

# The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD



Mobiles of words from the poems of the Nobel laureate (left) hang in the Seamus Heaney HomePlace in Bellaghy, Northern Ireland.

## HONORING THE POET AND HIS ROOTS

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BELLAGHY, NORTHERN IRELAND

As Seamus Heaney often recounted in his poems, he was forever rooted in the soil of his family's rural home outside Bellaghy, County Derry. That's where he grew up as the eldest of nine siblings, and that's where he came to rest. His life seemed to form a pantoum — a poem where the last line is the same as the first. So now Heaney's grave occupies a leaf-blown corner of the St. Mary's parish churchyard near his parents. His epitaph, from a poem he wrote about the hard work of trundling gravel in a wheelbarrow, says simply, "Walk on air against your better judgement."

The Nobel laureate, who taught at Harvard for many years, drew frequently from the well of childhood memory. Thus, Bellaghy is a special place in the singular universe of his poetry. Now the people of this corner of Ulster have repaid the devotion of their native son by erecting an arts center on the site of the former Royal Ulster Constabulary barracks next to the parish church. The Seamus Heaney HomePlace opened in the autumn of 2016 as a paean to the poet's origins and his accomplishments alike. Heaney so prized his rural roots that we were surprised to learn that Bellaghy is situated just 45 minutes in opposite directions from the cities of Derry and Belfast. That made it an easy stop on our drive between the two.

All stone and glass and wood, the exterior of HomePlace exudes a kind of modest sparseness. Its riches lie

within. The sweeping entrance lobby is dominated by photographs of the poet as a boy and in his later years. At age 12, the budding scholar went off to boarding school in Derry, which removed him from the day-to-day of family life in the village of Castledawson, outside Bellaghy.

But small artifacts on the first floor conjure the poet's youngest days. Quotations from his work and interviews pepper the walls. His well-worn leather bookbag, for example, had been his uncle Peter's money pouch. The hand-crafted bag "wasn't what the others had, so it bothered me," Heaney later admitted. It's a subtle peek into the psyche of a gifted boy who pined to fit in like everyone else. His school desk from Anahorish Primary School in Antrim still has the empty hole for an inkwell and "those little carved-out grooves for pens and pencils." His Aunt Sarah taught school in Bellaghy. "It was in her house that I first got a feel for books," he recalled.

Where artifacts are lacking, remembrance takes their place. Heaney's family members and neighbors have recorded their recollections of the man and rural Ulster life. It's a little like listening to a wake through a headset. To hear the rush of memory from them all could tie up most of the day.

The second floor of HomePlace approaches Heaney more obliquely — not through biography, but through the complementary processes of inspiration and language. A wooden butter paddle provides the tangible root for quoting "Churning Day" from Heaney's first book, "Death of a Naturalist." Boston firefighter Bobby Breen's fire helmet (a gift to the poet) conjures Heaney's celebration of the sacrifice of firefighters in his poem "Helmet." Dangling mobiles of words from Heaney's poems — as quotidian as

"clucking," "fledge" or "ditch" or as evocative as "rath," "mizzle," or "clabber" — invite visitors to turn the language around in their mouths for the sheer pleasure of how it feels.

Few of Heaney's poems are displayed at length. A notable exception is "Chanson d'Adventure," which relates his ambulance ride with his wife, Marie, after suffering a stroke one Sunday morning. It comes like a lightning strike in the midst of reverie.

For those of us visiting from afar, it's hit or miss whether we can capture a reading, lecture, concert, or play in the Helicon, the small theater inside the HomePlace that animates the museum with the ongoing joy and work of literary creation.

But there's more than one way to honor the poet. The night after we visited, we ordered a couple shots of Bushmills neat at Bittles Bar on Victoria Square in Belfast. Beneath a giant oil painting with images of Heaney standing in a field and writing at a desk, we clinked glasses to one of the greats in the august line of Irish letters.

### IF YOU GO ...

**Seamus Heaney HomePlace**  
45 Main Street  
Bellaghy, Northern Ireland  
+44 028 7938 7444  
seamusheaneyhome.com  
Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. 1-5 p.m.  
adults \$9.75, children 8 and older \$6.25

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## HERE

### ROBOT BUTLER MAKES TECHNO DEBUT

The future is happening now at YOTEL Boston, the techno-friendly affordable hotel brand that debuted last year in the Seaport District. In addition to existing super-fast Wi-Fi and self-check-in via mobile app, the hotel is introducing YO2D2, an automated hotel guest service specialist — a.k.a. robot butler — designed to make your stay more enjoyable and efficient. The Relay robot is programmed to safely navigate crowded spaces, autonomously summon the elevator, "dance" to music, and greet guests with clever messages displayed on its touchscreen interface. To summon YO2D2, simply call Mission Control with your request



for linens, extra towels, retail items or other amenities. The robot will call the cabin to announce its arrival, and you can then retrieve requested items from the storage compartment. No tipping necessary. 617-377-4747, [www.yotel.com/en/hotels/yotel-boston](http://www.yotel.com/en/hotels/yotel-boston)

### APP LOCATES VERMONT BREWERIES

Craft beer and brewery enthusiasts will want to check out the new app launched by the Vermont Brewers Association. The free Vermont Brewery Challenge app includes every Vermont brewery open to the public. Dynamic real time features include: finding breweries and tap rooms near to where you are visiting (including beers on tap, location and hours), locating various styles of beer within Vermont, adding breweries to a mobile passport, earning rewards and merchandise by collecting stamps, and news about brewery events such as links to ticket sales for Vermont Brewers Festival Burlington in July and Vermont Brewers Festival Killington in March. Also includes an interactive map featuring beer trails to visit across the state. Available for download in the App Store and Google Play. [www.vermontbrewers.com](http://www.vermontbrewers.com)

## THERE

### MURALS IN MANHATTAN

Art aficionados flock to New York City, but how many get to see an artist at work? Through April, visitors to the Hotel Edison in Midtown Manhattan can watch — and chat with — muralist Arnie Charnick as he completes three original works in a newly renovated corridor. The hotel's first artist-in-resi-



dence, Charnick's murals represent nearby Times Square in three eras, from vaudeville days through the 1980s. The soaring Art Deco hotel, dating back to 1931, hosts almost 800 rooms and suites, 24-hour fitness center, two restaurants (Bond 45; Friedmans) and The Rum House bar. Check website for deep discounts when booking in advance, reserving three nights or more, and park-and-stay deals. The Suite Life, valid for reservations through March 31, includes a \$50 American Express Card when booking any suite. Rates from \$112. 212-840-5000, [www.edisonhotelnyc.com](http://www.edisonhotelnyc.com).

### GRAND HOTEL REOPENS IN ADIRONDACKS

The Great Gatsby-era is alive in the Adirondacks at the Hotel Saranac. Originally designed in 1927 as a beacon of elegance in Saranac Lake, the hotel — now part of the select Curio Collection by Hilton — has reopened after a four-year, \$35 million restoration. The sole survivor of 13 luxurious properties that dotted the lake in the

1920s, the hotel today features 82 reimagined guest rooms in its main building, and 20 more suites in Compass Point, an adjacent complex that will open later this year. The Great Hall dominates the second floor with Palazzo-inspired designs influenced by the 14th century Davanzati Palace in Florence. In addition, the property boasts the Ampersand Salon and Spa, the rustic-chic Campfire Adirondack Grill + Bar, and Academy & Main, the hotel's retail arcade with 20 mini-boutiques selling everything from house-made candy to local artisan-made goods. Rates from \$199. 518-891-6900, [hotelsaranac.com](http://hotelsaranac.com).

## EVERYWHERE

### EXPLORE HISTORY AND ART IN SIX CONTINENTS

Travel the world from the comfort of your couch with "Civilizations," a new nine-part PBS/BBC documentary series. Filmed in six continents, the show celebrates how art, music, creativity, beauty, and esthetics shaped the development of civilizations

throughout the world, across the span of 30,000 years. Historians Simon Schama, Mary Beard, and David Olusoga host the show, and are joined on the journey by scholars of history, archaeology and ethnology, art, architecture and religion. Historical works and artifacts covered in the series include the 35,000-year-old "Lion Man," the cave paintings of Monte Castillo, ancient bronze masks of Sanxingdui in China, Mayan hieroglyphs, sculptures and carvings of Calakmul, Buddhist paintings in the Anjata Caves of India, Istanbul's Blue Mosque, and many others. The series also brings history into the present with contemporary artists such as Damien Hirst, Kara Walker, Richard Misrach, and Sophie Matisse. Series premiere April 17. [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)

### MINI-TOTE HOLDS A LOT

Packing for daytrips and short flights just got easier with the new Mini Puddle Jumper Day Bag by Lug. Designed to maximize each compartment's practicality while reducing the overall size, this mini-tote can carry all your important stuff and still tuck neatly under the seat in front of you. Features include tote handles, removable cross-body strap, two water bottle holders, large front zip pocket, two small front zip accessory pockets, wipeable bottom with feet, interior with pen holders and clip hook keychain, and more. Design your own bag option; available in 12 custom-made colors and patterns, and choice of interior lining colors. \$95 [www.luglife.com/collections/new-arrivals/products/mini-puddle-jumper?variant=39503239441](http://www.luglife.com/collections/new-arrivals/products/mini-puddle-jumper?variant=39503239441)

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