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Author: GEORGE KEEGAN

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TRAVEL



BY GEORGE KEEGAN

BELFAST PROGRAMME LAUNCHED

The Visit Belfast Bureau was in Dublin last week to announce details of an exciting programme of events taking place in that city this autumn. Those present at the launch included Anne McMullan and Joanne O'Hara (Visit Belfast), Fiona Cunningham NITB Marketing Manager for ROI, Richard Wakely Director Belfast festival at Queens and Susan McCleary the Festival Manager.

Visit Belfast has through a very difficult year to date due to the well publicised unrest as result of the issue. However that despite scenario city is holding it's own when it comes to visitor and numbers indeed a slight increase

for the month of August. The successful staging of the World Police & Fire Games helped enormously and hopes are high the various festivals and events over the coming months will attract both new and repeat visitors to the city. Anne McMullan points out that Belfast is a diverse and exciting city with fantastic festivals, events and attractions to see, adding "we had a great summer season welcoming thousands of visitors to the city to enjoy great hospitality, shops and visitor experiences such as Titanic, Crumlin Road Gaol, the MAC and SS Nomadic".

Fiona Cunningham also referred to the packed autumn programme and the expectation of more visitors travelling North "Belfast has transformed in recent years into a cosmopolitan city and provides a gateway to exploring the rest of Northern Ireland and I am confident that this fantastic line-up of festivals and events will give visitors from the Republic of Ireland even more reason to visit this autumn"

visit this autumn"

The main events taking place will be – Belfast Day (29th Sept), Restaurant Week (5th – 12th Oct), Fashion Week (10th – 13th), Belfast Festival (17th – 27th) and Belfast Music Week (11th – 17th

The following is a short synopsis of each event:

Belfast Day – a once-off event celebrating the cultural diversity within the city. Set in the grounds of the City Hall. Free admission. Restaurant Week – another celebration but this time of great food and restaurants. Over 80 will take part plus, cafes and Gastro –

West Coast Cooler Fashion Week - lovers of fashion will be brought right up to the minute with selections of all the latest styles on catwalks around the city.

Ulster Bank Belfast Festival At Queens - includes 7 Irish

premieres and a total of 24 countries will be coming to take part. This year's festival under the direction of Richard Wakely will be more contemporary than usual with much more interaction between audiences and performers. On the cinema front the emphasis is on 'Film Noir' and a focus on Swiss cinema. The Music Club will feature among others Dervish plus a double bill of jazz & indie with experimental Finnish band Oddarrang and award winning Danish male group Girls In airports. Good to note that 95% of all shows are priced £16 and under.

Music Week – a great mix of the very best in live music at many iconic locations such as the Ulster Hall, Lyric Theatre and the MAC plus unique performances at the Europa bus station, Connswater Shopping Centre, An Culturlann and the Palm House in Botanic

For full list and details go to www.visitbelfast.com or contact NITB on Callsave 1850 230230.

CRUISE & FERRY NEWS

Parisian Winter Holiday With Uniworld: The festive season beckons so now is the best time to plan a luxury river cruise with specialists Uniworld taking in the sights and sounds of wonderful Paris and other exciting French ports and cities. Travel in a luxuriously appointed Stateroom on the spacious River Baroness for a never to be forgotten 8 day cruise starting and finishing in the

Visit Conflans-Sainte - Honorine (Versailles), Rouen, Les Andelys, Vernon and Mantes-La-Jolie. Flights are exDublin and once you pass through airport security the Uniworld team will be there to welcome you and look after every need throughout the 8 days. This cruise, as with all their cruises, have a number of excellent inclusions such as, return flights with 1 piece of checked luggage per person, all meals, complimentary wine, beer & soft drinks during lunch and dinner, several excursions with English speaking local guides, on-board entertainment and Captain's Welcome gala and Farewell Dinner. Uniworld also offers other luxurious Christmas Season itineraries with sailings along the Rhine (Basel to Cologne) and the Danube (Budapest to Passau)

Full details on all Uniworld Boutique River Cruises contact your

local travel agent or click on www.uniworld.ie or tel 01 775 3838.

Take A World cruise: Thomas Cook Ireland have several new cruise choices as part of their World Cruise packages for irish customers during 2015. They are exclusive agents for Cunard and P&O here and among the offers are voyages of between 100 and 110 nights priced from €12,159pp. Cruises of this length they point out will appeal to retired people with time on their hands.

When travelling with Cunard holidaymakers will sail on the

Queen Mary 2, Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria and with P&O on the Aurora and Arcadia. Sharon Harney of Thomas Cook points out that for anyone getting used to retirement a world cruise is a great way to mark this key change in life. "Prospective customers will be delighted to hear that these cruise options are also very good value. For example the cost breaks down to little more than €130pp per night on Cunard's Queen Victoria – a figure that covers all meals, entertainment, accommodation and afternoon tea". Prices are based on cruise only for 2 people sharing an interior stateroom.
Flights & transfers can be arranged separately. Brochures are available at nearest travel agent or tel Thomas Cook on 01 5140336 for details and up to minute prices.

AIRSIDE UPDATES

Etihad Introduce a Flying Nanny: Etihad Airways recently launched a dedicated in-flight child assistant programme for families with the introduction of a flying nanny on board their long haul flights. The assistants will be easily identified in their bright orange aprons. During the past couple of months some 300 Etihad Airways cabin crew members have completed enhanced training for this role with a further 60 expected to be trained by the end of this month. At the close of 2013 the airline plans to have 500 flying nannies across their flight network. The selected crew members will interact with both young and older children during flights and shortly before landing will help parents by replenishing milk bottles, offering items such as water, fruit and other snacks especially when families are transferring to other flights.

CUTTINGS

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Autumn Break With Topflight: Irish owned company Topflight are offering a 4 day autumn break in the 4* Bella Italia Resort at Lake Garda from €249pps (4 sharing) which they say is an exceptional rate for one of the most popular resorts on their books. Lake Garda offers a wide range of activities from mountain biking to kite surfing on the lake. The beautiful cities of Verona and Venice are within driving distance and car hire can be organised by the Topflight representative. Price includes flights to Verona, airport tayes return transfers and 4 nights burgalow accommodation on a taxes, return transfers and 4 nights bungalow accommodation on a self-catering basis. Tel 01 2401701 or visit www.topflight.ie Overnight in Style On Tne Camino: It is now possible to

experience the Camino while staying in top class accommodation thanks to the new exclusive Camino Ways.com 'Superior Collection', From casas Rurales to country homes, farm houses and Paradors all properties in this collection have both great charm and a fascinating history. The list includes the 4* Parador de Leon where Martin Sheen and other actors stayed during the shooting of the film 'The Way'. Prices quoted are for accommodation on a half board basis, luggage transfer and holiday pack but do not include flights, airport transfers and insurance. Full details on www.caminoways.com

Meet Santa in Lapland: Two well established tour operators are

currently offering trips to visit Santa in Lapland; Sunway has two night trips from Dublin on 12th 14th & 16th December with prices from €1199 per adult and €999 per child. Included are flights, transfers ,accommodation, all meals, thermal clothing, husky & reindeer sleigh rides, snowmobile safari etc., There is also a private family visit with Santa and gift for children u 12. Pick up their special Lapland brochure at a travel agent or visit

www.sunway.ie

Falcon Holidays are offering day trips from Dublin on 6th & 13th December from €629 per adult and €549 per child. These trips have a magical mystery tour packed with surprises which include being greeted by elves before visiting Santa's secret grotto. Activities also include taking reindeer and husky sleigh rides, snowmobile, sledging and mini – skidoo rides. Thermal equipment is provided for outdoor activities (excluding infants). The maximum child age is 12 years. Details from travel agents or click on ways folcopholidays is www.falconholidays.ie

Roctober Metal Fest: various venues around the city 30th Sept-

5th Oct. Showcasing best of local and International talent.

Dubrovnik With Concorde travel: For a perfect escape this October check out a visit to the UNESCO Heritage city of Dubrovnik situated on the southern Adriatic coast where temperatures will average over 20 degrees. Concorde Travel are offering holidays from €329pp staying at the 3* Antuninska Apartments for 4 nights. These are located in a charming street leading off the main boulevard of the Old town. Depart exDublin on 23rd October. Note 7 night accommodation offers also available. Details at www.concordetravel.ie



Fiona Cunningham (left) Richard Wakely and Anne McMullan at launch of Belfast Programme.