screenings. First half of April.

May

Belfast Marathon (☎ 2587 2828; www.belfastcitymarathon.com) First Monday in May. Runners from across the globe come to compete but it's also a people's event, with a walk and fun run as well.

Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival (☎ 9023 2403; www.cqaf.com) Twelve days of drama, music, poetry, street theatre and art exhibitions in and around the Cathedral Quarter. Held in early May.

June

City Dance (Crescent Arts Centre; ☎ 9024 2338; www.crescentarts.org) Dance festival held at the Arts Centre.

July

Belfast Maritime Festival (☎ 9024 6609) A two-day festival at the beginning of July, centred on Queen's Quay and Clarendon Dock, with sailing ships, street entertainment, seafood festival and live music. In 2009 the festival will coincide with Belfast being one of the host ports for the Tall Ships Atlantic Challenge (www.sailtraininginternational.org).

August

Féile an Phobail (☎ 9031 3440; www.feilbelfast.com) Said to be the largest community festival in Ireland, the Féile takes place in West Belfast over 10 days in early August. Events include an opening carnival parade, street parties, theatre performances, concerts and historical tours of the City and Milltown cemeteries.

October

Belfast Festival at Queen's (☎ 9097 1197; www.belfastfestival.com) The UK's second-largest arts festival held in and around Queen's University during three weeks in late October and early November.

Halloween Carnival (☎ 9024 6609) Held from 27 to 31 October, with special events across the city, including a carnival parade, ghost tours and fireworks.

December

Christmas Festivities (☎ 9024 6609) A range of events from late November to 31 December, including carol singing, lamplight processions, a street carnival and a huge outdoor ice rink at the Odyssey Complex.

SLEEPING

From backpacker hostels to boutique hotels, the range of places to stay in Belfast gets wider every year. The traditional accommodation scene – red-brick B&Bs in the leafy suburbs of South Belfast and city-centre business hotels – has been lent a splash of colour in the form of stylish hotel-restaurant-nightclub combos such as Benedicts, and elegant but expensive boutique hotels set in refurbished historic buildings such as Ten Square and the Merchant Hotel.

Most of Belfast's budget and midrange accommodation is south of the centre, in the university district around Botanic Ave, University Rd and Malone Rd. This area is also crammed with good-value restaurants and pubs, and is mostly within a 20-minute walk of City Hall. You can expect to pay around £11 for a dorm bed in a hostel, approximately £45 to £65 for a double room in a good B&B or guesthouse, and about £70 to £100 for a double in a luxurious midrange hotel. The top-end and more expensive midrange places attract a business clientele during the week, and usually offer lower rates at weekends (Friday to Sunday nights).

Book ahead in summer or during busy festival periods. The Belfast Welcome Centre will make reservations for a fee of £2. You can also book accommodation through the **Lonely Planet website** (lonelyplanet.com).

City Centre

BUDGET

Belfast International Youth Hostel (☎ 9032 4733; www.hini.org.uk; 22-32 Donegall Rd; dm £8.50-12, s/d from £18/26; 🕒 🚿) Belfast's modern Hostelling International (HI) hostel is conveniently located just off Shaftesbury Sq, which means it can be a bit noisy at night when the pubs and clubs empty. The hostel has a kitchen, a laundry, a café and free linen; rates are slightly higher on Friday and Saturday nights. Take bus 9A or 9B from Donegall Sq East or Great Victoria St (across from the Europa BusCentre) to Bradbury Pl.

MIDRANGE

Benedicts (☎ 9059 1999; www.benedictshotel.co.uk; 7-21 Bradbury Pl; s/d from £65/75; 🕒) Set bang in the middle of the Golden Mile, Benedicts is a modern, style-conscious hotel at the heart of Belfast's nightlife. The rooms are above a

huge Gothic bar and restaurant (where you also have breakfast), so don't expect peace and quiet till after 1am. Free wi-fi.

Jury's Inn (☎ 9053 3500; www.jurysdoyle.com; Fish-erwick Pl, Great Victoria St; r £69-89; 🕒) Jury's bland modernity is more than made up for by its top location – only three minutes from City Hall and close to loads of good pubs and restaurants – and good value. Fixed room rates apply for anything up to three adults, or two adults and two kids. Breakfast is optional and costs £9 extra.

TOP END

Malmaison Hotel (☎ 9022 0200; www.malmaison-belfast.com; 34-38 Victoria St; r from £135, ste from £255; 🕒) Housed in a pair of beautifully restored Italianate warehouses (originally built for rival firms in the 1850s), the Malmaison is a luxurious haven of king-size beds, deep leather sofas and roll-top baths big enough for two, all done up in a decadent décor of black, red, dark chocolate and cream. The massive, rock-star penthouse suite has a giant bed (almost 3m long), a bathtub big enough for two and, wait for it ... a billiard table. With purple baize.

Ourpick Ten Square (☎ 9024 1001; www.tensquare.co.uk; 10 Donegall Sq S; r from £165; 🕒) A former bank building to the south of City Hall that has been given a designer feng-shui makeover, Ten Square is an opulent, Shanghai-inspired boutique hotel with friendly and attentive service. Magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Conde Nast Traveller* drool over the dark lacquered wood, cream carpets, low-slung futon-style beds and sumptuous linen, and the list of former guests includes Bono, Moby and Brad Pitt.

Merchant Hotel (☎ 9023 4888; www.themerchanthotel.com; 35-39 Waring St; r from £220, ste from £290; 🕒 P) Belfast's most flamboyant Victorian building, the old Ulster Bank head office, has been converted into the city's most flamboyant boutique hotel, a fabulous fusion of old-fashioned elegance and contemporary styling.

South Belfast

To get to places on or near Botanic Ave, take bus 7A or 7B from Howard St. For places on or near University and Malone Rds take bus 8A or 8B, and for places on or near Lisburn Rd take bus 9A or 9B; both depart from Donegall Sq East, and from the bus stop on Great Victoria St across from the Europa BusCentre.

AIRPORT ACCOMMODATION

Park Plaza Hotel (☎ 9445 7000; www.parkplazabelfast.com; Belfast International Airport, Aldergrove; s/d £105/120; 📍 📞) Immediately opposite the terminal at Belfast International Airport, the 106-room Park Plaza has a business centre, conference facilities and free courtesy transport to the city centre.

Park Avenue Hotel (☎ 9065 6520; www.parkavenuehotel.co.uk; 158HolywoodRd;s/d£79/99; 📍 📞) The classy 56-room Park Avenue is the nearest hotel to Belfast City Airport (3km away), and 3km east of the city centre.

BUDGET

Paddy's Palace Belfast (☎ ☎ 9033 3367; www.paddyspalace.com; 68 Lisburn Rd; dm £6-13.50, s/d £27/37; 📍 📞) A newish kid on the block, Paddy's offers clean and comfortable dorms, a big, well-equipped kitchen and a bright and homely common room, though the dorms are a bit gloomy. It has free internet and friendly staff who are happy to point you to the best local pubs. There's no sign outside, so it's easy to miss – bang on the door at the corner of Lisburn Rd and Fitzwilliam St.

Arnie's Backpackers (☎ 9024 2867; www.arniesbackpackers.co.uk; 63 Fitzwilliam St; dm £9-11; 📍) This long-established hostel is set in a quiet terraced house in the university area, with plenty of lively bars and restaurants nearby. It's a bit on the small side, but real coal fires, a friendly crowd, and the ever-helpful Arnie himself (and his two cute Jack Russell terriers) make it more cosy than cramped.

ourpick Ark (☎ 9032 9626; www.arkhostel.com; 44 University St; dm £11, s/d £20/32; 📍) The Ark has moved to a snazzy new home on the corner of University St and Botanic Ave (look for the tiny sign above the door), bang in the heart of Queens student quarter. It's small, convivial and newly kitted out with modern fittings. It has its own internet café, and is more family friendly than other hostels; there's also a 2am curfew.

Kate's B&B (☎ 9028 2091; katesbb127@hotmail.com; 127 University St; s/d £25/50) Kate's is a homely kind of place, from the window boxes bursting with colourful flowers to the cute dining room crammed with bric-a-brac and a couple of resident cats. The bedrooms are basic but comfortable, and the showers are

a bit cramped, but at this price – and only a few minutes' walk from Botanic Ave – we're not complaining.

All Seasons B&B (☎ 9068 2814; www.allseasonsbelfast.com; 356 Lisburn Rd; s/d/f £30/50/60; 📍) Away from the centre, but right in the heart of trendy Lisburn Rd, All Seasons is a red-brick villa with bright, colourful bedrooms, modern bathrooms, a stylish little breakfast room and a comfortable lounge. Take bus 9A or 9B from the city centre; the house is between Cranmore Ave and Cranmore Gardens, 150m past the big police station.

MIDRANGE

Bienvenue Guesthouse (☎ 9066 8003; bienvenueguesthouse@aol.com; 8 Sans Souci Park; s/d £42/60; 📍 📞) Set in a grand Victorian house with a tree-lined garden in a quiet side street off Malone Rd, the Bienvenue's four rooms offer hotel-standard accommodation, with period antiques (including a half-tester bed in one room), direct-dial phones, 24-hour reception and daily newspapers.

ourpick Old Rectory (☎ 9066 7882; www.anoldrectory.co.uk; 148 Malone Rd; s/d £46/66; 📍) A lovely red-brick Victorian villa with lots of original period features, this former rectory has four spacious bedrooms, a comfortable drawing room with a leather sofa and fancy breakfasts (venison sausages, scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, freshly squeezed OJ). It's a 10-minute bus ride from the centre – the inconspicuous driveway is on the left, just past Deramore Park South.

Camera Guesthouse (☎ 9066 0026; camera_gh@hotmail.com; 44 Wellington Park; s/d £50/68) A cosy, welcoming Victorian B&B with an open fire in the drawing room, the Camera is set in yet another of South Belfast's peaceful, tree-lined terraces. The tasty breakfasts are prepared using organic produce, and the friendly couple who own the place are a fount of knowledge on what to see and do in town.

TOP FIVE BELFAST RESTAURANTS

- Beatrice Kennedy's (p600)
- Cayenne (p598)
- Deane's Restaurant (p598)
- Roscoff (p598)
- Shu (p600)

Tara Lodge (☎ 9059 0900; www.taralodge.com; 36 Cromwell Rd; s/d/tr £65/75/105; 📍 📞) This B&B is a cut above your average South Belfast guest-house, with its stylish, minimalist décor; friendly, efficient staff; delicious breakfasts; and 18 bright and cheerful rooms. Great location too, on a quiet side street just a few paces from the buzz of Botanic Ave.

Crescent Town House (☎ 9032 3349; www.crescenttownhouse.com; 13 Lower Cres; s/d/tr from £90/110/130; 📍 📞) Another stylish boutique hotel with a perfect location, the Crescent is an elegant Victorian town house transformed into a den of designer chic, with its finger on the pulse of the city's party zone. Rooms have silky, Ralph Lauren-style décor and luxury bathrooms with Molton Brown toiletries and walk-in rain-head showers.

TOP END

ourpick Malone Lodge Hotel (☎ 9038 8000; www.malonelodge.com; 60 Eglantine Ave; s/d/apt from £85/120/109; 📍 📞) The centrepiece of a tree-lined Victorian terrace, the modern Malone Lodge has pulled in many plaudits for its large, luxurious rooms with elegant gold and navy décor, good food and pleasant, helpful staff. It also offers five-star self-catering apartments (one-, two- and three-bedroom).

Best Western Wellington Park Hotel (☎ 9038 1111; www.wellingtonparkhotel.com; 21 Malone Rd; s/d from £105/120; 📍 📞) A modern makeover with sunny yellow décor and designer frills has made the Wellie Park into a family-friendly, business-friendly place that appeals to a wide range of people, and provides the little luxuries that make you want to come back – overstuffed sofas, bathrobes and slippers, newspapers delivered to your room. Beware, though – it can be noisy at weekends, when the hotel pulls in more of a party crowd.

Outside the Centre

Dundonald Touring Caravan Park (☎ 9080 9100; www.theicebowl.com; 111 Old Dundonald Rd, Dundonald; camp/caravan sites £9.50/16.50; ☎ Mar-Sep) This small site (22 pitches) in a park next to the Dundonald Icebowl is the nearest camping ground to Belfast, 7km east of the city centre and south of the A20 road to Newtownards.

Farset International (☎ 9089 9833; www.farsetinternational.co.uk; 446 Springfield Rd; s/d £34/48; 📍 📞) This is a community-run venture in West Belfast, best described as a posh hostel. The

bright and cheerful modern complex is set in grounds overlooking a small lake, and has 38 en-suite rooms with TV. Rates include breakfast, and in the evening you can eat in the restaurant or use the self-catering kitchen.

EATING

In the last five years or so Belfast's restaurant scene has been totally transformed by a wave of new restaurants whose standards now compare with the best eating places in Europe.

City Centre

The main shopping area north of Donegall Sq becomes a silent maze of deserted streets and steel shutters after 7pm, but during the day the many pubs, cafés and restaurants do a roaring trade. In the evening, the liveliest part of the city centre stretches south of Donegall Sq to Shaftesbury Sq.

BUDGET

Charlie's Gourmet Sandwich Bar (☎ 9024 6097; 48 Upper Queen St; mains £1-4; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Charlie's is good place for cheap, healthy and filling sandwiches, and also serves a range of breakfasts from toasted soda bread to the full Ulster fry.

Ann's Pantry (☎ 9024 9090; 29-31 Queen's Arcade; mains £1.20-5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) A tiny bakery with next-door coffee shop, Ann's serves superb home-made soups, pies (try the steak and Guinness), cakes and choose-your-own sandwiches to take away or sit in.

Café Paul Rankin (☎ 9031 5090; 27-29 Fountain St; mains £2-5; ☎ 7.30am-6pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 7.30am-9pm Thu) Owned by Northern Ireland's best-known celebrity chef, this café has comfy benches and sofas for lounging on, and serves quality coffee, cakes, focaccias, soups, pastas and salads.

ourpick Flour (☎ 9033 9966; 46 Upper Queen St; mains £4-5; ☎ 7.30am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, to 10.30pm Thu) This funky little creperie tempts in hungry shoppers with a range of baguettes and sweet and savoury pancakes with healthy fillings such as olives, feta cheese and sun-dried tomatoes. Home-made soups and freshly squeezed juices are also on the menu.

Morning Star (☎ 9023 3976; 17 Pottinger's Entry; mains £5-15; ☎ food served noon-9pm Mon-Sat) This former coaching inn is famed for its all-you-can-eat lunch buffet (£5). The upstairs restaurant

features traditional Irish beef (big 700g steaks cost £15), mussels, oysters and eels, as well as more unusual things like alligator and ostrich. See also under Drinking, p601.

MIDRANGE

Altos (☎ 9032 3087; Anderson McCauley Bldg, Fountain St; mains £6-10; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Wed, to 8pm Thu, to 6pm Fri & Sat) This popular, high-ceilinged bistro is decked out in giant, modern-art canvases and bright ochre and turquoise colours that match the Mediterranean influence on the menu, which includes a good selection of vegetarian dishes.

Archana (☎ 9032 3713; 53 Dublin Rd; mains £6-11; ☎ noon-2pm & 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 5-11pm Sun) A cosy and unpretentious Indian restaurant, Archana offers a good range of vegetarian dishes from its separate 'Little India' menu. The *thali* – a platter of three curries with rice, naan bread, pakora and dessert – is good value at £13/9 for the meat/veggie version.

ourpick Mourne Seafood Bar (☎ 9024 8544; 34-36 Bank St; mains £9-14; ☎ noon-6pm Mon, noon-9pm Tue, noon-9.30pm Wed & Thu, noon-10.30pm Fri & Sat, 1-6pm Sun) This informal, public space, all red brick and dark wood with old oil lamps dangling from the ceiling, is tucked behind a fishmonger's shop, so the seafood is as fresh as it gets. On the menu are oysters served *au naturel* or Rockefeller, meltingly sweet scallops with saffron linguini, salt and chilli squid, and roast garnard with mustard and dill cream. Hugely popular, so best book ahead, especially on Sunday.

Speranza 2 (☎ 9023 0213; 16-19 Shaftesbury Sq; mains £9-15; ☎ 5-11.30pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-2.30pm & 3-10pm Sun) A local institution – it's been around for more than 20 years – the recently revamped Speranza is a big, buzzing Italian restaurant that complements traditional pizzas and pastas with more sophisticated dishes. It's family friendly, with a kids' menu, high-chairs, colouring books and crayons. They only take reservations for groups of six or more; otherwise, pop in and wait in the bar for a table.

Water Margin (☎ 9032 6888; 159-161 Donegall Pass; mains £11-16; ☎ noon-11pm) You can worship at the altar of Cantonese cuisine in this stylishly converted church, a five-minute walk east of Shaftesbury Sq. Expect authentic Chinese food from the Cantonese chefs and friendly, professional service.

Oxford Exchange (☎ 9024 0014; 1st fl, St George's Market, Oxford St; mains £11-17; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Thu,

noon-11pm Fri & 5-11pm Sat) Smart and stylish with bare pine floors, chocolate brown chairs, white linen napkins and a yellow tulip on each table, the Oxford has breezy charm and a menu of high-end comfort food – try the beer-battered cod with mushy peas, and chunky chips served in a twist of newspaper.

Cayenne (☎ 9033 1532; 7 Ascot House, Shaftesbury Sq; mains £12-20, 2-/3-course lunch £13/16; ☎ noon-2.15pm Mon-Fri, 6-10.15pm Mon-Thu, 6-11.15pm Fri & Sat, 6-8.45pm Sun) Behind an anonymous frosted-glass façade lurks a funky, award-winning restaurant operated by TV celebrity chef, Paul Rankin, decked out in designer black and amber and clad in conceptual art. The menu concentrates on quality Irish produce prepared with an Asian or Mediterranean twist.

Ginger (☎ 9024 4421; 7-8 Hope St; mains £14-18; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Sat) Ginger is one of those places you could walk right past without noticing, but if you do you'll be missing out. It's a cosy and informal little bistro with an unassuming exterior, serving food that is anything but ordinary – the flame-haired owner-chef (hence the name) really knows what he's doing, sourcing top-quality Irish produce and turning out exquisite dishes such as salad of seared sirloin steak with sweet pickled onion, wasabi and mango purée, and oyster mushroom tartlet with creamy green peppercorn puy lentils and parsnip chips.

TOP END

Deane's Restaurant (☎ 9033 1134; 34-40 Howard St; mains £15-20, 2-/3-course lunch £16/20; ☎ noon-3pm & 5.30-10pm Mon-Sat) Chef Michael Deane heads the kitchen in Northern Ireland's only Michelin-starred restaurant, where he takes the best of Irish and British produce – beef, game, lamb, seafood – and gives it the gourmet treatment. Typical dishes include pan-fried scallops with pickled carrots, watercress purée and orange vinaigrette, and rack of venison with baked potato purée, red cabbage marmalade and spiced pear *confit*. Revamped in 2007, the ultracoold dining room is open-plan and minimalist.

ourpick Roscoff (☎ 9031 1150; 7-11 Linenhall St; mains £16-22; ☎ noon-2.15pm Mon-Fri, 6-10.15pm Mon-Thu, 6-11.15pm Fri & Sat) A muted décor in shades of slate blue, white and dark grey, with polished wood floors and white linen, puts the food squarely centre stage in this sophisticated and smoothly run restaurant. Part of the Paul Rankin stable, Roscoff takes inspiration from Irish produce and French cuisine, with dishes

such as *carpaccio* (very thin slices of raw meat) of venison with celeriac remoulade, and pot roast turbot with mussels and tarragon cream. There's a two-/three-course lunch menu for £16/20, and a three-course dinner menu for £25 (Monday to Thursday only).

Great Room (☎ 9023 4888; Merchant Hotel, 35-39 Waring St; 2-/3-course lunch £16/20, mains £23-25; ☎ 7am-11pm) Set in the former banking hall of the Ulster Bank head office, the Great Room is a jaw-dropping extravaganza of gilded stucco, red plush, white marble cherubs and a vast crystal chandelier glittering beneath a glass dome. The menu matches the décor, decadent but delicious, a French-influenced catalogue of political incorrectness laced with foie gras, veal, truffles and caviar.

Cathedral Quarter & Around

John Hewitt Bar & Restaurant (☎ 9023 3768; 51 Donegall St; mains £5-7; ☎ food served noon-3pm Mon-Sat) Named for the Belfast poet and socialist, this is a modern pub with a traditional atmosphere and a well-earned reputation for excellent food. The menu changes weekly, but includes inventive dishes such as broccoli and Cashel blue cheese tart with sauté potatoes and dressed salad. It's also a great place for a drink (see p601).

McHugh's Bar & Restaurant (☎ 9050 9999; 29-31 Queen's Sq; mains lunch £5-7, dinner £8-15; ☎ food served noon-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun) This restored pub has a traditional feel with its old wooden booths and benches, and boasts one of the city's best bar-restaurants, serving traditional pub grub downstairs (till 7pm) and fancier dishes in the mezzanine restaurant upstairs (from 5pm). The house speciality is oriental stir-fries.

Hill Street Brasserie (☎ 9058 6868; 38 Hill St; mains lunch £5-7, dinner £14-22; ☎ noon-3pm Mon-Sat, 5-11pm Tue-Sat) In keeping with the design studios and art galleries that throng the nearby streets, this little brasserie is desperately trendy, from the slate-and-wood floor to the aubergine-and-olive colour scheme. Dinner is a bit overpriced, but the lunch menu is a bargain offering a choice of home-made burgers, risotto of the day and a flavoursome and filling seafood chowder.

Nick's Warehouse (☎ 9043 9690; 35-39 Hill St; mains £10-19; ☎ food served noon-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 6-9.30pm Tue-Sat) A Cathedral Quarter pioneer (opened in 1989), Nick's is an enormous red-brick and blonde-wood wine bar and restaurant buzzing with happy drinkers and diners. The menu is

strong on inventive seafood and veggie dishes, such as grilled swordfish on coconut rice with a pineapple, chilli, and sweetcorn relish, and spinach, red pepper and parmesan roulade with a tomato sauce and basil pesto.

South Belfast

BUDGET

Maggie May's (☎ 9032 2662; 50 Botanic Ave; mains £3-6; ☎ 8am-10.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10.30pm Sun) This is a homely little café with two rows of cosy wooden booths, colourful murals of old Belfast, and a host of hungover students wolfing down huge Ulster fries at lunchtime. The all-day breakfast menu runs from tea and toast to pancakes and maple syrup, while lunch can be soup and a sarnie or steak-and-Guinness pie; puddings include Dime Bar and sticky toffee. BYOB.

Other Place (☎ 9020 7200; 79 Botanic Ave; mains £7-9; ☎ 8am-5pm) This is another student favourite where you can linger over the Sunday papers amid red brick, orange pine and antique *objets*, or damp down a rising hangover with big plates of lasagne, cajun pitta or home-made hamburgers. Breakfast served till 11am.

MIDRANGE

ourpick Mollis's Yard (☎ 9032 2600; 1 College Green Mews; lunch mains £5-8, 2-/3-course dinner £20/25; ☎ noon-9.30pm Mon-Sat) A restored Victorian stables courtyard is the setting for this superb restaurant, with a cosy bar-bistro on the ground floor, outdoor tables in the yard and a rustic dining room in the airy roof space upstairs. The menu is seasonal and sticks to half a dozen each of starters and mains, ranging from gourmet confections such as penne and shredded confit duck with roast garlic and parmesan cream to hearty comfort food such as cottage pie. It also has its own microbrewery (see p602).

Café India (☎ 9066 6955; 42-46 Malone Rd; mains £7-10; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 5-11.30pm Mon-Thu, noon-midnight Fri & Sat, 1-11.30pm Sun) A cut above your average curry house, Café India is a big, split-level barn of a place with a high, raftered ceiling and lots of varnished wood. The food is exceptionally good – we can recommend the *palok chaat* (spiced spinach and onion fritters) and chicken tikka *achari zeera* (tandoori chicken in a tangy sauce flavoured with cumin and pickles).

Deane's at Queen's (☎ 9038 2111; 1 College Gardens; mains £8-14; ☎ 11.30am-9pm Mon & Tue, 11.30am-10pm Wed-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) A chilled-out bar and grill

from Belfast's top chef, Michael Deane, this place focuses on what could be described as good-value, gourmet pub grub, with a list of dishes that includes mussels in cider, leek and Gruyère tart, Lyonnaise sausage and mash with *choucroute* (shredded, pickled cabbage), and haddock and chips with mushy peas and dill tartare.

Café Conor (☎ 9066 3266; 11A Stranmillis Rd; mains £8-15; ☎ 9am-11pm) Set in the glass-roofed former studio of William Conor, a Belfast artist, this is a laid-back bistro with a light and airy dining area dominated by a portrait of Conor himself. The menu offers a range of pastas, salads, burgers and stir-fries, along with Irish favourites such as sausage and champ with onion gravy. The breakfast menu, which includes waffles with bacon and maple syrup, is served till noon on weekdays, 3pm at weekends.

Serai (☎ 9032 4000; 1 University St; mains £10-12; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 5.30-11pm Sat, noon-2.30pm & 5.30-10.30pm Sun) Crammed with well-heeled students gabbing over glasses of Chilean Sauv Blanc, Serai is a stylish bar-restaurant with an intriguing Asian fusion menu ranging from succulent chicken satay with salad dressed in soy sauce and sesame seeds, to stir-fried squid with lemongrass and chilli, and *ikan kukus* (fish steamed in banana leaf with hot-and-sour sauce). The early-bird menu, served 5.30pm to 7pm, offers a two-course dinner including one drink for £12.50.

Shu (☎ 9038 1655; 253 Lisburn Rd; mains £10-18; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm Mon-Fri, 7-9.30pm Sat) If you want to know who to blame for all those copycat designer restaurants with the dark-wood-and-chocolate-brown-leather look, then look no further. Lording it over the hipper-than-thou Lisburn Rd since 2000, Shu is the granddaddy of Belfast chic, a stylish restaurant with a basement bar that is still regularly winning awards for its food. The French-influenced menu includes frogs' legs and foie gras and dishes such as roast corn-fed chicken with ragout of white beans and lemon thyme, and wild mushroom, squash and ricotta *pithivier* (pastry parcel) with parsnip purée.

our pick **Beatrice Kennedy's** (☎ 9020 2290; 44 University Rd; mains £14-17; ☎ 5-10.15pm Tue-Sat, 12.30-2.30pm & 5-8.15pm Sun) This is where Queen's students take their parents for a smart dinner. It offers a candle-lit Edwardian drawing-room décor of burgundy, bottle green and bare red brick, with polished floorboards, starched white linen and brown leather chairs, and

TOP FIVE TRADITIONAL PUBS

- Bittle's Bar (opposite)
- Crown Liquor Saloon (opposite)
- Duke of York (opposite)
- Kelly's Cellars (opposite)
- Morning Star (opposite)

a simple menu of superb cuisine, including home-made bread and ice cream. Enjoy dishes such as smoked trout and crab tart, and roast monkfish with butternut squash purée and fennel. There's a separate vegetarian menu with dishes such as spinach and apple tart with potato gratin and fennel salad. From 5pm to 7pm you can get a two-course dinner for £13.

Outside the Centre

An Caife (☎ 9096 4184; Cultúrlann MacAdam ÓFiaich, 216 Falls Rd, West Belfast; mains £5-7; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) If you're exploring West Belfast, drop in to the café in this Irish language and arts centre (see p588) for some good home-cooked food – the menu includes stews, soups, pizzas, cakes, scones and fresh pastries.

Cutters River Grill (☎ 9080 5100; 4 Lockview Rd, Stranmillis; mains lunch £8-13, dinner £9-19; ☎ food served noon-10pm) One of the few bar-restaurants in Belfast with a waterside setting, Cutters has a terrace overlooking the River Lagan where you can enjoy lunch – try home-made lasagne or smoked chicken salad – while watching sculls and eights from the nearby rowing club messing about on the river.

DRINKING

Belfast's pub scene is lively and friendly, with the older traditional pubs complemented – and increasingly threatened – by a rising tide of stylish designer bars.

Standard opening hours are 11am or 11.30am to midnight or 1am, and 12.30pm to 11pm or midnight Sunday; some pubs remain closed all day Sunday, or don't open till 4pm or 6pm.

The worst thing about drinking in Belfast is getting past the bouncers on the door – the huge number of security staff employed in the city means that polite, well-trained doormen are a rarity. Some of the flashier bars have a dress code – usually no training shoes, no

jeans, no baseball caps (so that the security cameras can get a clear shot of your face) and definitely no football colours. A few even specify 'No political tattoos'.

City Centre

Crown Liquor Saloon (☎ 9024 9476; 46 Great Victoria St) Belfast's most famous bar has a wonderfully ornate Victorian interior. Despite being a tourist attraction (see p583), it still fills up with crowds of locals at lunchtime and in the early evening.

Garrick Bar (☎ 9032 1984; 29 Chichester St) Established in 1870, but recently refurbished, the Garrick hangs on to a traditional atmosphere with acres of dark wood panelling, tiled floors, a pillared bar and old brass oil lamps. There are snug booths with buttoned leather benches, and a real coal fire in each room. There's traditional music sessions in the front bar from 9pm on Wednesdays, and 5pm to 9pm Fridays.

Irene & Nan's (☎ 9023 9123; 12 Brunswick St) Named after two pensioners from a nearby pub who fancied themselves as glamour queens, Irene & Nan's typifies the new breed of Belfast bar, dripping with designer chic and tempting your taste buds with an in-bar bistro. It's a laid-back place with a 1950s retro theme, good food and good cocktails.

Morning Star (☎ 9023 5986; 17 Pottinger's Entry) One of several traditional pubs hidden away in the pedestrian alleys off High St, the Morning Star dates back to at least 1810 when it was mentioned in the *Belfast News Letter* as a terminal for the Dublin to Belfast stage coach. It has a big sweeping horseshoe bar, and cosy snugs for privacy. See also p597.

White's Tavern (☎ 9024 3080; 1-4 Wine Cellar Entry) Established in 1630 but rebuilt in 1790, White's claims to be Belfast's oldest tavern (unlike a pub, a tavern provided food and lodging). Downstairs is a traditional Irish bar with open peat fire and live folk music Wednesday to Saturday, upstairs is all red brick, pine and polished copper, with DJs playing from Thursday to Saturday.

Kelly's Cellars (☎ 9032 4835; 1 Bank St) Kelly's is Belfast's oldest pub (1720) – as opposed to tavern; see White's Tavern – and was a meeting place for Henry Joy McCracken and the United Irishmen when they were planning the 1798 Rising. The story goes that McCracken hid behind the bar when British soldiers came for him. It remains

resolutely old-fashioned, with vaulted ceiling and elbow-worn bar, is crammed with bric-a-brac and pulls in broad cross-section of Belfast society.

Bittle's Bar (☎ 9031 1088; 103 Victoria St) A cramped and staunchly traditional bar that occupies Belfast's only 'flat iron' building, Bittle's is a 19th-century triangular red-brick building decorated with gilded shamrocks. The wedge-shaped interior is covered in paintings of Ireland's literary heroes by local artist Joe O'Kane. Pride of place on the back wall is taken by a large canvas depicting Yeats, Joyce, Behan and Beckett at the bar with glasses of Guinness, and Wilde pulling the pints on the other side.

Cathedral Quarter & Around

John Hewitt Bar & Restaurant (☎ 9023 3768; 51 Donegal St) The John Hewitt is one of those treasured bars that have no TV and no gaming machines; the only noise here is the murmur of conversation. As well as Guinness, the bar serves Hilden real ales from nearby Lisburn, plus Hoegaarden and Erdinger wheat beers. There are regular sessions of folk, jazz and bluegrass from 6pm on Saturday, 3pm Sunday, and around 9pm the rest of the week. See also p599.

Northern Whig (☎ 9050 9888; 2 Bridge St) A stylish modern bar set in an elegant Georgian printing works, the Northern Whig's airy interior is dominated by three huge Socialist-Realist statues rescued from Prague in the early 1990s. Its relaxing sofas and armchairs in fashionable chocolate and café-au-lait colours encourage serious afternoon loafing, though the pace hots up considerably after 5pm on Friday and Saturday when the stag-and-hen-party crowd starts knocking back the WKDs and Bacardi Breezers.

Duke of York (☎ 9024 1062; 11 Commercial Ct) Hidden away down an alley in the heart of the city's former newspaper district, the snug, traditional Duke was a hang-out for print workers and journalists and still pulls in a few hacks. One claim to fame is that the Sinn Féin leader, Gerry Adams, worked behind the bar here during his student days.

Spaniard (☎ 9023 2448; 3 Skipper St) Forget 'style': this narrow, crowded bar, which looks as if it's been squeezed into someone's flat, has more atmosphere in one battered sofa than most 'style bars' have in their shiny entirety. Friendly staff, good beer, an eclectic

crowd and cool tunes played at a volume that still allows you to talk: bliss. On Sunday from 9pm to midnight is You Say We Play, with the DJ playing requests only.

Rotterdam (☎ 9074 6021; 54 Pilot St) The Rotterdam is a purist's pub, unrepentantly old-fashioned and wonderfully atmospheric, with stone floors, an open fire, low ceilings and perfectly poured Guinness. It's famed for the quality of its live-music sessions – jazz, folk, rock or blues plays most nights, and in summer the tables, and the gigs, spill outdoors.

South Belfast

Eglantine (☎ 9038 1994; 32 Malone Rd) The 'Eg' is a local institution, and widely reckoned to be the best of Belfast's student pubs. It serves good beer and good food, and there are DJs spinning most nights. Wicked Wednesday pulls in the crowds with an electric rodeo bull, bouncy boxing, sumo-wrestler suits and other fun, and Tuesday is the big music and entertainment quiz night. Expect to see a few stag and hen parties stagger through at weekends.

Botanic Inn (☎ 9050 9740; 23-27 Malone Rd) The 'Bot' is the second pillar of Malone Rd's unholy trinity of student pubs, along with the 'Eg' and the 'Welly Park' (Wellington Park). The latter has sadly been renovated into airport-departure-lounge anonymity, but the Bot is still a wild place, with dancing in the upstairs Top of the Bot club Thursday to Saturday (people queue down the street to get in), live folk music from 9pm on Wednesday, and big-screen sport when there's a match on.

Globe (☎ 9050 9848; 36 University Rd) This popular student pub seems to be the karaoke capital of Belfast, with sing-it-yourself sessions almost every night; the pseudo-1970s décor goes well with the wild retro sessions on Wednesday nights. On Saturday afternoons sport is the order of the day with football or rugby blaring on half a dozen giant screens.

Molly's Yard (☎ 9032 2600; 1 College Green Mews; ☒ closed Sun) This atmospheric restaurant-bar (see also p599) is home to Northern Ireland's first microbrewery, producing three varieties of real ale – Belfast Blonde (a continental-style lager), Molly's Chocolate Stout and Headless Dog, a dark amber ale with a refreshingly hoppy and slightly flowery flavour.

ENTERTAINMENT

The Belfast Welcome Centre issues *Whatabout?*, a free monthly guide to Belfast events, with pub, club and restaurant listings. The Thursday issue of the *Belfast Telegraph* has an Entertainment section with club, gig and cinema listings, as does the Scene section in Friday's *Irish News*.

The **Big List** (www.thebiglist.co.uk) is a weekly freesheet, published on Wednesday, that covers pubs, clubs and music events all over Northern Ireland, although the emphasis is heavily on Belfast. The **Belfast Beat** (www.admanpublishing.com) is a free monthly guide listing what's on where on Friday and Saturday. **ArtsListings** (www.artslistings.com) is another free monthly that covers the arts scene throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

Clubbing

Club hours are generally 9pm to 3am, with no admittance after 1am.

Milk (☎ 9027 8876; www.clubmilk.com; Tomb St; admission £5-10; ☒ Wed-Sun) Set in a converted red-brick warehouse, Milk has maintained its position as one of Belfast's hottest and most sophisticated clubs. Snatch on Thursday is the city's biggest R&B and hip-hop night, Fridays are for disco, house and electro, and on Saturday resident and guest DJs play house.

La Lea (☎ 9023 0200; www.lalea.com; 43 Franklin St; admission £2-5; ☒ from 9pm Wed-Sat) Billed as Belfast's most prestigious nightclub, La Lea caters to a cocktail-sipping, style-conscious over-23 crowd (which translates as 'no students'), with a strict door policy to keep out the riff-raff. Impressive décor with space-age lighting and huge Cambodian stone heads.

QUB Student Union (☎ 0870 241 0126; www.qubstudents.com; Mandela Hall, Queen's Students Union, University Rd) The student union has various bars and music venues hosting club nights, live bands and stand-up comedy. The monthly Shine (www.shine.net; first Saturday of the month; admission £19) is one of the city's best club nights with resident and guest DJs pumping out harder and heavier dance music than most of Belfast's other clubs.

Stiff Kitten (☎ 9023 8700; www.thestiffkitten.com; Bankmore Sq, Dublin Rd; admission £5-10; ☒ 11am-1am Mon-Wed, to 2am Thu, to 2.30am Fri, to 3am Sat, to midnight Sun) If the student union is too grungy a venue for your tastes head for the Stiff Kitten, a stylish new bar and club under the same management as Shine. Same serious attitude to the

music, but distinctly glitzier, appealing to an over-25 crowd.

Gay & Lesbian Venues

Belfast's rapidly expanding gay scene is concentrated in the Cathedral Quarter. For information on what's happening, check out www.gaybelfast.net and www.queernt.com.

Kremlin (☎ 9080 9700; www.kremlin-belfast.com; 96 Donegal St; ☒ 9pm-2.30am Tue, 9pm-3am Wed-Sun) Gay-owned and operated, the Soviet-kitsch-themed Kremlin is the heart and soul of Northern Ireland's gay scene. A statue of Lenin guides you into Tsar, the pre-club bar, from where the Long Bar leads into the main clubbing zone, Red Square. There's something going on seven nights a week – Event Horizon (admission £5, midnight to 6am) on Saturdays is the city's only all-night club.

Dubarrys Bar (☎ 9032 3590; www.dubarrysbar.co.uk; 10-14 Gresham St) One of Belfast's newest gay venues, Dubarrys is aimed at a slightly older, more sophisticated crowd who are looking for designer décor, cool tunes and conversation rather than flashing lights and banging dance music. Lick! (www.lick-women.com) is a lesbian club night, held at Dubarrys the third Friday of the month.

Mynt (☎ 9023 4520; www.myntbelfast.com; 2-16 Dunbar St) Another new club complex with a vast, luxurious lounge bar and two club spaces, Mynt provides entertainment all through the week, culminating in hilarious Sunday-night game shows hosted by Belfast's favourite drag queen, Baroness Titti von Tramp.

Union Street (☎ 9031 6060; www.unionstreetpub.com; 8-14 Union St) A stylish modern bar with retro styling and lots of bare brick and dark wood – check out the Belfast sinks in the loo – Union Street pulls in a mixed gay and straight crowd, attracted by the laid-back atmosphere and good food.

Other gay-friendly pubs include the **Nest** (☎ 9032 5491; 22-28 Skipper St), the John Hewitt (p601) and the Spaniard (p601).

Live Music & Comedy

Big-name bands and performers play to sell-out crowds at the Ulster Hall, Waterfront Hall, Odyssey Arena or King's Hall.

MAJOR VENUES

Waterfront Hall (☎ 9033 4455; www.waterfront.co.uk; 2 Lanyon Pl) The impressive 2235-seat Waterfront

is Belfast's flagship concert venue, hosting local, national and international performers from pop stars to symphony orchestras.

Odyssey Arena (☎ 9073 9074; www.odysseyarena.com; 2 Queen's Quay) The home stadium for the Belfast Giants ice-hockey team is also the venue for big entertainment events such as rock and pop concerts, stage shows and indoor sports.

King's Hall (☎ 9066 5225; www.kingshall.co.uk; Lisburn Rd) Northern Ireland's biggest exhibition and conference centre hosts a range of music shows, trade fairs and sporting events. It's accessible by any bus along Lisburn Rd or by train to Balmoral Station.

ROCK

Belfast Empire (☎ 9024 9276; www.thebelfastempire.com; 42 Botanic Ave; admission £4-10) A converted late-Victorian church with three floors of entertainment, the Empire is a legendary live-music venue. The regular Thursday night Gifted session showcases the best of new talent, both local and UK-wide, while Saturday is either big-name bands or tribute bands. There's stand-up comedy every Tuesday.

Limelight (☎ 9032 5942; www.the-limelight.co.uk; 17-19 Ormeau Ave) This combined pub and club along with next-door venue the Spring and Airbrake (under the same management) is one of the city's top venues for live rock and indie music, having hosted bands from Oasis to Franz Ferdinand, the Manic Street Preachers and the Kaiser Chiefs. It's also home to alternative club night Helter Skelter (admission £5, from 10pm every Saturday) and Belfast's biggest student night Shag (admission £3, from 10pm every Tuesday).

Lavery's (☎ 9087 1106; www.lavs.co.uk; 14 Bradbury Pl) Managed by the same family since 1918, Lavery's is a vast, multilevel, packed-to-the-gills boozing emporium, crammed with drinkers young and old, from students to tourists, businessmen to bikers. The Back Bar has live acoustic music from local singer-songwriters on Wednesday and live indie and alternative bands on Thursday, while the Bunker stages various local and touring bands Sunday to Thursday and DJs Friday and Saturday.

FOLK, JAZZ & BLUES

Pubs with regular live sessions of traditional Irish music include the Botanic Inn, the Garrick Bar, White's Tavern, the John

Hewitt, Kelly's Cellars and the Rotterdam (see Drinking).

For jazz and blues, head for the John Hewitt, McHugh's, the Rotterdam (all under Drinking), the Crescent Arts Centre (right) or the **Kitchen Bar** (☎ 9032 4901; www.thekitchenbar.com; 38 Victoria Sq).

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Ulster Hall (☎ 9032 3900; www.ulsterhall.co.uk; Bedford St) Ulster Hall (built in 1862) is a popular venue for a range of events including rock concerts, lunch-time organ recitals, boxing bouts and performances by the Ulster Orchestra (www.ulster-orchestra.org.uk). It's closed for renovations until the end of 2008.

Queen's University's **School of Music** (☎ 9033 5337; www.music.qub.ac.uk; University Rd) stages free lunchtime recitals on Thursday and regular evening concerts in the beautiful, hammer-beam-roofed Harty Room (School of Music, University Sq), and at the Sonic Arts Research Centre (Clorean Park), with occasional performances in the larger Sir William Whitla Hall (University Rd). You can download a programme from the website.

COMEDY

There's no dedicated comedy club in the city, but there are regular comedy nights at various venues including the **Spring and Airbrake** (Ormeau Ave), the Belfast Empire (p603), and the QUB Student Union (p602).

Theatre & Opera

Grand Opera House (☎ 9024 1919; www.goh.co.uk; 2-4 Great Victoria St; ☎ box office 8.30am-9pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat) This grand old venue plays host to a mixture of opera, popular musicals and comedy shows. The box office is across the street on the corner of Howard St.

Lyric Theatre (☎ 9038 1081; www.lyrictheatre.co.uk; 55 Ridgeway St; ☎ box office 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 4-7pm Sat) On the riverside south of the Botanic Gardens, the Lyric stages serious drama and is a major venue for the Belfast Festival at Queen's (see p594). Hollywood star Liam Neeson, who first trod the boards here, is a patron.

Old Museum Arts Centre (☎ 9023 3332; www.oldmuseumartscentre.org; 7 College Sq N; ☎ box office 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, to 7.30pm before a performance) The Old Museum stages an exciting programme of drama and comedy, with occasional prose and poetry readings and dance performances.

Crescent Arts Centre (☎ 9024 2338; www.crescentarts.org; 2-4 University Rd) The Crescent hosts a range of concerts, plays, workshops, readings and dance classes, and there's a regular club night called New Moon (10pm to late, admission £6, first Saturday of each month), which showcases live bands, with DJs playing afterwards. The Crescent also stages a 10-day literary festival called Between the Lines each March, and a dance festival, City Dance, in June.

Black Box (☎ 9024 4400; www.blackboxbelfast.com; 18-22 Hill St) Describing itself as a 'home for live music, theatre, literature, comedy, film, visual art, live art, circus, cabaret and all points in between', Black Box is a new and intimate venue in the heart of the Cathedral Quarter.

Cinemas

Movie House (☎ 9024 5700; www.moviehouse.co.uk; 14 Dublin Rd) A convenient city-centre 10-screen multiplex.

Queen's Film Theatre (☎ 9097 1097; www.queensfilmtheatre.com; 20 University Sq) A two-screen arthouse cinema close to the university, and a major venue for the Belfast Film Festival.

Storm Cinemas (☎ 9073 9134; www.stormcinemas.co.uk; Odyssey Pavilion) Belfast's biggest multiplex, with 12 screens and stadium seats throughout; part of the Odyssey Complex.

Sport

Rugby, soccer, Gaelic football and hockey are played through the winter, cricket and hurling through the summer.

Windsor Park (☎ 9024 4198; off Lisburn Rd) International soccer matches take place here, south of the centre; for details of Northern Ireland international matches, see www.irishfa.com.

Casement Park (☎ 9038 3815; www.antrimgaa.net; Andersonstown Rd) In West Belfast, you can see Gaelic football and hurling here.

Odyssey Arena (☎ 9073 9074; www.odysseyarena.com; 2 Queen's Quay) The Belfast Giants ice-hockey team draws big crowds to the area at the Odyssey Complex; the season is September to March. The arena also hosts indoor sporting events including tennis and athletics.

SHOPPING

For general shopping you'll find all the usual high-street chains and department stores in the compact central shopping area north of City Hall. The main shopping malls are the **Castle Court Centre** (Royal Ave) and the brand new **Victoria Square** (btwn Ann & Chichester St). There's late-night shopping till 9pm on Thursdays.

Newer shopping districts include the ultra-hip Lisburn Rd (from Eglantine Ave out to Balmoral Ave) – a straggling strip of red-brick and mock-Tudor façades lined with fashion boutiques, interior-design shops, art galleries, delicatessens, espresso bars, wine bars and chic restaurants – and the unexpected concentration of designer fashion shops (about a dozen of them) on Bloomfield Ave in East Belfast.

Items particular to Northern Ireland that you may like to look out for include fine Belleek china, linen (antique and new) and Tyrone crystal.

Wicker Man (☎ 9024 3550; 12 Donegall Arcade; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 9am-9pm Thu, 9am-5.30pm Sat, 1-5pm Sun) This shop sells a wide range of contemporary Irish crafts and gifts, including silver jewellery, glassware and knitwear.

Fresh Garbage (☎ 9024 2350; 24 Rosemary St; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 10.30am-8pm Thu) Easily recognised by the glumfest of Goths hovering outside the door, this place has been around for more than 20 years but remains a cult favourite for hippie and Goth clothes and Celtic jewellery.

Steensons (☎ 9024 8269; Bedford House, Bedford St; 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, to 7pm Thu) Showroom selling a range of stylish handmade jewellery in contemporary designs in silver, gold and platinum, from a workshop in Glenarm, County Antrim (p672).

Archive's Antique Centre (☎ 9023 2383; 88 Donegall Pass; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) This is a warren of curios and collectables spread over three floors, with Irish silver, brass, pub memorabilia, militaria, books and light fittings.

Tiso (☎ 9023 1230; 12-14 Cornmarket; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Fri & Sat, 10am-5.30pm Wed, 9.30am-8pm Thu, 1-5pm Sun) Make tracks to Tiso for hiking, climbing and camping gear and outdoor clothing.

Surf Mountain (☎ 9024 8877; 12 Brunswick St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Yo dude – come and join the goatee-stroking, nad-scratching crew checking out Surf Mountain's skate and snowboard gear.

Black & Lizards (☎ 9032 1768; 8 Wellington Pl; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) The place to go for all your photographic needs, both film and digital.

Matchetts Music (☎ 9026 8661; 6 Wellington Pl; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Stocks a range of acoustic instruments, from guitars and mandolins to penny whistles and bodhráns, as well as

books of lyrics and guitar chords for traditional Irish songs.

Phoenix Records (☎ 9023 9308; Haymarket Arcade, Royal Ave; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Owned by music producer Terry Hooley, the man who released *Teenage Kicks* by the Undertones on his Good Vibrations label back in 1978, this is Belfast's best alternative record shop and a source of tickets and info on the latest gigs.

Other good places to shop for Irish crafts and traditional Irish music include Cultúr-lann MacAdam ÓFaiach (p588; open 9am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 5.30pm Saturday) and Conway Mill (p588; open 10am to 4pm Monday to Friday).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Flights from North America, continental Europe and several major UK airports land at **Belfast International Airport** (☎ 9448 4848; www.belfastairport.com; Aldergrove), 30km northwest of the city. For further information, see p716.

There are direct flights from Cork, Galway and most British cities to the convenient **George Best Belfast City Airport** (☎ 9093 9093; www.belfastcityairport.com; Airport Rd), just 6km northeast of the city centre.

Boat

The terminal for **Stena Line** (☎ 0870 570 7070; www.stenaline.co.uk) car ferries from Belfast to Stranraer in Scotland is 2km north of the city centre; head north along York St, and turn right into Dock St (just past the Yorkgate Centre). Other car ferries to and from Scotland dock at Larne, 30km north of Belfast (see p719).

Norfolkline (☎ 0870 600 4321; www.norfolkline-ferries.co.uk) ferries between Belfast and Liverpool dock at the Victoria terminal, 5km north of town. Take the M2 motorway north and turn right at junction No 1.

The **Steam Packet Company** (☎ 0871 222 1333; www.steam-packet.com) operates car ferries between Belfast and Isle of Man (two or three a week, April to September only). They dock at Donegall Quay, a short distance from the city centre.

For more information on ferry routes and prices, see p719.

Bus

Belfast has two bus stations. The main **Europa BusCentre** (☎ 9066 6630) is behind the Europa

Hotel and next door to Great Victoria St train station, reached via the Great Northern Mall beside the hotel. It's the main terminus for buses to Derry, Dublin and destinations in the west and south of Northern Ireland. The smaller **Laganside BusCentre** (☎ 9066 6630; Oxford St), near the river, is mainly for buses to County Antrim, eastern County Down and the Cookstown area.

There are **information desks** (🕒 7.45am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat) at both bus stations, where you can pick up regional bus timetables, and you can contact **Translink** (☎ 9066 6630; www.translink.co.uk) for timetable and fares information.

Typical one-way fares from Belfast:

Service	Fare (£)	Duration (hr)	Frequency
Armagh	7	1¼	hourly Mon-Fri, 8 Sat, 3 Sun
Ballycastle	8	2	3 daily Mon-Sat
Bangor	3	¾	half-hourly Mon-Sat, 8 Sun
Derry	9	1¾	half-hourly Mon-Sat, 11 Sun
Downpatrick	4.50	1	at least hourly Mon-Fri, 6 Sat, 4 Sun
Dublin	10	3	hourly Mon-Sun
Enniskillen	9	2¼	hourly Mon-Sat, 2 Sun
Newcastle	6	1¼	hourly Mon-Sat, 7 Sun

National Express (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com) runs a daily coach service between Belfast and London (£34, 14 hours) via the Stranraer ferry, Dumfries, Carlisle, Preston, Manchester and Birmingham. The ticket office is in the Europa BusCentre.

For information on bus fares, durations and frequencies in Ireland, see p721.

Train

Trains to Dublin and all destinations in Northern Ireland depart from Belfast's **Central Station** (East Bridge St), east of the city centre. Trains for Portadown, Lisburn, Bangor, Larne Harbour and Derry depart from **Great Victoria St Station** (Great Northern Mall), next to the Europa BusCentre.

For information on fares and timetables, contact **Translink** (☎ 9066 6630; www.translink.co.uk). The **NIR Travel Shop** (☎ 9023 0671; Great Victoria St Station; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) books train tickets, ferries and holiday packages.

If you arrive by train at Central Station, your rail ticket entitles you to a free bus ride into the city centre.

Typical train fares from Belfast:

Service	Fare (£)	Duration (hr)	Frequency
Bangor	4	½	half-hourly Mon-Sat, 8 Sun
Derry	10	2¼	7 or 8 daily Mon-Sat, 4 Sun
Dublin	24	2	8 daily Mon-Sat, 5 Sun
Larne Harbour	5	1	hourly
Newry	8	¾	10 daily Mon-Sat, 5 Sun
Portrush	8	1¾	7 or 8 daily Mon-Sat, 4 Sun

On Sundays you can buy a Sunday Day Tracker ticket (£5), which allows unlimited travel on all scheduled train services within Northern Ireland.

For more information on the train network in Ireland, see p725.

GETTING AROUND

Belfast possesses a rare but wonderful thing – an integrated public-transport system, with buses linking both airports to the central train and bus stations.

To/From the Airports

The Airport Express 300 bus runs from **Belfast International Airport** to the Europa BusCentre (one way/return £6/9, 30 minutes) every 10 or 15 minutes between 7am and 8pm, every 30 minutes from 8pm to 11pm, and hourly through the night; a return ticket is valid for one month. A taxi costs about £25.

The Airport Express 600 bus links **George Best Belfast City Airport** with the Europa BusCentre (one way/return £1.30/2.20, 15 minutes) every 15 or 20 minutes between 6am and 10pm. The taxi fare to the city centre is about £7.

For details of the Airporter bus linking both airports to Derry, see p653.

To/From the Ferry Terminals

You can walk from Donegall Quay to City Hall in about 15 minutes. Alternatively, Laganside BusCentre is only a five-minute walk away. There is no public transport to the Stena Line and Norfolk Line ferry terminals.

Trains to the ferry terminal at Larne Harbour depart from Great Victoria St Station.

Bicycle

National Cycle Network route 9 runs through central Belfast, mostly following the western bank of the River Lagan and the north shore of Belfast Lough.

You can hire bikes from **McConvey Cycles** (☎ 9033 0322; www.mcconveycycles.com; 183 Ormeau Rd; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 8pm Thu) and **Life Cycles** (p593) from around £10 a day, or £40 a week.

Bus

Metro (☎ 9066 6630; www.translink.co.uk) operates the bus network in Belfast. An increasing number of buses are low-floor, 'kneeling' buses with space for one wheelchair.

Buy your ticket from the driver (change given); fares range from £1 to £1.60 depending on distance. The driver can also sell you a Metro Day Ticket (£3.50), giving unlimited bus travel within the City Zone all day Monday to Saturday. Cheaper versions allow travel any time after 10am Monday to Saturday (£2.50), or all day Sunday (£2.50).

Most city bus services depart from various stops on and around Donegall Sq, at City Hall. You can pick up a free bus map (and buy tickets) from the **Metro kiosk** (🕒 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) at the northwest corner of the square.

If you plan on using city buses a lot, it's worth buying a Smartlink Travel Card (available from the Metro kiosk, the Belfast Welcome Centre, and the Europa and Laganside BusCentres). The card costs an initial fee of £1.50, plus £5/10 per five/ten journeys – you can get it topped up as you want. Alternatively, you can get seven days' unlimited travel for £15.50. When you board the bus, you simply place the card on the ticket machine, and it automatically issues a ticket.

Car & Motorcycle

A car can be more of a hindrance than a help in Belfast, as parking is restricted in the city centre. For on-street parking between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday, you'll need to buy a ticket from a machine. For longer periods, head for one of the many multistorey car parks that are dotted around the city centre.

Major car hire agencies in Belfast:

Avis (www.avisworld.com) City (☎ 9024 0404; 69-71 Great Victoria St); George Best Belfast City Airport (☎ 0870 608 6317); Belfast International Airport (☎ 0870 608 6316)
Budget (www.budget-ireland.co.uk) City (☎ 9023 0700; 96-102 Great Victoria St); George Best Belfast City Airport (☎ 9045 1111); Belfast International Airport (☎ 9442 3332)

Europcar (www.europcar.com) George Best Belfast City Airport (☎ 9045 0904); Belfast International Airport (☎ 9442 3444)

Hertz (www.hertz.co.uk) George Best Belfast City Airport (☎ 9073 2451) Belfast International Airport (☎ 9442 2533)

PEOPLE'S TAXIS

The black taxis that cruise along the Falls and Shankill Rds in West Belfast have more in common with Turkey's 'dolmuş' minibuses than the black cabs of London. These are shared taxis that operate along fixed routes, departing only when full, then dropping off and picking up passengers as they go, more like buses than traditional taxis.

Indeed, the 'People's Taxis', as they became known, were introduced in the 1970s to replace local bus services that had been disrupted or cancelled as a result of street riots at the height of the Troubles. The drivers' associations that run the taxis are community-based ventures that provided much-needed employment during difficult times, and often gave jobs to ex-internees and prisoners who could not find work elsewhere. More than 30 years on, the black taxis are an accepted part of Belfast's public transport infrastructure. There is even a black taxi 'bus station' at Castle Junction.

Falls Rd taxis depart from Castle Junction at the corner of King and Castle Sts. During the day a sign in the windscreen shows their route; after 5.30pm the first person in the queue dictates the destination. You can hail a taxi anywhere; when you want to get out, knock on the window, and then pay the driver from the footpath.

Shankill Rd taxis depart from North St. You can hail them at bus stops; when you want to get out, say 'next stop' to the driver, and pay before you get out. Fares on both services are around £1 to £2 per person.

The Ireland-wide agency **Dooley Car Rentals** (☎ 9445 2522; www.dooleycarrentals.com; 175 Airport Rd, Belfast International Airport, Aldergrove) is reliable and offers good rates – around £130 a week for a compact car. You have to pay an extra £48 up front for a full tank of petrol, but if you return the car with an almost empty tank they're cheaper than the big names.

Taxi

For information on the black cabs that ply the Falls and Shankill Rds, see boxed text, p607. Regular black taxis have yellow plates back and front and can be hailed on the street.

Minicabs are cheaper but you have to order one by phone. Companies to call in-

clude **Fona Cab** (☎ 9023 3333) and **Value Cabs** (☎ 9080 9080).

Train

There are local trains every 20 or 30 minutes connecting Great Victoria St and Central Stations via City Hospital and Botanic Stations. There's a flat fare of £1 for journeys between any of these stops.

AROUND BELFAST

LISBURN & AROUND

The southwestern fringes of Belfast extend as far as Lisburn (Lios na gCearrbhach),

12km southwest of the city centre. Like Belfast, Lisburn grew rich on the proceeds of the linen industry in the 18th and 19th centuries. This history is celebrated in the excellent **Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum** (☎ 9266 3377; Market Sq; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), housed in the fine 17th-century Market House.

The museum on the ground floor has displays on the cultural and historic heritage of the region, while upstairs the award-winning 'Flax to Fabric' exhibition details the fascinating history of the linen industry in Northern Ireland – on the eve of WWI Ulster was the largest linen-producing region in the world, employing some 75,000 people.

There are plenty of audiovisual and hands-on exhibits – you can watch weavers working on Jacquard looms and even try your hand at spinning flax.

Lisburn Tourist Information Centre (☎ 9266 0038; Lisburn Sq; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) is on the town's main square.

Buses 523, 530 and 532 from Belfast's Upper Queen St go to Lisburn (£2.30, 40 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Friday, hourly Saturday and Sunday), or catch the train (£3, 30 minutes, at least half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly Sunday) from either Belfast Central or Great Victoria St Stations.

ULSTER FOLK & TRANSPORT MUSEUMS

Two of Northern Ireland's finest museums (☎ 9042 8428; www.uftm.org.uk; Cultra, Holywood; per

museum adult/child £5.50/3.50, combined ticket £7/4; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Jul-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Mar-Jun, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Oct-Feb) lie close to each other on either side of the A2.

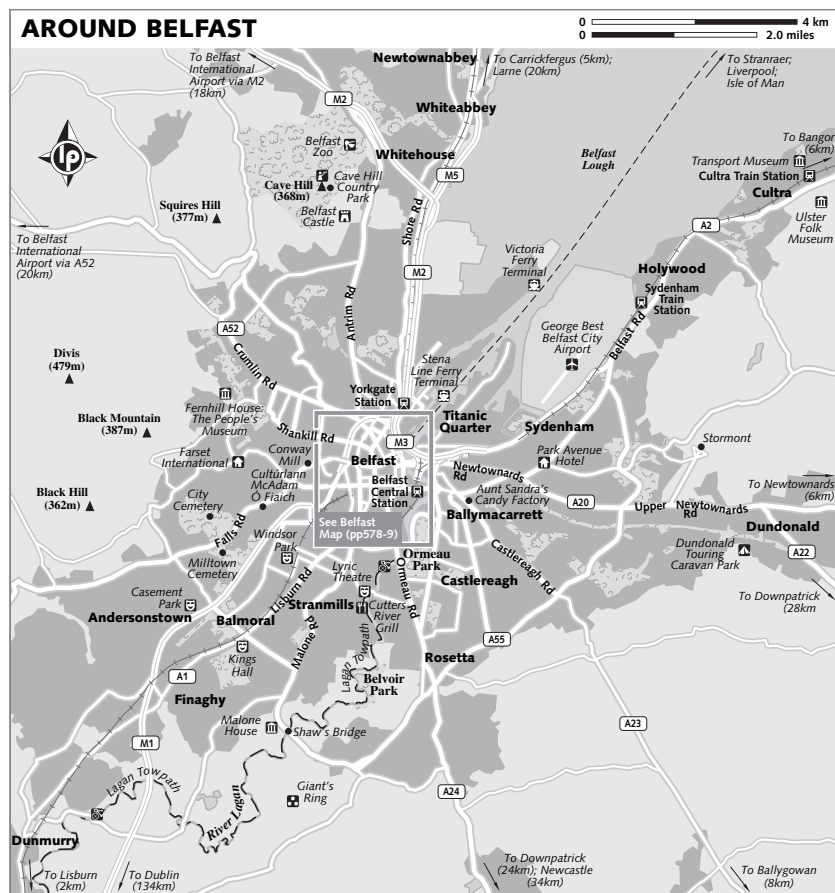
On the south side is the Folk Museum, where farmhouses, forges, churches and mills, and a complete village have been reconstructed, with human and animal extras combining to give a strong impression of Irish life over the past few hundred years. From industrial times, there are red-brick terraces from 19th-century Belfast and Dromore. In summer, thatching and ploughing are demonstrated and there are characters dressed in period costume.

On the other side of the road is the Transport Museum, a sort of automotive zoo with displays of captive steam locomotives, rolling stock, motorcycles, trams, buses and cars.

Highlight of the car collection is the stainless steel-clad prototype of the ill-fated DeLorean DMC, made in Belfast in 1981. The car was a commercial disaster but achieved fame in the *Back to the Future* films.

Most popular is the RMS *Titanic* display (www.titanicinbelfast.com), which includes the original design drawings for the *Olympic* and *Titanic*, photographs of the ship's construction and reports of its sinking. Most poignant are the items of pre-sailing publicity, including an ad for the return trip that never was.

Buses to Bangor stop nearby. Cultra Station on the Belfast to Bangor train line is within a 10-minute walk.



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