

THE WORLD AROUND US — HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY · P4–P7

Béal Feirste — Belfast

History, Geography & Culture — P4–P7

Key facts about Belfast

1

Location

Capital and largest city of Northern Ireland. Situated at the mouth of the River Lagan, surrounded by hills (Black Mountain, Cave Hill, Belfast Hills). Served by two airports: George Best Belfast City and Belfast International.

2

Name origin

Belfast comes from 'Béal Feirste' — 'mouth of the sandbanks' (referring to the River Farset, now underground, where it meets the Lagan).

3

Linen and shipbuilding

Belfast grew rapidly in the 19th century on two industries: linen mills (mainly in the west of the city — the 'linen district') and shipbuilding (Harland & Wolff in east Belfast).

4

The Titanic

Built at Harland & Wolff, Queen's Island (now the Titanic Quarter), Belfast. Launched 31 May 1911. Left Belfast for Southampton on 2 April 1912. Sank 15 April 1912. The Titanic Belfast museum (2012) is Europe's largest Titanic experience.

5

The Troubles

Belfast was the centre of much of the Troubles violence (1968–1998). Certain streets and areas became symbolic: the Falls Road (nationalist), the Shankill Road (unionist). Peace walls (interface barriers) were built between communities.



6

Peace walls

Physical barriers separating Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist communities, mainly in west and north Belfast. First built in 1969. Approximately 100 peace walls still stand — though most have gates that are open during the day.

Belfast today

A city transformed

- **REGENERATION:** the Titanic Quarter (former shipyard), Cathedral Quarter (arts and hospitality), and Victoria Square (retail) have transformed post-industrial areas.
- **POPULATION:** approximately 340,000 city proper, 670,000 greater Belfast area.
- **TOURISM:** Belfast is now a major tourist destination. Game of Thrones filming locations in NI brought a global audience. The Titanic Belfast museum has welcomed 6 million+ visitors.
- **SPORT:** Windsor Park (soccer, Northern Ireland national team), Casement Park (GAA, being redeveloped), the SSE Arena (concerts and ice hockey).
- **UNIVERSITIES:** Queen's University Belfast (founded 1845) and Ulster University. Significant student population.
- **FOOD:** Belfast has developed a strong food scene — St George's Market (Victorian covered market), Cathedral Quarter restaurants, artisan food producers.
- **PEACE WALL QUESTION:** should peace walls be taken down? Many community residents say they still feel safer with them. Others say they perpetuate division. The debate continues.

