

❖ Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce



Tourism in Belfast is a growth industry and has produced benefits for local businesses in both manufacturing and international services, including giftware, food processing, transport and travel services.

Visitor numbers have doubled to over four million a year, including over 700,000 from outside Northern Ireland, since 1999. These visitors now spend over £230 million a year in the modern hotels, shops, bars and restaurants that are to be found in most parts of the city emerging from the days of conflict. Some 15,000 jobs have either been created or safeguarded from the growth in tourism.

In addition, high profile conferences have been attracted to the Waterfront Hall in particular, now one of the UK's most popular convention centres. Visitors from virtually every continent came to Belfast last year for conferences in the Waterfront.

Over the past few years, Belfast has emerged as one of Europe's most popular city break venues, a standing that is encouraging significant private sector investment in modern amenities for tourists.

Continued investment in Belfast is essential because the city accounts for around 50% of the tourism economy, 64% of all visits and 95% of the conference business in Northern Ireland. Up to 50% of tourism jobs are also in Belfast.

To ensure the success of the many retail and hotel projects either underway or planned, the city needs to continue its co-ordinated efforts to attract even more visitors, especially those who will spend longer than a weekend. Thanks to the work of the Air Route Development Company (ARD) it is now much easier for Europeans and Americans to visit Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland.

One of the longest running regeneration projects is the work of the Laganside Corporation which, from the late 1980s, after years of neglect and decline, has transformed Belfast's waterfront, which has now become a focus for business, leisure and cultural activities.

The re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly has ensured greater confidence in the local business community and with brand names such as House of Fraser and IKEA all now becoming established in Belfast, the future has never looked brighter for economic growth and regeneration in the city.

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