

By ANGELA BIANCHI

**B**ELFAST—If clients are looking for a thrill this isn't the city for it and being too adventurous would be unwise.

Advise caution when talking politics and stay away from troubled areas—Andersontown, Fall's Road and Shankill Road which are divided by a wall separating the Protestant and Catholic areas.

But this capital of Northern Ireland is worth a stop-over for clients who enjoy good pubs, spirited conversation and a hint of living dangerously.

Don't expect to see streets crawling with British soldiers. If you're passing through this 800-year-old city chances are you won't notice any sign of the "Troubles" that have divided Belfast for more than 68 years.

Security is everywhere but the only time I felt tension was when I left Belfast to head to Dublin which meant crossing several strategic military zones.

The security check at Newry wasn't very long but the bus driver warned us not to take photos as our cameras would be confiscated and we'd probably be taken into custody.

To relieve tension the driver joked: "County Armagh is so dangerous that even the military takes the garbage out by helicopter...Newry is the IRA's favorite testing ground...the British keep moving their security checkpoints because they keep getting bombed."

Shortly after the checkpoint begins a mile-long control zone and you'd be wise to travel through it quickly as it's a popular target of IRA terrorists. Never stop in the zone, even if your car breaks down, because soldiers have orders to shoot anyone who does.

During their stay in Belfast clients should stick to the city

centre at night and watch the men, Guinness in hand, spill out from the packed pubs to drink the famous brew in the fresh air. Pubs close at 11:30 p.m. but hotel bars stay open until the last patron vacates his stool.

If there's not enough time for pub-crawling in Belfast, a definite must is the old Victorian Crown Liquor Saloon on Great Victoria Street. The floors are covered with mosaics and the stained glass windows, enclosed seating and majestic woodwork make you think you're drinking in a church.

Unlike Belfast's sing-along pubs, the Crown doesn't cater to tourists but to Irish punks, couples, singles and older folk.

Liquor is fairly expensive. A shot of Bailey's Irish Cream or a pint of beer costs \$3.

Ireland is not a shopping haven but it is noted for its Waterford and Tyrone crystal, Belleek china and woolen sweaters.

Shopping is definitely cheaper in Belfast than Dublin and most chain stores and designer boutiques have locations in both cities.

And fashions are well ahead of those available in Canada. Most women's fashions are less than \$100 and Italian shoes cost under \$60.

Convinced that travellers can



*The Victorian Crown Liquor Saloon in Belfast caters to Irish punks, couples, singles and older folk.*

be lured to Belfast, city politicians plan a £20 million project to build a 2,500-seat concert/conference hall and 120-bed hotel on the city's waterfront. Mayor Nigel Dodds expects the new centre to attract 370,000 visitors a year.

Belfast is a surprisingly clean industrial city with a few major attractions. The early 20th century city hall stands out in a gray business area. The beautiful cupola limestone building welcomes visitors with a banner spread across its facade which reads,

"Belfast says no"—a reminder that the Unionists are in power in this city.

Two other buildings worth seeing are Queen's University and the old Victorian Grand Opera House.

But the real beauty of Northern Ireland lies along the Antrim coast with its towering cliffs, beaches and tidy towns.

Day tours out of Belfast stop in several little-known small towns but the most picturesque sites are the nine glens, or valleys.

Lush green hills have a few clusters of grazing sheep and patches of rape seed, with hardly a person in sight.

For whisky-lovers recommend a stop in Bushills, the oldest licensed distillery (1608), which offers tours and sample of bush, black bush and single malt whisky.

The highlight of Antrim is Giant's Causeway, a mass of 40,000 rock columns that rise to six metres formed by a volcanic eruption 50 million years ago.