



IRELAND TRAVEL UPDATE

By JIM CLARKE

IRELAND'S only whiskey sommelier has launched the Irish Whiskey Trail – a tourist route that takes in the best pubs, bars, shops, distilleries and museums related to the country's distilling heritage.

Heidi Donelon has sought to create an online resource for whiskey buffs keen to sample a drop of the hard stuff in the land where it was invented.

Scottish whisky tourism is worth billions to the economy there, with its distilleries alone accruing over a million visitors last year. And the famous Bourbon Trail in Kentucky attracts millions of visitors every year.

Even though Ireland only has four working distilleries left, Donelon has launched the website after repeated requests from her tastings customers for a resource to help them navigate their way to the best drinking spots Ireland has to offer.

See irelandwhiskeytrail.com.

RYANAIR have had their knuckles rapped by the Office of Fair Trading in Britain over their many hidden charges.

Not for the first time, the budget airline attracted criticism for failing to provide clarity to customers over how much their flights and advertised promotions actually cost.

Ryanair have now vowed to give greater prominence on their website and in its adverts to the cost of their so-called "optional" charges, such as checking in a bag, or paying with a credit card. One assessment puts Ryanair's income from such charges at more than €750million per year.

Since 2004, the airline has been

repeatedly cited by the British Advertising Standards Authority for the content of its advertising.

New legislation from the EU is set to enforce transparent pricing in the airline industry. Earlier this month, MEPs approved new laws banning hidden airfare costs which are expected to come into force later this year.

BELFAST'S tourism industry is booming, thanks to daytripping visitors from the South.

Last year, over 80 per cent of daytrippers came from the Republic, compared with only a third in 2007 and only one in 10 five years ago.

And increasingly, the southern visitors are hanging around for more than shopping. In 2007, only nine per cent of overnight visitors to Belfast came from the Republic, but last year that had soared to 25 per cent.

The city saw a record 7.1 million visitors last year, boosting local offers by a staggering €508million. While overall visitor numbers only climbed by three per cent, that increase was sustained by a massive surge in daytrippers from the South.

The number of people visiting the city from outside Northern Ireland grew by 43 per cent, while daytripping to Belfast climbed an amazing 143 per cent.

THE Tullamore Phoenix Festival opens on Friday, and will focus on the history and heritage of the area. Expect pageantry, jugglers, carnival activities and street entertainment.

Running on the same days is the JFK Dunbrody Festival in New Ross. The Wexford town's annual celebration of its connections to the famous assassinated American President will feature street theatre, traditional music and a regatta along the river.

The Galway Arts Festival kicks off tomorrow and runs for a fortnight. It features more than 500 guest performers. Some shows, like Jack L or Tommy Tiernan, have already sold out. But with a line-up that includes the Kronos Quartet, the New York Dolls and a Samuel Beckett play as gaeilge, there's surely something for everyone's taste.