



TRAVEL



BY GEORGE KEEGAN

SUMMERTIME SUMMERTIME!

Sitting here writing this column it is 26 degrees outside - summer has definitely arrived. The exams are almost finished and thoughts turn to taking a holiday. In the space available it's impossible to include details of the many events and festivals which will be taking place around the country and overseas but I hope readers of The Travel Column will find some interesting ideas/ suggestions in the following list.

IRELAND

On the West coast this year two of the most popular pastimes are taking a trip on the award winning Great Western Greenway - the longest off-road walking and cycling trail in the country or embarking on a journey of discovery along the new Wild Atlantic Way which stretches for 2,500km from the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal all the way to Kinsale in Co. Cork.

Northern Ireland - offers something for all tastes particularly during the holiday period from superb golf courses to fine beaches, hill and mountain walking to folk parks.

Ulster Museum at Botanic Gardens in Belfast - see dinosaurs, an Egyptian mummy and much more on a trip to this fine museum. Introduce the family to the world of science, nature, history and art.

Aunt Sandra's Candy factory - also in Belfast. Here in Northern Ireland's own candy factory you can watch the skilled team at work and taste some of the well known confectionery they make here.

Ulster American Folk Park- situated outside Omagh relates the story of Irish emigration. See Ulster thatched cottages, experience life on board a full scale emigrant sailing ship and log cabins of the American frontier.

Pickie Fun Park - at the Marine Gardens on Bangor's sea front. A great day out especially for young children. Cafe on site.

The Jungle NI - at Moneymore in Co. Derry. Lots of action packed activities including archery, Mowgli Tree Top adventure course, trekking etc., Activities for everyone over 4 years.

Following the recent announcement that Royal Portrush has been invited to host the Open Golf Championship and confirmation the region will see the return of the Irish Open for 2015 & 2017 now is the perfect time to check out some or all of the excellent courses. Two events for the diary are 13th-15th Aug The Down Summer Trophy (over 3 courses, Ardglass, Downpatrick and Royal Down in Newcastle) and the Northern Ireland Open Challenge 28th-31st Aug at Galgorm Castle Golf Club in Ballymena.

SUMMER FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

July and August:

Camino Walking Festival - Camino Ways.com are to hold their first walking festival in Ireland to celebrate St. James' day. The event will be held on Sunday 27th July 2014 in the Wicklow mountains. Tickets cost €10pp to include special walking trails of various distances, delicious Spanish food, plus competitions and entertainment throughout the day. Director of Camino ways.com Roland Monsegu commenting on the first ever event said, "our St. James' Festival will be a fun and family friendly event to celebrate the saint and the most famous walking trail in the world- the Camino de Santiago, as well as it's connection with Ireland". The festival will take place at Lough Dan in Roundwood commencing at 9.30am. tickets to include parking, guided walks and food are available at adam@greenlifetours.com

Puglia Roadshow - Puglia is a beautiful region in Southern Italy (written about in this column) and a special roadshow 'We Are In Puglia' is taking place at George's Dock in Dublin until 15th July. Daily events include food & wine tastings, traditional sounds of Puglia, virtual tours and children's activities. Once a difficult region to reach there are now direct flights to both Bari and Brindisi.

Dates For The diary:

Bray Air Display- 20th July
Galway Arts Festival - 14th- 17th July
Feile Na Mara Achill Island - 18th-20th July
Buncrana Music Festival 10th-13th July
Galway Racing festival - 28th July-3rd Aug
Fleadh Cheoil na hEireann Sligo - 10th-17th Aug
Dublin Horse Show - 6th-10th Aug

SUMMER OFFERS WITH TOUR OPERATORS

All tour operators have a range of holidays to suit every taste and budget.

Here are some examples:

Take 'The Italian Express' With Contiki - This company, very much geared to the 18-35yrs age group market, has an 'Italian express' trip in October. Although slightly outside the summer holiday period this trip is well worth adding to the 2014 holiday diary. Walk in the footsteps of the Roman Emperors, throw some coins in the Trevi fountain, enjoy traditional Tuscan hospitality and see the art and architecture of wonderful Florence. In Rome experience special access to famous landmark buildings. To complete what appears to be a fab holiday there will be time to wander around the tiny streets of magical Venice. The tour price is based on twin shared accommodation. Flights & transfers are not included. The tour begins in Rome and finishes in Venice. Contiki is a leader in worldwide holidays & small group adventures for the 18-35 age group offering both quick 3 day breaks to epic journeys up to six weeks. Visit www.contiki.com

DM Tours To Lake District - Visit the Lake District with DM Tours on 18th August which also includes a visit to one of England's most famous seaside resorts, Blackpool. The 5 day tour takes in the Northern & Southern lakes and costs €425pps. Visit www.ohttravel.ie

Eastern Europe With Insight Vacations - Insight Vacations who organise Premium & Luxury escorted tours throughout Europe and beyond currently have a 13 day trip to Eastern Europe taking in many interesting and historic cities including Warsaw, Krakow, Prague and Dresden. Along the route there will be plenty of time to visit many iconic landmark buildings and sites with overnight accommodation in premium hotels. The tour price does not include flights however Insight will arrange airport transfers at scheduled times on the first & last day of the tour. Visit www.insightvacations.com

Camping In France - Crystal Al Fresco are offering the opportunity of some French Park holidays in July in the Aquitaine Region. Amenities include swimming pools, waterslides, playgrounds & children's clubs. The parks are located close to other outdoor activities including land sailing, surfing & kayaking. See www.crystalalfresco.ie

7 Nights In Gran Canaria - Travel with Sunway and stay for 7 nights in the excellent 5* Seaside Palm Beach Hotel from €899pp. This Retro style hotel, part of the Seaside Hotel Group, combines top class amenities and first class service. Price includes half board accommodation, 20kg baggage, a resort representative, services and all taxes. See www.sunway.ie

SELF - BOOKING OVERSEAS

Luxury Alpine Break - It is said 'Love is - an Alpine hut for two high up in the mountains far away from the madding crowd', so check out a new Alpine Hut retreat package created by the Grand Hotel Kronenhof, Pontresina, Switzerland just six miles from St. Moritz. The 5* package includes a night in a simple rustic chalet with the striking beauty of nature and crispness of the early morning mountain air. On arrival the butler will be there to prepare a 3 course meal before returning to the hotel and leaving the guests alone. Next morning guests either make their way back to the hotel on foot, by bicycle, or await collection by courtesy car. There are also 2 nights' accommodation in the luxurious hotel, one dinner in the Grand restaurant, one dinner in the Gourmet Kronenstübli restaurant, a massage in the Kronenhof Spa and a farewell gift to capture the memory of your stay. This hotel was completely refurbished to the highest standards in 2007 with luxurious Spa facilities, five restaurants and 28 new guest rooms. The Grand Hotel Kronenhof is also renowned for extensive children's activities and facilities. To book your stay contact reservations@kronenhof.com

ITALY

A country with many beautiful cities, towns and villages plus magical scenery and excellent food all waiting to be discovered. For art lovers the summer months produce an array of exciting exhibitions and those seeking local activities can choose from numerous festivals. A family holiday in the mountains of Trentino is well worth considering. The region where lakes and mountains meet has many resorts offering integrated weekly activity programmes for children and families. There are 3 nature parks to explore also.

GERMANY

Holidaymakers with any form of disability will welcome the news from the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) that important new additions have been added to their 'Barrier Free Germany' accessible travel website for summer 2014. Now more destinations, tour operators and specialist organisations in Germany, Ireland and the UK have come on board. Among the new specialist operators are PAB Tours (Ireland) who organise tailored travel for individuals, groups with special needs, people with limited mobility or families travelling with small children. Now involved also is Railshop - the only Deutsche Bahn licensed agency here and ideal for anyone wishing to book onward travel. Commenting Klaus Lohmann, director of GNTB Ireland & UK said "we are delighted to welcome new travel partners to our site from UK, Ireland and Germany. The expansion of our site demonstrates how much choice there is whatever your requirements, interests or budget. The number of people visiting Germany from the UK and Ireland is increasing all the time and we hope www.germany.travel/barrierfree.com will be an inspiration. Visitors just need curiosity".

FRANCE

Head for a sunshine holiday to the Mediterranean Coast of France to enjoy stunning scenery, golden beaches and sample the glamorous lifestyle of this popular region of the rich and famous. Attractions include the Cours Saleya Market in Nice, Notre dame de La Garde Basilica in Marseille, the Musee Fabre in Montpellier founded by artist Francois-Xavier Fabre containing a great selection of European art. No visit would be complete without visiting the famous port town of Saint-Tropez known as the playground of the rich and famous. See dozens of luxury yachts moored around the marina and stop at a cafe for a coffee or ice cream and people watch for some well known faces. France is such an easy destination to get to from Ireland - airlines include Aer Lingus, Ryanair, Air France and Cityjet. If you prefer to take a car then ferry companies Irish Ferries, Stena Line and Brittany Ferries offer direct sailings.

ENGLAND

In England the Camping & Caravanning Club has reported a surge in online bookings for 2014 with advance bookings via their website increasing by 26% compared to last year. The club has made it easier for holidaymakers by offering a video of campsites filmed at popular destinations around the UK. Campers also have the option of using the club's site seeker app enabling them to find the site of their choice. Beautiful areas to visit in England include the historic city of Bath, Shakespeare Country and the Lake District.

USEFUL CONTACTS

www.discoverireland.ie www.discovernorthernireland.ie www.visitbath.co.uk
www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk www.italiantouristboard.co.uk www.germanytourism.com
www.francetourism.com

AIRSIDE UPDATES

New British Airways Service - British Airways announced at the end of June they are to commence a 5 per day service between Dublin and London city Airport from 26th October using a mix of Embraer 170 & 190 jets from their new fleet of seventeen aircraft. An aircraft will be based at Dublin Airport for an early morning departure to facilitate customers who work all day in London or wish to connect with the airline's 26 domestic, European or International destinations from the Docklands airport. Each way hand luggage fares to London are available from €39.

Ryanair To Glasgow International - Ryanair is to begin a new 3 times daily service to Glasgow International as part of its extended 2014 Dublin winter schedule. This new service will replace the current Dublin - Glasgow Prestwick route and will compliment the existing Dublin to Edinburgh service which is also three daily.

CRUISE & FERRY NEWS

Alton Towers With Stena - Sail away with Stena Line to the UK's leading theme park - Alton Towers from just €470 per family (2 adults & 2 Children) including return travel with car from Dublin to Holyhead or Rosslare to Fishguard and 2 nights' accommodation and one day family pass to the resort. Details from your travel agent.

