

This is Belfast, so it is.

(A wee guide for delegates to The Lonely Page)



Don't panic. It's the first thing we say to all our visitors. We know, we used to have a pretty bad rep, but the Belfast of 2009 is a reformed character, the poster child for basket-case societies everywhere. IRA is out, Ikea is in. Our shopping centres boast more chains than an S&M convention. The hotels are full of the tourists who've flocked back after several decades of staying away, and they all seem to enjoy themselves enormously.

Besides that, we reckon conferences are always better if you get to see more of the city than the front wall of the room you meet in. So in the spirit of exploration, here's some info on how best to get here, eat and drink here, stay here and hang out here.

Getting here ...



... by Bus

If you're coming from within Northern Ireland, visit www.translink.com for timetables to Belfast.

If you're coming from southern Ireland, you can find timetables at www.buseireann.ie.

Due to the many express buses to the capital from other Irish towns and cities, the quickest way to Belfast is often through Dublin.

Bus Eireann and Ulsterbus operate a 24-hour service between Dublin's Bus Aras and Belfast's Europa Buscentre, with buses leaving on the hour. Return tickets are around £16.90/€22.00. At Europa and Bus Aras, buy your tickets from the kiosk; at Dublin Airport, buy your ticket from the driver.

Aircoach (www.aircoach.ie) operate services from Dublin city centre to Dublin Airport. Change at Dublin Airport for hourly buses to Jury's Hotel, Belfast. Buses leave on the half hour. Tickets from Dublin city centre to Belfast with Aircoach are £17.00/€22.00. Buy your tickets from the driver.

Both services take approximately the same amount of time.

... by Train

The closest train station to Queen's Student Union is Botanic.

If you're coming from within Northern Ireland visit www.translink.com for timetables to Belfast.

If you're coming from southern Ireland, Irish Rail (www.irishrail.ie) is your first stop for train timetables. Irish Rail operates a regular service from Dublin Connolly to Belfast Central Station. Your ticket to Belfast will allow you to change trains and travel onto Botanic Station.

We recommend taking a train from Central to Botanic, as it is just one stop away, but taxis are available at Central Station, and there is a free bus service into the City Centre – just show your train ticket to the driver.

... by Car

For route planning, the address of Queen's University Belfast Students' Union:

University Road
Belfast
BT7 INF
Northern Ireland.

The AA: www.theaa.com/travelwatch/planner_main.jsp

Via Michelin: www.viamichelin.co.uk

Google Maps: <http://maps.google.co.uk/>

Parking around the Union and the university area is limited, but possible. Persevere!

... by Air

Direct to Belfast

Via International Airport ...

www.bmibaby.co.uk

www.easyjet.com

www.britishairways.com

Airport Express 300 operates a 24-hour service between International Airport and Belfast Europa Buscentre, with buses departing every 10 minutes throughout the day. The bus leaves from the stop located opposite the terminal exit. A return ticket will cost about £10 and the journey takes 30 to 40 minutes, depending on traffic.

If you're loaded, you can grab a taxi outside the terminal building; the fare to Belfast city centre is approximately £25.00.

... or via George Best Belfast City Airport

www.bmibaby.co.uk

www.ryanair.com

www.flybe.com

The Airport Express 600 operates every 20 minutes from the footbridge at Sydenham Halt to the Belfast Europa Buscentre. The service, Flexibus route No. 600, operates between 06:00 and 22:05, and costs £2.20 for a return journey.

You can also get the train from City Airport. A shuttle service operates between the Airport Terminal and the adjacent rail halt at Sydenham. Translink operate a twice hourly rail service (0600-2300) Monday-Friday to Central and Victoria Street Stations. The service is hourly on Sundays (0900-2200). You can change at Central station for Botanic station – about a ten-minute walk (if you're slow) to Queen's Student Union. The cost to Botanic station is around £2.50.

Approved taxis operate from the City Airport taxi rank directly outside the terminal building and will cost about £8.00 to the city centre.

Through Dublin

If you're flying into Dublin Airport we recommend you take the bus to Belfast. Bus Eireann and Aircoach both run hourly services direct from Dublin Airport to the Europa Buscentre in Belfast. Travelling time from Dublin Airport is between 2 – 2 ½ hours. See the "... by Bus" section above for more information and prices.

It is possible to travel to Belfast from Dublin Airport by train – but it involves getting a bus or taxi to Connolly Station and then a bus to Belfast. A bus to Connolly will take about 30 minutes and the train takes about 2 hours to Belfast Central Station.

If you're coming through Dublin Airport and fancy a side trip to the Irish capital - buses depart from the airport direct to O'Connell Street regularly at a reasonable cost.

... by Sea.

Belfast is best accessible by sea through Belfast Port, but you can come through Dublin as well.

The following companies service both ports:

Stenaline: www.stenaline.co.uk
P&O: www.poirishsea.com
Norfolk Line: www.norfolkline.com/ferry

Be aware that each company has their own individual terminals in Belfast, which are not located close to each other – make sure you're heading for the right one on your return trip. Be well aware of check-in times too, which can sometimes be up to two hours before departure.

Good deals for foot passengers:

Coach and Ferry

Stenaline have combined coach and ferry tickets from £62 return. Coach and ferry tickets include travel to and from the Stenaline terminal to Europa Buscentre.

Rail&Sail

Stenaline also have combined rail and ferry tickets from £42 returns, but these don't include travel to and from the Europa Buscentre.

Finding Queen's Student Union ...

... from Botanic Train Station (approx. 10 min. on foot)

Turn left as you come out of the station (there's only one exit) and walk straight up Botanic Avenue. If you're going the correct way you'll pass a Subway, a Clements (coffee shop) and then a Starbucks on your left and Boojum (delicious Mexican food) and No Alibis (independent bookstore) on your right.

Keep walking until you reach the crossroads of Botanic Avenue and University Street. There's a set of pedestrian traffic lights – head for the right side of the street and keep going up Botanic Avenue until you come to University Square on the right-hand side. Don't be fooled by the name – University Square is actually just a row of houses, but you'll know you're on the correct course when you pass the heinous library tower block and then the not-heinous Lanyon Building on your left.

Follow University Square to the very end and turn left onto the cunningly named University Road. You'll see Queen's Students' Union across the street. There's a pedestrian crossing directly opposite the Union's front entrance.

... from Europa Buscentre (approx. 10 min. by bus and 25 min. on foot)

Exit the Europa through the Mall onto Great Victoria Street. You'll see the Crown Bar across the road.

If you want to get the bus, cross the road at the pedestrian lights and head right. You'll quickly come to a set of bus stops. Take an 8a, 8b or 8c to University Road; buses stop right across the road from the Union. Tickets cost £1.10 per trip but you can buy a day ticket for £2.50 or £3.50, depending on the time of day.

If you're walking, don't cross the road; just turn right and keep walking up Great Victoria Street until you come to Shaftesbury Square – there's a Halifax on one side and KFC on the other.

Continue past the KFC onto Bradbury Place. Walk straight and you'll pass Lavery's Bar on the left and Spuds chip shop on the right. You'll come to a set of pedestrian lights. On your right is the bottom of the Lisburn Road. Keep going straight onto University Road.

Keeping an eye out on the right for Belfast's best second-hand bookshop/café, Bookfinders, continue on down University Road and you'll reach the front entrance of the Union.

... from Belfast City Hall (approx. 15 min. by bus and 35 min. on foot)

At the heart of the city centre is City Hall, at the centre of Donegall Square.

If you want to get the bus, you can pick up an 8a, 8b or 8c at the bus stop on Donegall Square East, opposite the Belfast Wheel. Fares are £1.10 but you can get a day ticket for £2.50 or £3.50, depending on the time of day. The bus stops directly opposite the front of the Union on University Road.

If you want to walk turn right at the front of City Hall and head for Donegall Square West. There's a bar called The Apartment and a Clements coffee shop. Turn left onto Donegall Square West and walk until you come to a set of pedestrian lights.

On the opposite side of the road is Nationwide Bank on the corner. Pass the bank and you're on Bedford Street. Walk straight up Bedford street, past the Ulster Hall, until you come to the crossroads of Bedford Street, Ormeau Avenue and Dublin Road.

Continue straight onto the Dublin Road – you should pass a Movie House on the left. A little further up there's a Tesco Metro. Follow the Dublin Road until you come to Shaftsbury Square. There's a Halifax on one side and a KFC on the other.

If you carry on straight ahead past the Halifax you'll come to Botanic Avenue – see Botanic Station directions above.

If you veer off to right towards the KFC you'll be on Bradbury Place, keep walking straight ahead onto University Road – for more in-depth directions see above.

Staying here ...



... on a Budget

Ark (hostel)

dorm/single/double £11/20/32

44 University St. (at Botanic Ave.)

+44 (0) 28 9032 9626

arkhostel.com

Unbeatably close to the conference. Newly outfitted, group-friendly hostel in the busy student neighbourhood of Botanic Ave. Internet café on site; amenities close by. Curfew of 2 a.m.

Paddy's Place (hostel)

dorm/single/double £6-13.50/27/37

68 Lisburn Rd. (at Fitzwilliam St.)

+44 (0) 9033 3367

paddyspalace.com

An easy walk from the conference. Well-maintained hostel with great kitchen and lounge facilities; located on diverse, pedestrian Lisburn Road. Free Internet, parking on site; amenities close by.

... at Mid-Range Prices

Old Rectory (B&B)

single/double = £46/66

148 Malone Rd. (at Deramore Park)

+44 (0) 28 9066 7882

www.anoldrectory.co.uk

Seven minutes by bus or car to the conference. Victorian villa with comfortable rooms and high period style. Quiet neighbourhood. Excellent breakfasts of local ingredients. Parking on site.

Tara Lodge (hotel)

single/double/triple = £65/75/105

36 Cromwell St. (near Botanic Ave.)

+44 (0) 28 9059 0900

An easy walk from the conference. Modern, stylish and comfortable. Tucked in from the busy student neighbourhood of Botanic Ave. Excellent breakfasts. Free Internet, parking on site, amenities close by.

Holiday Inn Express

single/double/triple = £65/65/80

106 University St. (short walk from Botanic Ave.)

Belfast, BT7 1HP

+44 (0) 28 9031 1909

Pretty close to the university, and pretty much what you'd expect from a simple Holiday Inn. Breakfast and parking free for guests.

... if You're Mad Loaded

The Merchant Hotel

suites £430/night

35-39 Waring St.

Belfast, BT1 2DY

+44 (0) 28 9023 4888

An intimate, sumptuous, 5-star hotel in the historical Cathedral Quarter of Belfast's city centre.

Magnificent bar, including what might be the world's most expensive cocktail, clocking in at £250.

(Ah, well. Worth a shot. Fab for a night out, though, if you're into sumptuousity.)

Eating, Drinking and Being Merry here ...



To give you an idea of how easy it is to find sustenance and merriment in Belfast (around conference business, of course!), we've suggested some cafes, bars and restaurants within 5 or 10 minutes' walk of the union, as well as a few more further afield should you wish to venture into the City Centre. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does give you an idea of what you can expect. Any member of The Lonely Page staff will likely have their own recommendations to add in person; we can provide directions to these locations, and will be happy to help out if there's something else in particular that you fancy.

... Immediately Around Queen's

Queen's Student Union: As close as you get to being there. Several snack-bars; a Clements coffee shop; the main union shop, selling snacks and drinks (as well as stationery and student basics); and a pharmacy. It's cheap, and it's as close as you get to being there.

Deanes at Queen's: Tucked away opposite the Queen's Lanyon Building, Deanes offers relatively high-end dining at reasonable prices. There's another branch of the restaurant on the way in the City Centre, and this one also comes with a classy sandwich deli.

Bookfinders: Just down toward town from the Union on the same side of University Road. A Belfast treasure and beloved of generations of Queen's creative writers (okay, so we kind of use it as our living room sometimes ...), Bookfinders is a second-hand bookshop/cafe in which Mary Denvir serves homemade soups, sandwiches and toasties, plus hot drinks and cakes, at very reasonable prices and in an atmosphere that can't quite be explained.

Beatrice Kennedy's: Fine dining a few doors down from the Heaney Centre (which, by the bye, is 46 University Road, just across from Bookfinders). Not cheap, but comes highly recommended (including by the aromas that waft into the courtyard at the Heaney Centre. Hot damn.)

Tony Roma's: U.S. chain steak restaurant serving burgers, ribs and similar fare, within sight of the front door of the Heaney Centre on University Road.

... on Botanic Avenue

A bustling, “studenty” area of South Belfast, Botanic Avenue is loaded with cafes, restaurants, pubs and fast-food locations. This list (which is in order of proximity to the university) is by no means exhaustive, and we recommend that you take a wander for yourself!

Common Grounds - “A vibrant hub in a centreless community”, located in the Holylands neighbourhood at 12-24 University Avenue (just off of Botanic and a few blocks past the Union Theological College on the left). Unique in that all profits go to community projects world-wide. The food is both excellent and reasonably priced, the staff friendly and the atmosphere welcoming. Highly recommended. (Closed Sundays.)

Molly's Yard: Gourmet pub food and beyond, tucked away behind Botanic Avenue. Excellent local beers on draught and fabulous desserts.

Cafe Renoir: Soups (with lovely bread), sandwiches, pizzas (creative and affordable), cakes and local specials such as salmon – we recommend the Eggs Benedict!

Scalini: High quality Italian food. A slightly pricier option, but generally well worth it! (See also its brother establishment, Villa Italia, on University Road just down from Bookfinders.)

The Other Place: Decent Irish food at reasonable prices, as well as bottomless coffees. Sometimes the service is terrible, but in a kind of humorous way.

Boojum: A great, simple little Tex-Mex joint started by some folks from the States. Burritos to fajitas, fast and furious, perfect for when you haven't got much time but want something filling. Just past No Alibis Bookstore, on the left.

Empire Music Hall: A popular concert venue and bar, serving food during the day and staying open for drinking into the night. A historical feel, and a good atmosphere for anyone looking for a drink and a post-reading chat.

Lee Garden: High quality Chinese restaurant, to eat in or take away. Definitely the best this side of town, and usually open till midnight.

Springsteen's – American style food, served in a diner setting.

Sakura – Traditional Japanese restaurant. Sit at the counter to enjoy the sushi train, or there's table seating and a full menu as well. Good lunch deals, quite classy.

... Further Afield

La Boca – 6 Fountain St. – Argentine restaurant in a lovely, high-ceilinged setting. Amazing food, and the owner takes great care in choosing the best tea, wine and beer to complement it. Freshly made soups and desserts every day, and tapas/wine specials. (Closed Sunday.)

Crown Liquor Salon – a historic Belfast bar, first stop for many tourists. Located on Great Victoria Street across from the somewhat infamous Europa hotel. Worth even just sticking your head in to look at the decor – pressed tin ceilings, ornate drinking snugs.

The Cathedral Quarter – area of town located roughly between Royal Avenue and the River Lagan. It's a great time to explore, as some of Belfast's most beautiful and long-neglected buildings are here and have recently been renewed. This quarter of the city also houses some of the most interesting (and best) pubs and bars in the city, including:

Black Box – 18-22 Hill St. – arts venue with room to chill, great gigs and damn good pizza

The Duke of York – 7-11 Commercial Court, off Donegall Road – a good, solid Irish pub

Potthouse Bar & Grill – 1 Hill St. – restaurant/bar/club with multiple floors, some trippier than others ...

White's Tavern – 2-4 Winecellar Entry – Belfast's oldest tavern, open since 1630

The Spaniard and Muriel's (3 Skipper St. and 12-14 Church Lane respectively)
Distinctive, interesting places with mad decor and good drinks; both also serve excellent food daily

The John Hewitt Bar – 51 Donegall Street – named for the late poet, socialist and Free Man of Ulster who founded the Belfast Unemployed Research Centre (which owns and operates the pub). Good atmosphere and music most nights too.

For Those With Extra Time to Spend ...



Giant's Causeway. (Photo by poet/Lonely Pager Paul Maddern)

Seeing Belfast

Probably the easiest way to see the city is to head down to Castle Place in the city centre and catch the open-top bus tour. It'll take you around all the famous and infamous sights of the city including the Botanic Gardens, City Hall, Albert Clock, St Anne's Cathedral, the famous wall murals and so on. You can hop on and off as you please.

A more intimate way of seeing the sights is by taking the Black Taxi tour, which departs from outside City Hall in Donegall Square, the city's central plaza. The tour covers the nice, touristy stuff but it's the sort of misery-memoir-on-wheels aspect that people rave about. On the tour you can see up-close the famous murals that adorn gable ends in the city's more fortress-like neighbourhoods, such as the iconic portrait of IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands, and the Shankill's grisly answer to the Mona Lisa, in which a UVF gunman's rifle seems to point at you wherever you are. Many of the murals are less visceral than in the past – you're as likely to see George Best as a UVF gunman these days – and they vary greatly in terms of accomplishment, but they retain a grisly, undeniable *somethingness* that is unique to this city. You can also write your name or a message on one of the "peace walls" that still separate nationalist and unionist areas.

While you're in Donegall Square you might take a spin on the Belfast Wheel outside City Hall, our very own mini-me version of the London Eye. The views are spectacular – you can see the whole city, bounded to the west by mountains and to the east by the Lough. There's a great view of the famous yellow cranes of Harland & Wolff, the shipyard where they built the Titanic as well as many other, more successful vessels. Also punctuating the skyline are the twin spires of St Peter's, the Catholic Cathedral, the minimalist spike of St Anne's, the Church of Ireland Cathedral, and the monumental dome of Victoria Square shopping centre.

One really ought not come to Belfast without getting drunk at least once. The Crown Liquor Salon is a National Trust site and the only pub in the world protected by law. A tarty slice of baroque Victoriana, it was founded by a Protestant woman who insisted on a good, monarchist name, and her Catholic husband, who placed a mosaic of the English crown on the floor so that on entering, one must first walk all over the crown. Belfast people appreciate such creative sectarianism. Opposite the Crown is the Europa Hotel – once the world's most-bombed hotel (who would've thought there was a league table for such things?), before the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo upped its game. White's Tavern is the city's oldest pub (Shakespeare was alive when it opened its doors) while the Duke of York is the pub where Gerry Adams used to be a barman – the only job he's ever had outside of politics. The John Hewitt, named after the great socialist poet, is itself a co-operatively-owned gem much loved by Belfast's arty set. Nearer to Queen's, the Empire Music Hall is a venerable institution, Auntie Annie's Porter House and The Spring and Airbrake/Katy Daly's/The Limelight are the best venues for music, and the Parlour, the Taphouse, the Globe and particularly the Botanic Inn (the Bot) pull the biggest crowds.

Day Trips

Northern Ireland has some amazing scenery, particularly along the Antrim Coast, if you've got time to stay for a proper visit. Also visit the Belfast Welcome Centre (at 47 Donegall Pl. near the City Hall or www.gotobelfast.com).

The Giant's Causeway was famously described by Dr Johnson as “worth seeing but not worth going to see”. Less famously, perhaps apocryphally, Johnson very nearly drowned on said trip, so perhaps he simply meant it was worth seeing but not worth drowning for. And he must certainly not have taken the Antrim Coast Road (north of Larne) to get there – a breathtaking stretch that's a mainstay in “World's Greatest Drives” lists. The Giant's Causeway is one of only three UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Ireland. Set amidst the Glens of Antrim, this spectacular natural monument is what remains of a great bridge built by legendary giant Fionn MacCumhaill, so he could cross the sea and pick a fight with Scottish giant Bannandonner. (Or it's a unique series of polygonal basalt columns formed by a volcanic explosion 60 million years ago, if you can believe a tall tale like that.) Make sure to wear good shoes. Also in the vicinity, you can scare the bajaysus out of yourself on the Carrick-a-rede rope bridge, and then calm yourself with a dram at the Old Bushmills Distillery. Options abound ... Enjoy!