



TRAVEL



BY GEORGE KEEGAN

UPCOMING WESTPORT FESTIVAL

Next month is a good time to visit Westport, Ireland's most popular town, for the 2014 Westport Festival of Music and Food which takes place on the week-end of 28th/29th June around the lovely grounds of Westport House. With every week that passes more and more names are

added to the already stellar line-up of artists taking part. Music acts already announced include Bryan Adams, David Gray, Sinead O'Connor, Kool & the Gang, the Overtones, the Divine Comedy and the Kilfenora Ceili Band. The very popular Roisin Dubh Stage is back again this year featuring an array of upcoming Irish acts. Also appearing will be the 2Cellos from Croatia regarded by many as one of the most musical acts in the world noted for their re-imagining pop and rock tunes performed on their cellos.

On the food side the 'Chefs Kitchen' has many well known gastronomic gurus including Rachel Allen, Clodagh McKenna and Darina Allen plus top restaurant chefs such as Ross Lewis (Chapter 1), Derry Clarke (L'Ecrivain), Noel McNeel (Lough Erne Resort), Neven Maguire (MacNean House) and local award winning chef Seamus Commons from Knockranny House Hotel & SPA.

The festival committee are keen to point out that all age groups are welcome at the many fun- activities taking place in the grounds, with children u12 allowed in for free when accompanied by an adult. Among the entertainments in the park will be The Pirate Queen Swinging Ship - set apparently to test your head for heights as well as your stomach, the 8 foot high Swan Pedaloe Boats and the popular Westport House Express train rides. Beside the restaurant/bar will be a Pirate playground and bouncy castle.

In and around Westport there are many fine hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs to choose - provided you book early! If you prefer camping then check out the established camp site at Westport House offering excellent facilities.

Tickets for the Westport Festival of Music & Food are available through Ticketmaster and for week-end camping & festival tickets book at www.westporthouse.ie/shop. Full details of ticket options and events go to www.westportfestival.com.

CUTTINGS

The Cotswolds Travel Pass: The Cotswolds region of England has introduced a novel idea to encourage visitors to get to and move around this beautiful area using public transport. The 'Cotswolds Discoverer Pass' is an eco-friendly integrated bus and rail ticket providing unlimited travel to and around the region with participating operators. The passes are available for 1 day or 3 days and valid seven days a week. Train passes may be used anytime from 8.50am Mon-Fri. The 1 day passes costs £10 per adult & 3 days is just £25 per adult.

Hilton Dublin Appoint New Chef: Hilton Dublin at Charlemont Place has appointed Jason Banyon as their executive chef. Jason hails from London and has over 20 years experience fifteen of which were spent with leading hotels in both London & New Zealand including The Carlton Tower and the Royal Garden Hotel. He also worked at sea for a time with top cruise company Celebrity Cruises. He says he is thrilled with the opportunity to introduce new flavours and concepts to the menus at the Uisce restaurant in Hilton Dublin. This hotel is a short stroll from both Ranelagh and St. Stephen's Green and a Luas stop is practically outside the door. Info & bookings on www.hilton.com/hiltondublin

Meanwhile anyone planning a trip to Amsterdam should note that Hilton Worldwide's Astoria Hotels & Resorts have just opened a brand new Waldorf Astoria in that city. Situated along the canal this luxury property with 93 guest rooms comprises six historic 17th & 18th century town houses in the UNESCO area of Herengracht. Click on www.waldorfastoria.com/amsterdam

TOUR OPERATOR OFFERS

Reasons To Walk The Camino: Every year thousands of people from around the world sign up to walk or cycle one of the six separate European routes of The Camino. All routes eventually converge at the Plaza del Obradoiro in the historic city of Santiago de Compostela (written about in this column). Those taking part go for a variety of reasons – some are pilgrims, others seek a spiritual experience and many go for an adventure. Probably the most popular route and certainly the busiest is the French Way and Irish Camino travel specialist company Camino Ways, who offer walking and cycling trips on several Camino routes, have put together a list of 6 reasons that make the French Way so appealing and special. They are;

- A) Beautiful Scenery - lush green grass, vineyards, sweeping views and beautiful landscapes.
- B) The Culture- this route is home to many fascinating and interesting sites with ancient bridges, medieval castles, quaint villages and towns.
- C) Food – many local delicacies to savour on the way including cured meats (in El Bierzo), tapas (in Burgos) or fresh seafood (in Galicia).
- D) Ancient Traditions- walking on the paths undertaken by thousands of pilgrims since the Middle Ages and continuing certain traditions which have been formed such as having your special passport stamped in each town along the route then receiving your certificate in Santiago de Compostela.
- E) Friendly People- at any given time walkers of all ages and nationalities are on the route all with a different story to tell and local people living on the French Way are known for being friendly and helpful.
- F) Santiago de Compostela- the final stop for all the various journeys. This is a vibrant and charming city rich in history. It has a UNESCO listed old town and the inspiring Cathedral.

CaminoWays.com organise Camino holidays year round and prices include accommodation (half-board), luggage transfers from hotel to hotel and holiday pack with practical information. Note prices don't include travel insurance, flights or airport transfers. Full details on www.caminoways.com

Greek Islands With Cassidy Travel: Crystal blue waters, beautiful beaches, warm weather and great food sum up any of the Greek Islands and Cassidy Travel has a range of locations and prices from €309pps this summer. Call the hotline on 0818 332500 or drop into one of their Dublin Travel shops.

Long Distance Travel Deals: If you fancy visiting friends or relations in Australia, Canada or Dubai this year several tour operators currently have some excellent offers; Abbey Travel have flights to Australia including Perth, Sidney, Adelaide, Brisbane & Melbourne. Shandon Travel has flights exDublin & Cork to Dubai in Sept/Oct (Book by 11th June). Finally TravelAgent.ie is taking bookings for Canada during November.

TOURISM NORTH

Events in Derry: Following a very successful year as UK City of Culture for 2013 Derry/Londonderry has chosen the theme 'City of Song' for 2014. Upcoming events include; Music City Day 21st June and Celtronic Music Festival from 21st to 28th June. At the end of next month the city will welcome the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race once again.

Galgorm Resort & Spa Offers: The Galgorm Resort and Spa in Co. Antrim is a lovely place to stay when touring around the Causeway Route. Set in over 160 acres of lush parkland alongside the river Maine this fine hotel has 75 bedrooms and suites all designed in the very best contemporary style. Without doubt one of this hotel's special features is their superb Spa and special packages are available designed for groups of five plus wishing to enjoy some time together with friends or family. These include overnight packages or the Mid-week Spa Escape. There are also numerous relaxing treatments available for hotel guests suitable for women and men. Highly recommended. Contact 044 (0)28 2588 2550 or click on www.spa-galgorm.com. To contact hotel ring 044 (0)2588 1001.

Belfast Waterfront Displays Plans: The extensive development at Belfast's Waterfront Conference & Exhibition Centre set to cost £29.5m was due to be showcased this week during the IMEX Frankfurt 2014 event with some 9,000 visitors including up to 4000 hosted buyers from around the world attending the high profile 3 day exhibition. This was certainly an excellent opportunity to present details of the new Waterfront extension.

Ride The Giro d'Italia Road: Hastings Hotels have launched a special package from £78pps at their 4* Ballygally Castle situated close to the Glens of Antrim to celebrate the legacy of the Giro d'Italia and giving guests the chance to explore the route taken by the elite riders. The hotel has recently been refurbished and the 'Ride the Road they Rode' package includes accommodation with breakfast, Pink afternoon tea, Pink Cocktail and a Giro d'Italia route map. Bicycle hire is available if required. Offer subject to T&C and availability. Call 048 2858 1066 or visit www.hastingshotels.com/ballygally-castle

AIRSIDE UPDATES

Air Canada Rouge: As already mentioned the new leisure airline Air Canada Rouge began a year long service between Dublin and Toronto recently with up to 7 non-stop flights per week. They are operating a 280 seat 767-300ER aircraft with stylish cabin interiors in their brand colours of burgundy and grey and passengers have a choice of 3 seating areas on board – rouge, rouge Plus and Premium rouge. All premium rouge customers from European destinations can enjoy priority check-in plus boarding, complimentary food and drink service and complimentary iPad to enjoy 'player' the airline's in-flight streaming entertainment system. The airline launched in 2014 with a network of 14 routes from both Toronto and Montreal into Europe and the Caribbean. Call to your travel agent or visit www.aircanada.com/rouge

Belfast to Bulgaria for Skiing: It has been reported that Belfast Tour Operator Travel Solutions are set to introduce a winter ski programme to Bulgaria following the withdrawal of Balkan Tours. Travel Solutions are due to begin the programme at the end of December 2014 with direct flights exBelfast to Plovdiv with Jet2.com. Contact ---

New Tapestry Honours Seamus Heaney: People from the world of music and the arts including singer Paul Simon (who travelled to Ireland especially for the occasion) were on hand at Dublin Airport's T2 building a few weeks ago to unveil an Amnesty International commissioned Peter Sis designed Aubusson tapestry in honour of the late Seamus Heaney. The creation of the tapestry was generously supported by Paul Simon, Bono, The Edge, Paul McGuinness & Kathy Gilfillan, Marie & Joe Donnelly, Kathy & Ed Ludwig and the Dublin Airport Authority. All spoke of their delight that the memory of such a wonderful poet will be celebrated in such a work of art.

Etihad Continue To Promote GAA: Etihad Airways the national airline of the United Arab Emirates have installed a GAA Museum memorabilia box in their First & Business Class lounge at Dublin Airport's

T2, the first such museum box outside Croke Park. Passengers travelling in Pearl Business Class exDublin to Abu Dhabi can view the historical objects while relaxing in the lounge. On display are programmes and admission tickets for memorable games plus an antique hurley dating back to the early 20th century. Commenting Beatrice Cosgrove Etihad General Manager for Ireland said, "we are immensely proud of our partnership with the GAA, one in which we have driven through all levels- from the Senior Championship to the International Hurling Festival and right down to the grass route with our very successful and popular competitions and promotions. We hope our guests will enjoy viewing the latest edition of historical GAA hurling memorabilia to the First and Business Class lounge". Also this week the 'Raise The bar' winners were announced for 2014. They are Dublin South inner city club Kevins who pipped Coolderry from Co.Offaly. The winners receive €10,000 cash sponsorship fund, new kits and coaching from Tipp legend Nicky English.

CRUISE & FERRY NEWS

Stena Special For Bikers: Stena Line are currently offering a special 'Bikers' day trip fare from £25 for bike plus rider on their Belfast to Cairnryan route. By leaving Belfast port on the 07.30 or 11.30am sailings people can travel to Scotland to meet up with friends or do some touring in what is a lovely part of that country and return on the 19.30pm or 23.30 sailings. Check details on www.stenaline.com

COMING UP: INSIGHT INTO A LUXURY COACH TOUR TO THE BEAUTIFUL LAKE DISTRICT