There’s plenty to fill a short break to Belfast, from beautifully restored Victorian architecture to a glittering waterfront, fantastic food scene and music-filled pubs. Here’s our guide to the highlights.

**SIGHTS**

**Botanic Gardens**
(visitbelfast.com)
The showpiece of Belfast’s green oasis is Charles Lanyon’s beautiful Palm House, built 1839–40; and its birdcage dome, a masterpiece of cast-iron and curvilinear glass, added in 1852. Nearby is the 1889 Tropical Ravine, a huge red-brick greenhouse designed by the garden’s curator, Charles McKimm. Inside, a raised walkway overlooks a jungle of tropical ferns, orchids, lilies and banana plants growing in a sunken glen.

**St George’s Market**
(belfastcity.gov.uk)
Northern Ireland’s oldest continuously operating market was built in 1896. This Victorian beauty hosts a Friday Variety Market (flowers, produce, meat, fish, homewares and second-hand goods), a Saturday City Food, Craft and Garden Market (stalls to look out for include Suki Tea, Ann’s Pantry and Hillstown Farm) and a Sunday Food, Craft and Antique Market.

**Titanic Belfast**
(titanicbelfast.com)
The head of the slipway where the Titanic was built is now occupied by the giant, angular edifice of Titanic Belfast, an unmissable multimedia extravaganza that charts the history of Belfast and the creation of the world’s most famous ocean liner. Cleverly designed exhibits enlivened by historical images, animated projections and soundtracks chart Belfast’s rise, followed by a high-tech ride through a noisy, smells-and-all recreation of the city’s shipyards.

**Ulster Museum**
(nmni.com)
You could spend hours browsing this state-of-the-art museum but, if you’re pressed for time, don’t miss the Armada Room, with artefacts retrieved from the 1588 wreck of the Spanish galleon Girona; the Egyptian Room, with Takabuti, a 2,500-year-old Egyptian mummy unwrapped in Belfast in 1835; and the Early Peoples Gallery, with the bronze Bann Disc, a superb example of Celtic design from the Iron Age.

**EATING**

**George’s of the Market**
MODERN IRISH
(georgesbelfast.com)
Many of the ingredients at this first-floor restaurant in historic St George’s Market are sourced on-site. On market days the best seats are on the balcony, looking down over the buzz of stallholders and shoppers below. It’s revered for its ‘best of the market’ Ulster Fry breakfasts, but steaks and cutlets cooked on the grill are excellent, too.

**Mourne Seafood Bar**
SEAFood
(mourneseafood.com)
Hugely popular, this informal, pub-like place is all red brick and dark wood, with old oil lamps dangling from the ceiling. On the menu are oysters, meltingly sweet scallops, lobster and langoustines sourced from Mourne’s own shellfish beds, along with luscious fish such as hake, sea bream and sea bass. Book ahead for dinner.

**Perch**
(thespercbelfast.com)
A lively rooftop bar in the rafters of a Victorian building, with hanging plants and chilled-out tunes. In winter there’s boozy hot chocolate and blankets, while the summer cocktail menu includes Pimm’s, punch and bellinis.

**Crown Liquor Saloon**
(nationaltrust.org.uk/thecrown-bar)
This late-Victorian church (reputed to be haunted) with three floors of entertainment. It’s a legendary live-music venue, with stand-up comedy and quiz nights to look out for when you’re in town, too.

**The Belfast Empire**
(queenstheatres.com)
The Belfast Empire in Queen’s Quarter is a converted late-Victorian church. It’s a tourist attraction, the bar is hidden in an alleyway and filled up with locals come 6pm.

**Muriel’s Café-Bar**
(12-14 Church Lane)
Hats meet harlotry (ask who Muriel was) in this snug and welcoming bar with retro decor, old sofas and armchairs, gilt-framed mirrors and a cast-iron fireplace. Gin is Muriel’s favourite tipple, and there’s a range of brands to mix with your tonic.

**Muddlers Club**
MODERN IRISH
(themuddlersclubbelfast.com)
Industrial-style decor, friendly service and rustic dishes that allow fresh local ingredients to shine are a winning combination at one of Belfast’s best restaurants. Named after a society of Irish revolutionaries co-founded by Wolfe Tone, who held meetings at the same spot in the 1790s, the Muddlers Club is hidden in an alleyway off Commercial Court. It’s popular, so book ahead.

**Don’t miss**

The Belfast Empire in Queen’s Quarter...
### Sleeping

**Vagabonds**  
Best for socialising  
(vagabondsbelfast.com)  
Comfy bunks, lockable luggage baskets, private shower cubicles, a beer garden, a pool table and a relaxed atmosphere are what you get at one of Belfast’s best hostels. It’s run by a couple of experienced travellers, and there’s a whole range of different sleeping options, from large dorms to private doubles. It’s conveniently located close to both Queen’s and the city centre.

**Old Rectory**  
Best for cosiness  
(anoldrectory.co.uk)  
A lovely Victorian house with original stained glass, five spacious bedrooms, a drawing room with leather sofa, and fancy breakfasts (home-baked bread, porridge with Bushmills whiskey, scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, veggie fry-up, freshly squeezed orange juice). A credit card is required to secure your booking, but payment is cash only.

**Merchant Hotel**  
Best for opulence  
( thromerchanthotel.com)  
Belfast’s most flamboyant hotel occupies the palatial former Ulster Bank head office. Rooms are individually decorated, and mix contemporary styling and old-fashioned elegance. Those in the original Victorian building have opulent floor-length silk curtains, and the newer rooms have an Art Deco theme. Facilities include a spa and an eight-person rooftop hot tub.

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FURTHER READING  
Our Ireland guide (£16.99) has a chapter on Belfast, which you can also download as a PDF (£2; shop.lonelyplanet.com), or on our Guides app.