

Your adventure starts here



Barista coffee area on-board the Stena Line ferry to Northern Ireland. Picture Nigel Duncan Media

Over 39 million passengers and 8.8m cars travel one of the Discover Ferries ships each year.

They are a collection of 12 ferry operators who have come together to promote ferry travel in UK and Ireland.

Members operate over 80 routes across the UK and Scotland to Ireland is one of the most popular routes.

They also have ferries to the Continent, the Isle of Wight and the Isles of Scilly and around the islands of Scotland.

Emma Batchelor of Discover Ferries said that people who take a ferry for the first time often become converts.

She added: "We have a real diversity of membership and there is something for everyone.

"We say that travelling by ferry is really part of your holiday and your holiday starts as soon as you get on board.

“What is great about ferries is that you can take your pets on board and there is often a dedicated children’s area.

“Generally, you can walk about and eat and you can relax in a comfortable lounge. It is about enjoying the experience, not enduring it.”

Two companies operate from Cairnryan. As you drive down Loch Ryan from Glasgow you first see Stena. The P&O terminal is a short distance further on the Stranraer road. The best advice is to check your ticket.

Let’s look at Dover-based P&O first. They operate ferries from the UK to Ireland and Continental Europe.

Car parking at Cairnryan is free and their welcoming staff are always on hand to assist.

Embarkation was smooth and the ship we sailed on was comfortable and well-appointed with sizeable dining and rest areas.

The first class area is small but the service is slick and you can enjoy complimentary drinks and nibbles as well as snacks like fruit and tasty toasted bacon sandwiches.

They were ideal after an early morning and a 2hr 40min drive from Edinburgh to the ferry terminal.

We returned with Stena who claim to operate the biggest ferries between Scotland and Northern Ireland. You pay for car parking at Cairnryan.

We travelled on the Stena Superfast VIII from Belfast to Cairnryan in only 2hr 15min with a choice of up to six daily crossings.

The German-built, ten-deck ship, which was 667ft long and weighs over 30,000 tonnes, has a capacity of 1,200 passengers and 661 cars.

The Stena ship is like a cruise vessel. First class is luxurious with complimentary wine and soft drinks and nibbles. Try the lemon drizzle cake, it's delicious.

A full main meal list is available with the burger the most popular.

Recliner seats are a bonus if you have endured a long drive and TV screens are conveniently placed around the secure area. There is no sound.

You can upgrade to first at the port, online and when you book and the Superfast VIII has a number of suites for extra exclusivity (a built-in en-suite), a sauna, where you can also have a 15-minute massage, and a jacuzzi.

A Barista-branded coffee shop is near a spacious lounge area where children can play games.

There is also a children's playroom with designated attendant and you can indulge in retail therapy at a well-stocked shop.

Emma explained that the Stena we were on was a cruise-style ferry and said: "You can book a luxury cabin with an en-suite including shower plus with a bed and a TV and you can go on board and relax and use that as your base.

"The spa is amazing and that is quite unique on the Belfast route. It is another way to relax."

The best way to book at holiday is to go on line and get some info from Discover Ferries at www.discoverferries.com.

Their tag line is: "The adventure starts here." Ours did.