

Chelmsford U3A Travel Group

The Travel Group's first trip went ahead on 19th May 2014, when ten of us went to Northern Ireland for a three night stay. Our trip included a tour of the Titanic Belfast exhibition, a day out on the beautiful Antrim coast including the Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, and a bus trip around Belfast from which we viewed Stormont, Crumlin Road gaol and the historically troubled areas of the Falls and Shankill.



Titanic Belfast

At its peak just before WW1, some 40,000 people worked in the Harland and Wolff shipyards, whereas now there are just 200. The £77m Exhibition Centre, designed to look like the bow of a ship at ground level and a white star from above (The Titanic was owned by the White Star Line), covers the ill-fated ship's history from its design and construction and launch to its sinking and eventual re-discovery at the bottom of the Atlantic. The tour includes a shipyard ride exploring life as a shipbuilder, 3D replicas of the inside of the ship when finished, including the famous sweeping staircase, and an interactive floor showing underwater images of the shipwreck as seen by Robert Ballard, its discoverer in 1985.

Giant's Causeway



Formed 60 million years ago as a result of plate tectonic movements, these hexagonal basalt rock formations have given rise to some of the most unusual coastal scenery to be seen anywhere. As is often the case in Ireland, the Causeway's origins are the subject of myth and legend. The Irish giant Finn O'Cool is said to have used the Causeway as a stepping stone to cross from Ireland and Scotland.

Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge



For over 350 years fishermen had strung a rope bridge 30m above the seas to allow them to access the best places to catch migrating salmon. Now owned by the National Trust, the bridge is now crossed each year by thousands of visitors seeking a minor thrill!

Crumlin Road Gaol

It first opened its doors in 1846 and was a fully operational prison for 150 years. Its inmates included murderers, suffragettes, Loyalist and Republican political prisoners – these included Eamon de Valera, The Reverend Iain Paisley, Gerry Adams, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness at various times – as well as ODC's (Ordinary Decent Criminals!). 17 prisoners were executed – we saw the condemned man's cell – and it also witnessed escapes, hunger strikes and riots. It is now an interesting museum!

Falls and Shankill

The Unionist Shankill and Nationalist Falls sit side-by-side, divided only by the 40 foot high Peace Line. Whilst hideous, nobody dares yet to risk taking it down. Crossing from one side to the other can be made by access roads, although these are closed during times of heightened tension, such as the summer marching seasons. The murals on the sides of houses are famous, although the most militaristic ones have largely been removed. The mural in the Falls featuring the IRA hunger striker on the side of the Sinn Fein offices is one of the most photographed.

Future Dates

Lake Garda trip – 1st to 6th June 2014;
Full meeting – Thursday, 12th June 2014 (Christ Church, New London Road, Chelmsford);
Berlin, Colditz and Dresden – 11th September 2014;
Madeira – 18th to 25th February 2015; and 25th February to 4th March 2015.

If you are interested in joining the Travel Group or have any questions about the proposed trips, please contact David Gout, Group Convenor on davidagout@outlook.com or telephone 01245 268923.