

# British Culture 11 - Visit Northern Ireland

## General Facts

Northern Ireland covers about one sixth (1/6) of the island of Ireland. It is not a densely populated area. Actually it is the second most sparsely populated part of the United Kingdom after Scotland.

Northern Ireland became part of the United Kingdom in 1921. There are 6 counties in Northern Ireland: Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone.



## Belfast



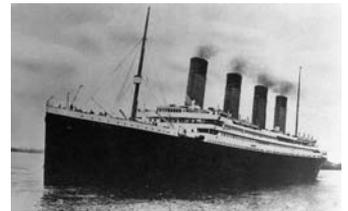
Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland. It is both a historical and modern city. It was founded in 1177 when John de Courcy established a settlement on the banks of the Farset river. Belfast was granted city status by Queen Victoria in 1888.

During the Industrial Revolution, people moved to Belfast looking for jobs in the shipyards, linen mills and the large

tobacco and weaving industries. The population quickly grew from 20,000 in the 1800s to just under half a million people today.

Belfast is now a friendly and lively European city. It has got 2 universities, 2 cathedrals and a grand opera house.

Belfast is also the city where the Titanic was designed and built.



## Murals in Belfast

Two communities have been in conflict for many years in Northern Ireland: the Republicans and the Unionists. The Republicans are Roman Catholic and they want Northern Ireland to be part of Ireland. The Unionists are Protestant. They want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom.

There are over 2,000 murals in Northern Ireland. The first mural was painted in 1908 by Unionists. The objectives behind the murals were to mark one's territory, show resistance and commemorate people who had died.

Several themes can be seen on the murals:

- historical events of the 17<sup>th</sup> century like the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne,
- the First World War,
- the period known as The Troubles (late 1960s - 1998),
- sporting figures like George Best who was a famous football player,
- cultural figures like the children's writer C.S. Lewis who wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia*,
- icons like the Titanic.



## Derry / Londonderry



The foundation of Derry dates back to the 6th century A.D. when St. Columba established a monastery. In 1613, the city was granted a Royal Charter by King James I and the "London" prefix was added, changing the name of the city to Londonderry.

The most important monument in Derry is the Walls which have been remarkably well preserved. The Walls were built during the period 1613-1619 as defences for early 17th century settlers from England and

Scotland. You can also admire Europe's largest collection of cannons whose origins are known precisely.

The Bogside is an area outside the walled city famous for its murals that depict some tragic events that took place in the area. One of these most well-known tragic events was Bloody Sunday: on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972, 26 unarmed civil-rights protesters and bystanders were shot by soldiers of the British Army.



## The Giant's Causeway



The Giant's Causeway is a spectacular rock formation located on the northeast coast of Northern Ireland. It is the dramatic result of volcanic eruptions that took place 60 million years ago. The site consists of some 40,000 basalt columns that form steps from the cliff top to the sea. Legend has it that Finn Mac Cool, a giant who commanded Ireland's army, fancied a lady giant in the Hebrides, so he built the causeway to bring them together. There are other legends associated to the site.

The Giant's Causeway was declared a World Heritage

Site by UNESCO in 1986.

## Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge

Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge is a rope suspension bridge located near Ballintoy in County Antrim. The bridge links the mainland to the tiny Carrick Island. For centuries some fishermen threw this precarious bridge across the gap to get to the island. The chasm (gap) is 24 metres deep and 18 metres across. The bridge is no longer used today by fishermen: they prefer to use a helicopter! But it has become a successful tourist attraction: in 2009, 247,000 visitors came to enjoy the spectacular view from the bridge.

