



TRAVEL



BY GEORGE KEEGAN

EASTER TREATS

With the arrival of Spring and Summer on the horizon thoughts centre on taking a short break either in Ireland or overseas during the Easter weekend break. There was a period when hotels were inclined to 'up their prices' for holiday periods such as Easter but thankfully things have changed dramatically and now around the country it's possible to find many special offers, particularly for families. The following is just a selection of some offers and attractions this year.

HOTELS

County Cork; Longueville House Hotel, Mallow- The 'Racing Home For Easter Festival' in Mallow is a 3 day gathering of top flat & jump racing taking place just 1.5km from Longueville House Hotel and they have put together a series of 2 or 3 day packages to include accom, breakfast, dinner and reserved admission to top floor of the Grandstand/Pavilion on a meeting of your choice. The hotel also welcomes families over the week-end. Visit www.longuevillehouse.ie

Fota Island Resort - Perfect for families with plenty of activities to keep children happy. Package here includes 3 course dinner on one evening in the Fota restaurant for adults (with special buffet dinner available for children aged 4-12yrs between 5.30pm & 6.30pm at €9 per child). Details on www.fotaisland.ie

Castlemartyr Resort - this stunning 5* resort complete with it's own castle ruins on site has family breaks from 11th-27th April. There is an Easter Club for young children with schedule of daily activities plus egg hunt on Easter Sunday. For booking & terms tel 021 4219000.

Dublin and County; Herbert Park Hotel Ballsbridge - One of my favourite hotels has a family package from just €225 per night including a double room with interconnecting twin room for 2 children U12. Children are treated to a movie & pizza and there is a full breakfast buffet in the Pavilion restaurant for four. Free car parking. Tel 01 6672200.

Hilton Worldwide Hotels in Dublin - are offering between 17th- 29th April special B&B rates as follows; Hilton Dublin Airport €49.50pp, Hilton at Charlemont (right beside Luas Line) €58.50pp and the Conrad in Earlsfort Tce €88.50pp. Visit www.hiltonworldwidedublin.com

The Shelbourne Hotel - visit the capital and stay in style at this renowned hotel overlooking St.Stephen's Green. From 17th- 27th April an overnight in a Queen or De Luxe room with full breakfast, use of the fitness & thermal facilities and access to the hotel Spa with swimming pool, sauna etc., costs from €229 per room per night.

Fitzpatrick's Castle Hotel, Killiney - This fine hotel with wonderful views of Dublin Bay is located within easy reach of Dublin city. A special couples mini break 'A One Night Escape Break' for €139pp in a de-luxe room with breakfast plus 2 course meal in the excellent Dungeon Grill. Families are catered for with a mid week stay 3nights B&B plus 3 course dinner in PJ's restaurant. Offers are subject to availability. Tel 012305556.

County Mayo; Spend time over the holidays on the new Wild Atlantic Way while staying in another of my favourite hotels the family owned Knockranny House Hotel & Spa in Westport. This excellent hotel is situated within walking distance of the town and there is an offer of 2 nights B&B plus one dinner (and bike hire) for 2 adults & 2 children from €175pp sharing. Tel 098 28600.

County Kerry: - the 5* Dunloe Hotel has a family package at €750 for 2 adults & up to 3 children (or €784 with carriage ride through the Gap). This includes 3 nights in family room and breakfast. Lots of activities for the children, (and dog can come also). Tel 0646644111.

In N. Ireland the Lough Erne Resort Fermanagh is the perfect place to bring the family and enjoy a 5 or 7 night stay in one of the luxurious lodges beside the Lough. During your stay walk up to the main hotel and treat yourself to dinner in the Catalina restaurant. Click on www.loughernerresort.com

EASTER EVENTS

Derry Pan Celtic festival - this unique event to be hosted by Derry/Londonderry during Easter week (22nd-27th Apr) is expected to attract over 5000 participants in a range of musical and other activities. Check details at www.visitderry.com/pan-celtic-festival-2014

National Gallery Dublin - has three new photographic portraits on view by Irish artist Kevin Abosch who is based in Paris. His work has been featured for some time in the arrivals hall at Dublin Airport. The photos acquired are Bob Geldof, award winning actress Olwen Fouere and Brian O'Driscoll. Gallery closed on Good Friday.

OUTSIDE IRELAND

If a short trip to the UK is your preference then check out the following:

England - celebrate Easter in Shakespeare's England where there are a great number of family events taking place. List includes searching for clues to win prizes on Easter trails and egg hunts, watching a performance of 'Curious' (suitable for 3yrs and under) at the Royal Shakespeare Company Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, or perhaps bringing the family to see the Shakespeare Houses. For a Victorian experience visit Hill Close Gardens in Warwick and enjoy the Victorian way of life displays before having a 'cuppa' in the Visitor Centre. Other attractions in the area include The Heritage Motor Centre, Ragley Park & Gardens and the 7th Literary Festival, Stratford (26th April-4th May) featuring, among others, rock musician Ray Davies of The Kinks fame and writer Tim Brooke-Taylor. Not to be forgotten is the Bard's birthday anniversary (26th & 27th April) when thousands of visitors will descend on the world famous town. To check accommodation and full list of events go to www.shakespeare-england.co.uk/easter

New Cotswold hotel - Rated to be the oldest Inn in Britain the Porch House in Stow-On-The-Wold has become a popular place to stay in this lovely part of England. The ancient building was transformed last September into a contemporary boutique hotel. The original building dates to 970AD. Rooms from £100 per night. Click on www.porch-house.co.uk

TOUR OPERATOR OFFERS

Great Locations Offered By DM Tours: The Co. Monaghan based specialist group tour operator DM Tours, a division of O'Hanrahan Travel, organise luxury chauffeur - driven guided tours for groups and families both in Ireland and overseas. They organise a great range of tours to suit all interests. Over the Easter period there is a 6 day World War 1 Battlefields Tour to mark the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the war. The trip includes travel by ferry Dublin- Holyhead and overnight sailing Hull - Zeebrugge with en-suite cabin, dinner and breakfast then luxury coach journey from Belgium to France. There will be hotel accommodation, several guided tours and visits to important World War 1 museums and sites.

The company is also offering 2 opportunities to visit the famous North of England Heritage cities of York & Chester in 2014. Departures for the 4 day tour are 2nd May & 29th August using ferry route from Dublin-Holyhead priced at €395pp (sharing twin or double room). Other tours include; Scottish Highlands (19th May & 30th Aug), Chelsea Flower Show (23rd May) and Annecy Plus French Alps (2nd June). Annecy is a really beautiful town. Option to take a cruise on the lake is highly recommended. DM Tours also run a series of popular Agricultural/Vintage Tours. First up will be the Cambridge Vintage Sales (25th April) then Llandudno Festival of Transport (3rd May).

Late News - D&M has just announced some additional tours offering the chance to walk in the footsteps of many iconic Coronation Street characters from the past played by such as Ena Sharples and Elsie Tanner. A final opportunity before demolition takes place of the site used in the World famous soap. See original sets, dressing rooms and walk the cobbled street. Tour with luxury coach including visits to Manchester & Chester is priced €295pp sharing. Departures 6th & 20th April (note -also tours in May and June). A major plus when travelling with D&M Tours is their policy of collecting people travelling from the county at pick-up points in Monaghan, Castleblayney and Carrickmacross. Bookings & details of all tours on 042 9663111 or 087 2826977.

Guided Camino Tours: Camino Ways.com specialists on walking and cycling holidays along the Camino have announced a series of week- long guided tours perfect for anyone travelling alone wishing to meet new people and share the experience as part of a group. Tours take place every month until November 2014, with choice of several routes. Dates and booking click on www.caminoways.com

Topflight To Madeira: Irish owned tour operator Topflight has announced it will continue to offer clients the opportunity to visit the lovely island of Madeira again this year. The announcement follows confirmation that partners Windavia Airlines are to commence a weekly service exDublin to Funchal on Sundays from April to October. To coincide with this announcement Topflight has produced a glossy brochure highlighting Stay & Explore holidays, accommodation options and group holidays designed to suit, walkers, golfers, gardening enthusiasts etc., Most offers located close to the capital Funchal. Call into travel agent or contact Topflight on 01 240 1700 (from N.Ireland 028 9752 1168).

Insight USA Sale: Relive stories of the Wild West and see the Big Country on an Insight Vacations 9 day premium tour departing 11th May 2014. Visit historic places such as Salt Lake City, Jackson, Grand Teton National Park, Deadwood and Rocky Mountains National Park. Insight Vacations are noted for supplying first class services throughout their tours including quality dining, top hotels, luxury coaches with extra legroom, airport transfers and head sets during all guided visits. Note T&C apply - flights exDublin extra. Call into a travel agent or click on www.insightvacations.com

Visit Thailand: Topflight Worldwide have launched their inaugural dedicated Thailand brochure offering holidaymakers a choice of nine locations. The company specialise in personalised trips. Tel 01240 1788 for details.

ON LINE SPECIALS

North America With GoHop: Leading On Line Company GoHop.ie has offers to North America including Montreal, Orlando, Calgary & New York. Flights from Dublin, Shannon & Cork. Visit www.gohop.ie

Giro D'Italia Coming Soon: The arrival of the Giro d'Italia cycle race on 10th May is creating a great buzz around Northern Ireland and beyond. 200 top cyclists are due to race from Belfast along the lovely Causeway coast through towns in Antrim passing several of Ireland's top visitor attractions before returning to Belfast. To coincide NITB are offering the opportunity to witness the spectacle with 2nights B&B in the Ramada Hotel Portrush from £109 per adult. Subject to availability. Further details on Giro d'Italia at www.discovernorthernireland.com/giro2014. Details of other events around Northern Ireland call save 1850 230 230 or click on www.discovernorthernireland.com

Donard Challenge Mountain Race, Donard Park Newcastle 29th March – 10K with over 850m climbing of Millstone mountain before descending to sea level.

Adventureland at various locations, 5th-6th April – this week-end showcases an array of outdoor activities. Select from 55 different events.

5th DubShed at Kings Hall Belfast, 5th-6th April – see hundreds of classic & modified cars. Fun for the whole family.

Fermanagh Museum Has Ambitious Plans: The County Museum at Enniskillen Castle Museums has announced ambitious expansion plans due to commence in August of this year for completion in 2015. The 'Heritage Gateway To Fermanagh' redevelopment will see a range of artefacts going on public display including a 35lb block of butter found some 30 years ago during turf cutting at Carrownag near Tempo. Following a Carbon 14 date test by Queens University it was confirmed the block dates to between 1030 & 1150AD. Expansion is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund.

AIRSIDE UPDATES

Ryanair Announces Schedule ex London: In their London Stansted Winter schedule Ryanair have announced 8 new routes plus increased frequency on 36 other routes.

SAILING AWAY

HSS Fastcraft Returns: The Stena Line HSS Fastcraft will return to the Dun Laoghaire – Holyhead route from Wed 9th April until Tues 9th Sept. Commenting Orla Noonan Stena Head of Travel said, "the brighter part of the year is set to get even brighter when Stena Line's iconic HSS springs into action on 19th April. We hope the seasonal service of the vessel, well known for it's style and speed will get people thinking about a spring break or summer holiday to Britain in the coming months". Fares from €129 single for car & driver with one round trip daily. Sailing time is 2hrs20mins. Visit travel agent or go to www.stenaline.ie

Irish Ferries To France: Irish Ferries in support of National Ferries Fortnight, aimed to attract more passengers to use this form of travel, have discounted motorist fares to France from €89 each way for car & 2 people on sailings until 30th April 2014. Call to travel agent or tel 0818 300 400.

NOTE: Before booking a holiday or short break always check up to the minute prices.



Pics G. Keegan

