

The Northwest



A city-lover's nirvana, the northwest is crammed with some of the country's coolest conurbations, a concrete jungle that was once England's mighty industrial heartland.

Sounds sexy, right? Oh, but it is. Within the relatively tight confines of the region you'll find life, music, history and hedonism all clamouring for your undivided attention. There's Manchester, a genuine contender for England's hippest city, only a short hop from Liverpool, whose cultural credentials are a match for anyone. Just down the road is picture-postcard Chester, its rich historical layers revealed in its architecture, while on the coast resides the grand dame of British seaside resorts, Blackpool – home to the most eye-popping, stomach-churning roller coaster on which we've ever been dizzy.

And when you need respite from the concrete paw-print of humankind, you're only a short ride from some of England's most beautiful countryside, including the ever-enticing Isle of Man. All of this from a region that once changed the world.

Born just down the road in Shropshire, the Industrial Revolution was raised in the mill towns of Lancashire into the overwhelming force of capitalism; where, in Manchester, the world's first modern city was conceived; and where the endless possibilities of the Age of Reason were put through their original paces.

These days, however, the northwest is all about looking forward, about being the region that leaves its imprint on the 21st century in the way that it has for the last couple of centuries. A tall order, no doubt, but the region knows a thing or two about mighty achievements, urban redesign and bloody good music: look and listen for yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Learning exactly what kind of hell war is in the **Imperial War Museum** (p659) in Manchester
- Getting to the root of the game at Preston's **National Football Museum** (p692)
- Having your insides churned and twisted at Blackpool's **Pleasure Beach** (p690)
- Getting to grips with the **Isle of Man** (p696) – about as exotic as England gets
- Walking in Frodo's footsteps in and around **Hurst Green** (p695)
- Learning a valuable history lesson at the outstanding **International Slavery Museum** in Liverpool (p681)



■ POPULATION:
6.7 MILLION

■ AREA: 5473
SQ MILES

■ ENGLAND'S LAST TEMPERANCE (NO ALCOHOL) BAR:
FITZPATRICK'S (RASTENSTALL, LANCASHIRE)

THE NORTHWEST



Information

Discover England's Northwest (www.visitnorthwest.com) is the centralised tourist authority that covers the whole of the northwest.

Activities

The northwest is predominantly an urban area, and there are few walking and cycling options. One main exception is the Ribble Valley, which has plenty of good walks including the 70-mile **Ribble Way**, and is also well covered by the northern loop of the **Lancashire Cycle Way**.

The Isle of Man has top-notch walking and cycling opportunities. Regional tourism websites contain walking and cycling information, and tourist offices stock free leaflets as well as maps and guides (usually £1 to £5) that cover walking, cycling and other activities.

Getting Around

The towns and cities covered in this chapter are all within easy reach of each other, and are well linked by public transport. The two main cities, Manchester and Liverpool, are only 34 miles apart and are linked by hourly bus and train services. Chester is 18 miles south of Liverpool, but is also easily accessible from Manchester by train or via the M56 motorway. Blackpool is 50 miles to the north of both cities, and is also well connected. Try the following for transport information:

Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority (www.gmppte.com) For extensive info on Manchester and its environs.

Merseytravel (☎ 0161-236 7676; www.merseytravel.gov.uk) Taking care of all travel in Merseyside.

National Express (☎ 08717 81 81 81; www.national.express.com) Extensive coach services in the northwest; Manchester and Liverpool are major hubs.

MANCHESTER

pop 394,270

If London were to have a rival, Manchester would be it. Birmingham is big, but no city outside the capital has the kind of history, style and urban aplomb to match the uncrowned capital of the north. You don't have to take our word for it: in 2007 the BBC announced that five of its major departments – Sports, Children's, Five Live, New Media and Research – would be relocated to a pur-

pose-built complex called Media City in the Manchester suburb of Salford.

The move will be completed by 2011, but the city is more than ready, with its major-metropolis credentials being long established. This is, after all, the world's first modern city, where capitalism was born; where the Industrial Revolution blossomed; where communism and feminism were given theoretical legs; and where the first computer beeped into life. And it didn't stop there.

The change and influence of the last decade and a half has been nearly as dramatic. It began with a musical revolution, was interrupted by a bomb, and has climaxed in the transformation of Manchester into, arguably, Britain's most exciting 21st-century city – the envy of any urban centre in Europe. It is surely indicative of more than just northern one-upmanship over London that Manchester looks to Barcelona as its main rival and inspiration.

There are museums and enough heritage to satisfy even the most demanding historian, but what makes Manchester so inviting is that it has managed to weave the mementoes of its past with a forward-looking, ambitious program of urban development that has already offered a vision of what the future might hold.

The future, according to Manchester, is to ensure that form follows function, and that cities are first and foremost human dwellings. Testament to this belief is the remarkable life on show at street level, from the trendy bars and boutiques of the bohemian Northern Quarter to the loud-and-proud attitude of the Gay Village and the chic, self-possessed stylings of the Castlefield area. Spend enough time here and you too will be infected with the palpable confidence of a city that knows it's onto a good thing.

HISTORY

Canals and steam-powered cotton mills were what transformed Manchester from a small disease-infested provincial town into a big disease-infested industrial city. It all happened in the 1760s, with the opening of the Bridgewater Canal between Manchester and the coal mines at Worsley in 1763, and with Richard Arkwright patenting his super cotton mill in 1769. Thereafter, Manchester and the world would never be the same again. When the canal was extended to Liverpool and the open sea in

MANCHESTER

INFORMATION

Cameo Road Chemist.....	1	F4
Central Library.....	(see 9)	
Cornerhouse.....	2	F5
L2K Internet Gaming Cafe.....	3	F4
Lesbian & Gay Foundation.....	(see 61)	
Police Station.....	4	E3
Post Office.....	5	E3
Tourist Office.....	6	F3
Waterstone's.....	7	E2
Waterstone's.....	8	E2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Central Library.....	9	E4
Chetham's Library & School of Music.....	10	F1
Early Years & Play.....	11	D4
Godlee Observatory.....	12	G4
Greater Manchester Police Museum.....	13	H2
John Rylands Library.....	14	E3
Manchester Art Gallery.....	15	F3
Museum of Science & Industry.....	16	C4
People's History Museum.....	17	D3
Town Hall.....	18	E3
Urbis.....	19	F1

SLEEPING

Abode.....	20	H3
Castlefield.....	21	C4
Great John Street Hotel.....	22	C4
Hatters.....	23	H2
Hilton Manchester Deansgate.....	24	D4
Jury's Inn.....	25	E5
Manchester YHA.....	26	C5
Midland.....	27	E4
New Union Hotel.....	28	G4
Ox.....	29	C4
Palace Hotel.....	30	F5
Premier Travel Inn.....	31	E4
Premier Travel Inn.....	32	F4
Radisson Edwardian.....	33	E4
Rembrandt Hotel.....	34	G4
Yang Sing Oriental Hotel.....	(see 43)	

EATING

Bluu.....	35	G1
Brasserie Blanc.....	36	E3
Earth Cafe.....	37	G2
Eighth Day.....	38	G6
Ithaca.....	39	E3
Love Saves the Day.....	40	G2
Market Restaurant.....	41	G1
Modern.....	(see 19)	
Trof.....	42	G2
Yang Sing.....	43	F4

DRINKING

A Place Called Common.....	44	G2
AXM.....	45	G4
Bar Centro.....	46	H2
Bluu.....	(see 35)	
Britons Protection.....	47	E5
Dry Bar.....	48	G2
Dukes 92.....	49	C5
Lass O' Gowrie.....	50	G5
Mr Thomas Chop House.....	51	E3
Odd.....	52	G2
Old Wellington Inn.....	53	F1
Peveril of the Peak.....	54	E5
Taurus.....	55	G4
Temple of Convenience.....	56	F5

ENTERTAINMENT

AMC Cinemas.....	57	D4
Atlic.....	58	F5
Band on the Wall.....	59	H1
Bridgewater Hall.....	60	E5
Club Alter Ego.....	61	G4
Cornerhouse.....	(see 2)	
Essential Nightclub.....	62	G3
Green Room.....	63	F5
Library Theatre.....	(see 9)	
Manchester Cathedral.....	64	E1
Manchester Central.....	65	E4
Manchester Opera House.....	66	D3
Moho Live.....	67	G2
Music Box.....	68	F5
Odeon Cinema.....	69	F1
Royal Exchange.....	70	E2
Ruby Lounge.....	71	G2
South.....	72	E3

SHOPPING

Affleck's Palace.....	73	G2
Harvey Nichols.....	74	E2
Oi Pollou.....	75	H2
Oxfam Original.....	76	G2

TRANSPORT

Bus Station.....	77	G3
Coach Station.....	78	G4
Travelshop.....	79	G3

Directions:

- To Salford Quays (1m); Lowry & Imperial War Museum North (1m)
- To Manchester Gay Centre (2m); Manchester Backpackers' Hostel (2m); Old Trafford (4m); Old Trafford Lodge (4m); Lancashire County Cricket Club (4m); Juniper (Altrincham) (6m); Manchester Airport (12m)

1776, Manchester – dubbed ‘Cottonopolis’ – kicked into high gear and took off on the coal-fuelled, steam-powered gravy train.

There was plenty of gravy to go around, but the good burghers of 19th-century Manchester made sure that the vast majority of the city’s swollen citizenry (with a population of 90,000 in 1801, and 100 years later, two million) who produced most of it never got their hands on any of it. Their reward was life in a new kind of urban settlement: the industrial slum. Working conditions were scarcely better, with impossibly long hours, child labour, work-related accidents and fatalities commonplace. Mark Twain commented that he would like to live here because the ‘transition between Manchester and Death would be unnoticeable’. So much for Victorian values.

The wheels started to come off towards the end of the 19th century. The USA had begun to flex its own industrial muscles and was taking over a sizeable chunk of the textile trade; production in Manchester’s mills began to slow, and then it stopped altogether. By WWII there was hardly enough cotton produced in the city to make a tablecloth. The postwar years weren’t much better: 150,000 manufacturing jobs were lost between 1961 and 1983 and the port – still the UK’s third largest in 1963 – finally closed in 1982 due to declining traffic. The nadir came on 15 June 1996, when an IRA bomb wrecked a chunk of the city centre, but the subsequent reconstruction proved to be the beginning of the glass-and-chrome revolution so much in evidence today.

ORIENTATION

Shoe power and the excellent Metrolink tram are the only things you’ll need to get around the compact city centre. All public transport converges at Piccadilly Gardens, a few blocks southeast of the cathedral. Directly north is the on-the-up boho Northern Quarter, with its offbeat boutiques, hip cafes and fabulous record shops. A few blocks south is the Gay Village, centred on Canal St and, just next to it, Chinatown, basically a bunch of restaurants clustered around Portland St.

Southwest of the city centre is Castlefield and Deansgate Locks, a development that has successfully converted the 19th-century canalside industrial infrastructure into a groovy weekend playground for the city’s fine young things. Further west again – and

accessible via Metrolink – are the recently developed Salford Quays, home to the fab Lowry complex and the Imperial War Museum North. Not far away is Old Trafford football stadium, where Manchester United’s global stars earn their fabulous keep.

For information on getting around, see p669.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Cornerhouse (☎ 0161-200 1514; www.cornerhouse.org; 70 Oxford St) Art and film books, specialist magazines and kitschy cards.

Waterstone’s Deansgate (☎ 0161-832 1992; St Anne’s Sq (☎ 0161-837 3000))

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 0161-436 3999)

Police station (☎ 0161-872 5050; Bootle St)

Rape Crisis Centre (☎ 0161-273 4500)

Samaritans (☎ 0161-236 8000)

Internet Access

Central Library (☎ 0161-234 1982; St Peter’s Sq; per 30min £1; ☎ internet access 1-6pm Mon-Sat)

L2K Internet Gaming Cafe (☎ 0161-244 5566; 32 Princess St; per 30min £2; ☎ 9am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

City Life (www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk) The city’s evening paper in electronic form.

Manchester After Dark (www.manchesterad.com) Reviews and descriptions of the best places to be when the sun goes down.

Manchester City Council (www.manchester.gov.uk) The council’s official website, which includes a visitors’ section.

Manchester Online (www.manchesteronline.co.uk) Local online newspaper.

Real Manchester (www.realmanchester.com) Online guide to nightlife.

Virtual Manchester (www.manchester.com) Restaurants, pubs, clubs and where to sleep.

Visit Manchester (www.visitmanchester.com) The official website for Greater Manchester.

Medical Services

Cameolord Chemist (☎ 0161-236 1445; St Peter’s Sq; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Manchester Royal Infirmary (☎ 0161-276 1234; Oxford Rd)

Post

Post office (Brazenose St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

THE WARS OF THE ROSES

The Wars of the Roses was nothing more than a protracted quarrel between two factions – the House of Lancaster (whose symbol was a red rose) and the House of York (represented by a white rose) – over who would rule England.

It began with Lancastrian Henry VI (r 1422–61 and 1470–71), who was terrific as a patron of culture and learning, but totally inept as a ruler, and prone to bouts of insanity. During the worst of these episodes he had to hand over power to Richard, Duke of York, who served as protector but acted as king. Henry may have been nutty but his wife Margaret of Anjou, however, was anything but, and in 1460 she put an end to Richard's political ambitions by raising an army to defeat and kill him at the Battle of Wakefield. Round one to Lancaster.

Next it was the turn of Richard's son Edward. In 1461 he avenged his father's defeat by inflicting a defeat of his own on Henry and Margaret, declaring himself Edward IV (r 1461–70 and 1471–83) as a result. One all.

But Edward's victory owed much to the political machinations of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick – appropriately nicknamed 'the kingmaker' – but the throne proved an amnesiac and in time Eddie forgot his friends. In 1470 Warwick jumped ship and sided with the Lancastrians. Edward was exiled and Henry, Margaret and the earl were all smiles. Half-time and the score was two–one to Lancaster.

Edward came back strongly a year later. He first defeated and killed the earl at the Battle of Barnet before crushing Henry and Margaret at Tewkesbury. Henry was executed in the Tower of London and Margaret was ransomed back to France, where she died in poverty. Just to make sure, Edward also killed their son.

The Yorkists were back in the game, and Edward proved to be a good and popular king. When he died in 1483 (apparently worn out by his sexual excesses), power passed to his brother Richard, who was to rule as regent until Edward's 12-year-old son came of age. Two months after the king's death, Richard arranged for the 'disappearance' of his nephew and he was crowned Richard III. But when rumours of Dickie's dastardly deed became known, he became as popular as a bad smell. In 1485, the Lancastrians, led by the young Henry Tudor, defeated Richard at the Battle of Bosworth, leaving the fallen king to offer his kingdom in exchange for a horse. Final result: victory to Lancaster.

The coronation of Henry VII, and his subsequent marriage to Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth, put an end to the fighting and ushered in the Tudor dynasty, but it didn't end the rivalry.

The two sides may not be fighting with swords and lances, but one of the great enmities in English football today exists between Lancashire's Manchester United – who wear red – and Yorkshire's Leeds United, who wear all-white.

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 0871 222 8223; www.visitmanchester.com; Town Hall Extension, St Peter's Sq; 🕒 10am–5.15pm Mon–Sat, 10am–4.30pm Sun)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There's so much to see in the city centre and in the surrounding suburbs – from Salford Quays towards the west (across the River Irwell) to the museums and galleries of the University of Manchester (located south of the city centre along and off Oxford Rd). Pretty much everywhere in Manchester can be reached easily by public transport.

City Centre

The city's main administrative centre is the superb Victorian Gothic **town hall** (admission free, tours adult/child £5/4; 🕒 tours 2pm Sat Mar–Sep) that dominates Albert Sq. The interior is rich in sculpture and ornate decoration, while the exterior is crowned by an impressive 85m-high tower. You can visit the building on your own, but because it's the city's main administrative centre you won't get the same access as you would by taking an organised tour, which departs from the tourist office.

Just behind the town hall, the elegant Roman Pantheon lookalike **Central Library** (☎ 0161-234 1900; St Peter's Sq; admission free; 🕒 10am–8pm Mon–Thu, 10am–6pm Fri & Sat) was built in 1934.

MANCHESTER IN...

Two Days

Two days? It's hardly enough, but here's a good sample menu to get you started. After exploring the **Museum of Science and Industry** (opposite), take a peek inside the **John Rylands Library** (below) before hopping on the Metrolink for the Salford Quays and its trio of top attractions: the **Imperial War Museum North** (opposite), the **Lowry** (p660) and the **Manchester United Museum** (p660). If you'd rather eat glass than set foot in, or give money to, Man U PLC, skip across town to visit Manchester City's ground at the **City of Manchester Stadium** (p668). Pick a restaurant such as **Yang Sing** (p664) to kick off the evening, then try **A Place Called Common** (p665) and round off the night in **Music Box** (p666).

The next day, make a visit to **Urbis** (below) before indulging your retail chi in either the **Millennium Quarter** (p669) or the boutiques and offbeat shops of the **Northern Quarter** (p669). Finish your day with a jaunt to the suburb of West Didsbury and its selection of fantastic restaurants (see boxed text, p665).

Four Days

Congratulations. You've seen sense and have added a few days to really appreciate the city. Follow the two-day itinerary and also tackle some of the city's lesser-known museums – the **People's History Museum** (opposite), **Chetham's Library** (see boxed text, p660) and the **Manchester Jewish Museum** (see boxed text, p660). Get an insider's take on the city's rich musical heritage by going on a **Manchester Music Tour** (p483). Go south and explore the **Manchester Museum** (p661) and **Whitworth Art Gallery** (p661). If the weather is decent, visit the **Godlee Observatory** (see boxed text, p661) before examining the riches of the **Manchester Art Gallery** (below).

It is the country's largest municipal library, with more than 20 miles of shelves.

MANCHESTER ART GALLERY

A superb collection of British art and a hefty number of European masters are on display at the city's top **gallery** (☎ 0161-235 8888; www.manchestergalleries.org; Mosley St; admission free; ☺ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). The older wing, designed by Charles Barry (of Houses of Parliament fame) in 1834, has an impressive collection that includes 37 Turner watercolours, as well as the country's best collection of Pre-Raphaelite art. The newer gallery features a permanent collection of 20th-century British art starring Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Stanley Spencer, Henry Moore and David Hockney. Finally, the Gallery of Craft & Design, in the Athenaeum, houses a permanent collection of pre-17th-century art, with works predominantly from the Dutch and early Renaissance masters.

JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

An easy candidate for top building in town, this marvellous Victorian Gothic **library** (☎ 0161-834 5343; www.library.manchester.ac.uk; 35 Deansgate; admission free; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon & Wed-Sat, noon-5pm Tue & Sun) was one hell of a way for

Rylands' widow to remember her husband, John. Less a library and more a cathedral to books, Basil Champneys' stunning building is arguably the most beautiful library in Britain – although there's not much argument when you're standing in the simply exquisite Gothic 'Reading Room', complete with high-vaulted ceilings and stained-glass windows. It's such a breathtaking building that you could easily ignore the magnificent collection of early printed books and rare manuscripts. A £16 million refit has resulted in the addition of a surprisingly tasteful modern annexe with a cafe and a bookshop.

URBIS

The stunning glass triangle that is **Urbis** (☎ 0161-907 9099; www.urbis.org.uk; Cathedral Gardens, Corporation St; levels 2-4 admission free, charge for temporary exhibits; ☺ 10am-6pm Sun-Wed, 10am-8pm Thu-Sat) is a museum about how a city works and – often – doesn't work. The walls of the three floors are covered in compelling photographs, interesting statistics and informative timelines, but the best parts are the interactive videos, each of which tell stories about real people from radically different backgrounds and how they fare in Manchester.

It's all well and good to theorise, but there's nothing like a real story to hammer home the truth. Homelessness, rootlessness and dislocation are major themes of urban living, and Urbis doesn't shy away from encouraging visitors to consider what it's like to sleep on a park bench.

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE & INDUSTRY

The city's largest **museum** (MOSI; ☎ 0161-832 1830; www.msimg.org.uk; Liverpool Rd; admission free, charge for special exhibitions; ☹ 10am-5pm) comprises 2.8 hectares in the heart of 19th-century industrial Manchester. It's in a landscape of enormous, weather-stained brick buildings and rusting cast-iron relics of canals, viaducts, bridges, warehouses and market buildings that makes up Castlefield, now deemed an 'urban heritage park'.

If there's anything you want to know about the Industrial (and post-Industrial) Revolution and Manchester's key role in it, you'll find the answers among the collection of steam engines and locomotives, factory machinery from the mills, and the excellent exhibition telling the story of Manchester from the sewers up.

With more than a dozen permanent exhibits, you could spend a whole day poking about the place, testing early electric-shock machines here and trying out a printing press there. A unifying theme (besides the fact that science and industry were pretty handy to the development of society) is that Manchester and Mancunians had a key role to play: did you know that Manchester was home to the world's first computer (a giant contraption called 'the baby'), in 1948, or that the world's first submarine was built to the designs of local curate Reverend George Garrett, in 1880? Nope, neither did we.

GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE MUSEUM

One of the city's best-kept secrets is this superb **museum** (☎ 0161-856 3287; www.gmp.police.uk; 57A Newton St; admission free; ☹ 10.30am-3.30pm Tue) housed within a former Victorian police station. The original building has been magnificently – if a little creepily – brought back to life, and you can wander in and out of 19th-century cells where prisoners rested their heads on wooden (!!) pillows; visit a restored magistrates' court from 1895; and examine the case histories (complete with mugshots and photos of weapons) of some

of the more notorious names to have passed through its doors.

PEOPLE'S HISTORY MUSEUM

Social history and the labour movement are the themes at this **museum** (☎ 0161-839 6061; www.phm.org.uk; Left Bank, Bridge St). It's housed in an old Edwardian pumping station, which is currently undergoing a major refit. You'll have to wait until the end of 2009 to see displays like the desk at which Thomas Paine (1737–1809) wrote *Rights of Man* (1791).

Salford Quays

It seems that no 21st-century urban plan is complete without a docklands development; in Manchester's case, the docks are the Salford Quays, west of the city centre along the Ship Canal. Three major attractions draw in the punters, and a shopping centre makes sure they have outlets at which to spend their money. It's a cinch to get here from the city centre via Metrolink (£2); for the Imperial War Museum North and the Lowry, look for the Harbour City stop; get off at Old Trafford for the eponymous stadium.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM NORTH

War museums generally appeal to those with a fascination for military hardware and battle strategy (toy soldiers optional), but Daniel Libeskind's visually stunning **Imperial War Museum North** (☎ 0161-836 4000; www.iwm.org.uk/north; Trafford Wharf Rd; admission free; ☹ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb) takes a radically different approach. War is hell, it tells us, but it's a hell we revisit with tragic regularity.

The exhibits cover the main conflicts of the 20th century through a broad selection of displays, but the really effective bit comes every half-hour when the entire exhibition hall goes dark and one of three 15-minute films (*Children and War*, *Why War?* or *Weapons of War*) is projected throughout. Visitors are encouraged to walk around the darkened room so as to get the most out of the sensory bombardment.

Although the audiovisuals and displays are quite compelling, the extraordinary aluminium-clad building itself is a huge part of the attraction, and the exhibition spaces are genuinely breathtaking. Libeskind designed three distinct structures (or shards) that represent the three main theatres of war: air, land and sea.

MORE MUSEUMS

If you can't get enough of annotated exhibits, Manchester has a number of other museums worth checking out.

The **Manchester Jewish Museum** (☎ 0161-8349879; www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com; 190 Cheetham Hill Rd; adult/child £4/3; 🕒 10.30am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Sun), in a Moorish-style former synagogue, tells the story of the city's Jewish community in fascinating detail, including the story of Polish refugee Michael Marks, who opened his first shop with partner Tom Spencer at 20 Cheetham Hill Rd in 1894. From Piccadilly Gardens, take bus 59, 89, 135 or 167.

Nearby, the wonderful **Museum of Transport** (☎ 0161-205 2122; www.gmts.co.uk; Boyle St, Cheetham Hill; admission £4/2; 🕒 10am-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb) is packed with old buses, fire engines and lorries built in the last 100 years.

Beautiful **Chetham's Library & School of Music** (☎ 0161-834 7861; www.chethams.org.uk; Long Millgate; admission free; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri), built in 1421, is the city's oldest structure that's still completely intact – and was where Messrs Marx and Engels used to study (by the big bay window in the main reading room). It is only open by prearranged visit, as it is part of a national school for young musicians.

The **Pankhurst Centre** (☎ 0161-273 5673; www.thepankhurstcentre.org.uk; 60-62 Nelson St; admission free; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) is the converted childhood home of Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928), a leading light of the British suffragette movement. It has displays on her remarkable life and political struggles.

LOWRY

Looking more like a shiny steel ship than an arts centre, the **Lowry** (☎ 0161-876 2020; www.the-lowry.com; Pier 8, Salford Quays; 🕒 11am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun & Mon) is the quays' most notable success. It attracts more than one million visitors a year to its myriad functions, which include everything from art exhibits and performances (see Classical Music, p668) to bars, restaurants and, inevitably, shops. You can even get married in the place.

The complex is home to more than 300 paintings and drawings by northern England's favourite artist, LS Lowry (1887–1976), who was born in nearby Stretford. He became famous for his humanistic depictions of industrial landscapes and northern towns, and gave his name to the complex.

OLD TRAFFORD (MANCHESTER UNITED MUSEUM & TOUR)

Here's a paradox: the world's most famous and supported football club, beloved of fans from Bangkok to Buenos Aires, is the most hated club in England and has a smaller fan base in Manchester than its far less successful cross-town rival, Manchester City (see boxed text, above). United fans snigger and dismiss this as small-minded jealousy, while treating the **Old Trafford stadium** (www.manutd.com; Sir Matt Busby Way; 🕒 9.30am-5pm) like holy ground and the stars who play there like minor deities.

Those stars return the compliment by winning everything – most recently a league and Champions' League double in 2008.

But there's no denying that a visit to the stadium is one of the more memorable things you'll do here. We strongly recommend that you take the **tour** (☎ 0870 442 1994; adult/child £12/8; 🕒 every 10min 9.40am-4.30pm except match days), which includes a seat in the stands, a stop in the changing rooms, a peek at the players' lounge (from which the manager is banned unless invited by the players) and a walk down the tunnel to the pitch-side dugout, which is as close to ecstasy as many of the club's fans will ever get. It's pretty impressive stuff. The **museum** (adult/child £8.50/6.75; 🕒 9.30am-5pm), which is part of the tour but can be visited independently, has a comprehensive history of the club, and a state-of-the-art call-up system that means you can view your favourite goals – as well as a holographic 'chat' with Sir Alex Ferguson.

University of Manchester

About a mile south of the city, the University of Manchester is one of England's most extraordinary institutions, and not just because it is a top-class university with a remarkable academic pedigree and a great place to party. It is also home to a world-class museum and a superb art gallery.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Maybe it's the vertiginous spiral staircase, but hardly anyone ever visits the fabulous **Godlee Observatory** (☎ 0161-200 4977; www.manastro.co.uk; fl G, Sackville Bldg, UMIST, Sackville St; admission free; ☎ by appointment only), one of the most interesting places in town. Built in 1902, it is a fully functioning observatory with its original Grubb telescope in place; even the rope and wheels that move the telescope are original. Not only can you glimpse the heavens (if the weather allows), but the views of the city from the balcony are exceptional. It's located at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST).

Alternatively, you'll get great views of the city from the Hilton bar atop the city's tallest skyscraper, the Beetham Tower (see Hilton Manchester Deansgate, p663).

MANCHESTER MUSEUM

If you're into natural history and social science, this extraordinary **museum** (☎ 0161-275 2634; www.museum.manchester.ac.uk; University of Manchester, Oxford Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun & Mon) is the place for you. It has galleries devoted to archaeology, archery, botany, ethnology, geology, numismatics and zoology. The real treat here, though, is the Egyptology section and its collection of mummies. One particularly interesting section is devoted to the work of Dr Richard Neave, who has rebuilt faces of people who have been dead for more than 3000 years; his pioneering techniques are now used in criminal forensics.

Take bus 11, 16, 41 or 42 from Piccadilly Gardens or bus 47, 190 or 191 from Victoria station.

WHITWORTH ART GALLERY

Manchester's second most important **art gallery** (☎ 0161-275 7450; www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk; University of Manchester, Oxford Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun) has a wonderful collection of British watercolours. It also houses the best selection of historic textiles outside London, and has a number of galleries devoted to the work of artists from Dürer and Rembrandt to Lucien Freud and David Hockney.

All this high art aside, you may find that the most interesting part of the gallery is the group of rooms dedicated to wallpaper – proof that bland pastels and horrible flowery patterns are not the final word in home decoration.

MANCHESTER FOR CHILDREN

Urbis (p658) is always full of kids who find the interactive displays quite engaging, and the **Museum of Science and Industry** (p659) is the perfect all-day destination, offering a host of different activities and exhibits suited to

younger visitors. Nearby, the canalside parks and walkways of Castlefield are pleasantly distracting. Manchester United's ground, **Old Trafford** (opposite), is always popular with fans, who are getting younger and younger (kids seem to lose interest in Manchester City when they ask 'but what have they won?'). The **Imperial War Museum North** (p659) is designed to engage the interest of kids barely into double figures, despite its war-based themes not being a bunch of laughs.

If you're looking for some free time away from the kids, **Early Years & Play** (☎ 0161-234 7117; Overseas House, Quay St) is a city-centre crèche.

QUIRKY MANCHESTER

You don't have to work too hard to find oddity in Manchester: spend enough time in Piccadilly Gardens and you'll know what we mean. However, for a different (and altogether fabulous) view of the city, climb to the parapet of the **Godlee Observatory** (see boxed text, above), a place virtually nobody goes to. You can then do some (pretend) stir in the one of the Victorian prison cells of the **Greater Manchester Police Museum** (p659) before trawling through the marvellous collection of eclectic shops in the **Northern Quarter** (p669).

When you're done, you'll have to unwind with a pint in the **Temple of Convenience** (p665), a tiny basement pub with a terrific atmosphere located in...a former public toilet.

TOURS

The tourist office (see Information, p657) sells tickets for all sorts of guided walks, which operate almost daily year round and cost £5/4 per adult/child.

DETOUR: ELIZABETH GASKELL HOUSE

About three miles south of the city centre is **Elizabeth Gaskell House** (☎ 0161-225 1922; www.elizabethgaskellhouse.org; 84 Plymouth Grove, Ardwick; admission free; 🕒 noon-4pm 1st Sun of month Mar-Dec), a Grade II detached Regency-style villa that was the home of novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, who lived here from 1850-65 (and whose family continued to live here until 1913). It is a rare property: besides its unique literary associations (Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens were regular visitors), it is one of the few homes in Manchester whose interior has been carefully maintained and restored to its original elegance. The house has limited opening hours; to get here, take bus 50, 113, 130, 147, 191 or 197 from Piccadilly Gardens, or take the train to Ardwick.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Manchester Irish Festival (www.manchesteririshfestival.co.uk) Manchester's huge Irish community goes bonkers for a week in mid-March.

Manchester International Festival (www.manchesterinternationalfestival.com) With its exciting showcasing of only new, commissioned work, this largely musical biennial festival (held in July) is already the city's most popular.

Manchester Jazz Festival (www.manchesterjazz.com) Takes place in 50 venues throughout the city in late July.

Futuresonic (www.futuresonic.com) Superb electronic music and media arts festival that takes place in various venues over a week in summer.

Manchester Pride (☎ 0871 230 2624; www.manchesterpride.com) One of England's biggest celebrations of gay, bisexual and transgender life, held in late August.

Manchester International Film Festival (www.kinofilm.org.uk) A biennial late-October film festival that was launched in 2007.

SLEEPING

Although Manchester's beds cater mostly to the business traveller – who can be trusted to provide the steadiest flow of business – the city's reputation as a capital of cool has seen the standards of style go up, and Manchester is now awash with all manner of designer digs. Remember that during the football season (August to May), rooms can be almost impossible to find if Manchester United is playing at home. If you are having difficulty finding a bed, the tourist office's accommodation service (£4) can help.

City Centre**BUDGET**

Manchester YHA (☎ 0845 371 9647; www.yha.org.uk; Potato Wharf; dm incl breakfast from £14; 📞 📺) This purpose-built canalside hostel in the Castlefield area is one of the best in the country. It's a top-class option with four- and six-bed dorms, all with bathroom, as well as a host of good facilities.

Hatters (☎ 0161-236 9500; www.hattersgroup.com; 50 Newton St; dm/s/d/tr from £17/28/50/70; 📞 📺) The old-style lift and porcelain sinks are the only leftovers of this former milliner's factory, now one of the best hostels in town, with location to boot – smack in the heart of the Northern Quarter, you won't have to go far to get the best of alternative Manchester.

Rembrandt Hotel (☎ 0161-236 1311; www.rembrandtmanchester.com; 33 Sackville St; s/d/tr from £35/40/45) Grande dame of the Gay Village; spartan rooms but a very friendly welcome. Another good option.

New Union Hotel (☎ 0161-228 1492; www.newunionhotel.com; 111 Princess St; s/d/tr from £40/50/60) In the heart of the Gay Village but not exclusively pink, this terrific little hotel is all about affordable fun – the rooms are functional, but the karaoke machine downstairs works just fine. Not recommended for a quiet layover.

MIDRANGE

Ox (☎ 0161-839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd; d/tr from £55/75) Not quite your traditional B&B (breakfast is extra), but an excellent choice, nonetheless: nine ox-blood-red rooms with tidy amenities above a fine gastropub in the heart of Castlefield. It's the best deal in town for the location.

Castlefield (☎ 0161-832 7073; www.castlefield-hotel.co.uk; 3 Liverpool Rd; s/d from £70/99; 📞 📺) This is another successful warehouse conversion that has resulted in a thoroughly modern business hotel. Overlooking the canal basin, it has spacious, comfortable rooms and excellent amenities, including a fitness centre and pool that are free to guests.

Palace Hotel (☎ 0161-288 1111; www.principal-hotels.com; Oxford St; r from £80) An elegant refurbishment of one of Manchester's most magnificent Victorian palaces resulted in a special boutique hotel, combining the grandeur of the public areas with the modern look of the bedrooms.

Abode (☎ 0161-247 7744; www.abodehotels.co.uk; 107 Piccadilly St; r from £80; ☑) Modern British style is the catchphrase at this converted textile factory. The original fittings have been combined successfully with 61 spanking-new bedrooms divided into four categories of ever-increasing luxury: Comfortable, Desirable, Envable and Fabulous, the latter being five seriously swanky top-floor suites. Vi-Spring beds, Monsoon showers, LCD-screen TVs and stacks of Aqua Sulis toiletries are standard throughout. In the basement, star chef Michael Caines has a champagne and cocktail bar adjacent to his very own restaurant.

Radisson Edwardian (☎ 0161-835 9929; www.radissonedwardian.com/manchester; Peter St; r from £110; ☑) The Free Trade Hall saw it all, from Emmeline Pankhurst's suffragette campaign to the Sex Pistols' legendary 1976 gig. Today, those rabble-rousing noisemakers wouldn't be allowed to set foot in the door of what is now a sumptuous five-star hotel, all minimalist Zen and luxury. Unless, of course, they were *famous* rabble-rousing noisemakers, and then they would probably be headed straight for one of the four penthouse suites, one of which is named after Bob Dylan, who went electric at the Free Trade Hall in 1965.

Other options worth considering:

Jury's Inn (☎ 0161-953 8888; www.jurysdoyle.com; 56 Great Bridgewater St; r from £55) Comfortable Irish chain hotel a few doors down from the Bridgewater Hall.

Premier Travel Inn (☎ 0870 990 6444; www.premiertravelinn.com; r from £65) G-Max (Bishopsgate, 11 Lower Mosley St); Portland St (The Circus, 112 Portland St) Two convenient city-centre locations for this tidy chain.

Midland (☎ 0161-236 3333; www.themidland.co.uk; Peter St; r from £104; ☑) Mr Rolls and Mr Royce sealed the deal in the elegant lobby of this fancy business hotel.

TOP END

Hilton Manchester Deansgate (☎ 0161-870 1600; www.hilton.co.uk; 303 Deansgate; r from £114) A no-surprises Hilton occupying the lower 23 floors of the city's newest – and tallest – landmark, the Beetham Tower.

ourpick Yang Sing Oriental Hotel (☎ 0161-920 9651; www.yangsingoriental.com; 36 Princess St; r/ste from £179/239; ☑) The city's most famous Chinese restaurant (see p664) got into the hospitality business in 2008 with arguably the northwest's most luxurious small hotel. Japanese silk duvets and pillows; beautiful bespoke Asian furnishings; a complimentary minibar; and your choice of five separate room aromas (which

you can select when booking) – just some of the extravagant offerings at this exquisitely elegant new hotel, which has already raised the hospitality bar by several notches.

Great John Street Hotel (☎ 0161-831 3211; www.greatjohnstreet.co.uk; Great John St; r £235-395; ☑) Elegant, designer luxury? Present. Fabulous rooms with all the usual delights (Egyptian cotton sheets, fabulous toiletries, free-standing baths and lots of high-tech electronics)? Present. A butler to run your bath in the Opus Grand Suite? Present. This former schoolhouse (ah, now you get it) is small and sumptuous – and just across the street from Granada TV studios. A rare treat: the rooftop garden has a hot tub and views of the *Coronation Street* set. Now that's something you don't see every day.

Salford Quays

MIDRANGE

Old Trafford Lodge (☎ 0161-874 3333; www.lccc.co.uk; Talbot Rd; d Mon-Fri £64, d Sat & Sun £54; ☑) Cricket fans will salivate at the thought of watching a first-class match from the comfort of their bedroom balcony; for the rest of us, this is a pretty good business hotel with decent amenities.

TOP END

Lowry (☎ 0161-827 4000; www.rfhotels.com; 50 Dearman's Pl, Chapel Wharf; s/d from £350/385) Simply dripping with designer luxury and five-star comfort, Manchester's top hotel has fabulous rooms with enormous beds, ergonomically designed furniture, walk-in wardrobes, and bathrooms finished with Italian porcelain tiles and glass mosaic. You can soothe yourself with a skin-brightening treatment or an aromatherapy head-massage at the health spa.

Other Areas

BUDGET

Manchester Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 0161-865 9296; 64 Cromwell Rd; dm £15) A very pleasant private hotel in Stretford, 2 miles south of the city centre, with cooking facilities, a TV lounge and some doubles. It's a cinch to get to from the city centre via Metrolink (Stretford stop).

TOP END

Eleven Didsbury Park (☎ 0161-448 7711; www.elevendidsburypark.com; 11 Didsbury Pk, Didsbury; r £140-260) Tucked away in fashionably bohemian Didsbury, this utterly wonderful boutique hotel (part of the Eclectic group) is as romantic and

stylish a place as you'll find in the city. Avoid, if you can, the smaller doubles. Although it's about 5 miles south of the city centre, it's easily reached by train from Piccadilly (to East Didsbury station).

EATING

Only London can outdo Manchester for the choice of cafes and restaurants. There's something for every palate, from the ubiquitous-but-excellent selections in Chinatown to Wilmslow Rd (the extension of Oxford St/Rd), aka the Curry Mile, with its unsurpassed concentration of Indian and Pakistani eateries. Organic is the order of the day throughout the Northern Quarter (where you'll also find some excellent veggie spots), while the city's fanciest fare is to be found in the suburbs, especially West Didsbury. Following is but a small starter course.

Budget

Trof (☎ 0161-832 1870; 5-8 Thomas St; sandwiches £4, mains around £8; ☎ 9.30am-midnight) Great music, top staff and a fab selection of sandwiches, roasts and other dishes (the huge breakfast is a proper hangover cure), as well as a broad selection of beers and tunes (Tuesday night is acoustic night), have made this new opening a firm favourite with students.

Eighth Day (☎ 0161-273 4878; 111 Oxford Rd; mains around £5; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) New and most definitely improved after a major clean-up, this environmentally friendly hang-out is a favourite with students. It sells everything to make you feel good about your place in the world, from fair-trade teas to homeopathic remedies. The vegetarian- and vegan-friendly menu is substantial.

Earth Cafe (☎ 0161-834 1996; www.earthcafe.co.uk; 16-20 Turner St; chef's special £5.80; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) Below the Manchester Buddhist Centre, this gourmet vegetarian cafe is working hard at becoming the first 100% organic spot in town. The chef's special – a main dish, side and two salad portions – is generally excellent and always filling.

Love Saves the Day (☎ 0161-832 0777; Tib St; lunch £6; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Wed, to 9pm Thu, to 8pm Fri, 10-6pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) The Northern Quarter's most popular cafe is a New York-style deli, small supermarket and sit-down eatery in one large, airy room. Everybody comes here – from crusties to corporate types – to sit around over a spot of lunch and discuss the day's goings-on. A wonderful spot. The house salad is £5.50.

Midrange

Al Bilal (☎ 0161-257 0006; 87-81 Wilmslow Rd; mains £7-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Sun-Fri) It's a given that you cannot leave Manchester without tucking into a curry along Wilmslow Rd, which is as famous as Bradford or Birmingham for its Indian cuisine. There are so many great restaurants to pick from – and some pretty awful ones, too – but Al Bilal will treat you and your tummy just right with its excellent dishes.

Yang Sing (☎ 0161-236 2200; 34 Princess St; mains £9-16; ☎ lunch & dinner) A serious contender for best Chinese restaurant in England, Yang Sing attracts diners from all over with its exceptional Cantonese cuisine. From a dim-sum lunch to a full evening banquet, the food is superb, and the waiters will patiently explain the intricacies of each item to punters who can barely pronounce the dishes' names.

Brasserie Blanc (☎ 0161-832 1000; www.brasserieblanc.com; 55 King St; mains £9-17; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Top chef Raymond Blanc brings his winning formula of French cuisine with world influences (Asian primarily, but lots of English touches) to Manchester with some style and plenty of success. The dining room is elegant enough – crisp, white linen on the tables and fancy art work on the walls – but the atmosphere is hardly stuffy: everyone comes to eat well and have fun doing it.

Bluu (☎ 0161-839 7740; www.bluu.co.uk; Unit 1, Smithfield Market, Thomas St; 3-course lunch £15, dinner mains £10-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) It's a chain cafe-bar, but Manchester's version has retained its kudos thanks to its location, look and clientele – a steady stream of hipsters who appreciate its aforementioned strengths and menu, which offers an inventive choice of British and Continental dishes using only the freshest ingredients.

Market Restaurant (☎ 0161-834 3743; www.market-restaurant.com; 104 High St; mains £11-16; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Fri, dinner Sat) It's a sorry-looking kind of place, but don't judge a restaurant by its shabby exterior: inside you'll find excellent British cuisine on a menu that changes monthly to take account of the season's best.

our pick Modern (☎ 0161-605 8282; Urbis, Cathedral Gardens, Corporation Street; 2-/3-course lunch £13/16, dinner mains £11-21; ☎ lunch & dinner) Top fare on top of the world, or an excellent meal atop Manchester's most distinctive landmark, Urbis, is one of the city's most enjoyable dining experiences. The food – mostly new British cuisine – will not disappoint, but being

EATING IN THE 'BURBS

If you want some truly fine meals, you'll need to venture out to the suburbs, where you'll be in good company. Top of the heap is the Michelin-starred **Juniper** (☎ 0161-929 4008; www.juniper-restaurant.co.uk; 21 The Downs, Altrincham; dinner around £30; 🍴 lunch & dinner Fri & Sat, dinner Tue-Thu; 🚗 Metrolink to Altrincham, but you'll also eat very well on one gourmet street (Lapwing Lane) in West Didsbury, home to French-influenced **Lime Tree** (☎ 0161-445 1217; www.thelimeetrerestaurant.co.uk; 8 Lapwing Lane, West Didsbury; mains £14-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri & Sun, dinner Mon & Sat; 🚗 East Didsbury); high-end gastropub **Metropolitan** (☎ 0161-374 9559; www.the-metropolitan.co.uk; 2 Lapwing Lane, West Didsbury; mains around £15; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🚗 East Didsbury); and veggie **Greens** (☎ 0161-434 4259; 8 Lapwing Lane, West Didsbury; mains around £15; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, dinner Mon; 🚗 East Didsbury).

able to sit at a table close to the floor-to-ceiling windows make this place worthwhile.

Ithaca (☎ 0870 740 4000; www.ithacamanchester.com; 36 John Dalton St; mains £12-20; 🍴 lunch & dinner) A new Asian experience spread over four floors, you'll find well-made Japanese (including excellent sushi) on the first two floors, and a Bangkok-style cocktail lounge on the 3rd floor, with an eye-catching solid, black-glass oval bar. The top floor is a members' club.

DRINKING

There's every kind of drinking hole in Manchester, from the really grungy ones that smell but have plenty of character to the ones that were designed by a team of architects but have the atmosphere of a freezer. Every neighbourhood in town has its favourites; here's a few to get you going.

Bars

A Place Called Common (☎ 0161-832 9245; www.aplacecalledcommon.co.uk; 39-41 Edge St; 🍴 noon-midnight Mon-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) Common by name but great by nature, this is a terrific boozier favoured by an unpretentious crowd who like the changing artwork on the walls and the DJs who play nightly.

Bar Centro (☎ 0161-835 2863; 72-74 Tib St; mains £6-9; 🍴 noon-midnight Mon-Wed, to 1am Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) A Northern Quarter stalwart, very popular with the bohemian crowd precisely because it doesn't try to be. Great beer, nice staff and a better-than-average bar menu make this one of the choice spots in the area.

Bluu (☎ 0161-839 7740; www.bluu.co.uk; Unit 1, Smithfield Market, Thomas St; 🍴 noon-midnight Sun-Mon, to 1am Tue-Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat) Our favourite of the Northern Quarter's collection of great bars. Bluu is cool, comfortable and comes with a great terrace on which to enjoy a pint and

listen to music selected by folks with really good taste.

Dry Bar (☎ 0161-236 9840; 28-30 Oldham Rd; 🍴 noon-midnight Mon-Wed, noon-2am Thu-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun) The former HQ of Manchester's maddest protagonists (legend has it Shaun Ryder once pulled a gun on Tony Wilson here), Dry has remained cool long after the scene froze over, and it's still one of the best bars in the Northern Quarter.

Odd (☎ 0161-833 0070; www.oddbar.co.uk; 30-32 Thomas St; 🍴 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun) This eclectic little bar – with its oddball furnishings, wacky tunes and anti-establishment crew of customers – is the perfect antidote to the increasingly similar look of so many modern bars. A slice of Mancuniana to be treasured.

Temple of Convenience (☎ 0161-288 9834; Great Bridgewater St; 🍴 noon-midnight Mon-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat, noon-11pm Sun) This tiny basement bar with a capacity of about 30 has a great jukebox and a fine selection of spirits, all crammed into a converted public toilet. Hardly your bog-standard pub.

Pubs

our pick Britons Protection (☎ 0161-236 5895; 50 Great Bridgewater St; mains around £7) Whisky – 200 different kinds of it – is the beverage of choice at

TOP FIVE PUBS FOR PINT IN THE NORTHWEST

- Philharmonic (p686; Liverpool)
- Temple of Convenience (above; Manchester)
- Britons Protection (above; Manchester)
- Albion (p674; Chester)
- Baby Cream (p686; Liverpool)

this liver-threatening, proper English pub that also does Tudor-style meals (boar, venison and the like). An old-fashioned boozier; no fancy stuff.

Dukes 92 (☎ 0161-839 8646; 2 Castle St) Castlefield's best pub, housed in converted stables that once belonged to the duke of Bridgewater, has comfy, deep sofas inside and plenty of seating outside, overlooking lock 92 of the Rochdale Canal – hence the name. If it's sunny, there's no better spot to enjoy a pint of ale.

Lass O'Gowrie (☎ 0161-273 6932; 36 Charles St; mains around £6) A Victorian classic off Princess St that brews its own beer in the basement. It's a favourite with students, old-timers and a clique of BBC employees who work just across the street in the Beeb's Manchester HQ. It also does good-value bar meals.

Other decent boozers:

Mr Thomas' Chop House (☎ 0161-832 2245; 52 Cross St; mains around £10) An old-style boozier that is very popular for a pint as well as for food.

Old Wellington Inn (☎ 0161-830 1440; 4 Cathedral Gates) One of the oldest buildings in the city and a lovely spot for a pint of genuine ale.

Peveril of the Peak (☎ 0161-236 6364; 127 Great Bridgewater St) An unpretentious pub with wonderful Victorian glazed tilework outside.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

A handy tip: if you want to thrive in Manchester's excellent nightlife, drop all mention of Madchester (see boxed text, opposite) and keep talk of being 'up for it' to strict irony. Otherwise, you'll risk being labelled a saddo nostalgic or, worse, someone who should have gone home and grown up a decade ago. But fear not: there is still a terrific club scene and Manchester remains at the vanguard of dance-floor culture. There's a constantly changing mixture of club nights, so check the *Manchester Evening News* for details of what's on. Following are our favourite places.

Music Box (☎ 0161-236 9971; www.musicboxmanchester.com; 65 Oxford St; admission £6-12; 🎧 8pm-midnight Wed & Thu, 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) Deep in Jilly's Rockworld complex you'll find our favourite club in town and – judging by the queues – almost everyone else's, too. The punters come for the superb monthly club nights, such as Mr Scruff's Keep It Unreal, as well as a host of terrific one-offs.

Attic (☎ 0161-236 6071; www.thirstyscholar.co.uk; New Wakefield St; admission free; 🎧 11pm-2am Thu & Fri, to 3am

Sat) This superb venue is at the top of a flight of stairs, in a building beneath a railway arch. Northern Soul nights share space with techno, alt grunge and live music nights. A student favourite and a great night out.

Sankey's (☎ 0161-950 4201; www.sankeys.info; Radium St, Ancoats; admission free-£12; 🎧 10pm-3am Thu & Fri, 10pm-4am Sat) With regulars like Danny Tenaglia, Sasha, and Layo & Bushwacka in the box, hard-core clubbers are in good hands when they trek out to the middle of Ancoats. Techno, breakbeats, tribal and progressive house.

South (☎ 0161-831 7756; www.south-club.co.uk; 4A South King St; admission £5-8; 🎧 10pm-3am Fri & Sat) An excellent basement club to kick off the weekend: Friday night is Rock 'n' Roll Bar, featuring everything from Ibrahim Ferrer to Northern Soul, and Saturday is Disco Rescue, which is more of the same eclectic mix of alternative and dance.

Cinemas

Cornerhouse (☎ 0161-228 2463; www.cornerhouse.org; 70 Oxford St) Your only destination for good art-house releases; also has a gallery, bookshop and cafe.

Odeon Cinema (☎ 0870 224 4007; www.odeon.co.uk; The Printworks, Exchange Sq) An ultramodern 20-screen complex in the middle of the Printworks centre.

AMC Cinemas (☎ 0161-817 3000; www.amccinemas.co.uk; The Great Northern, 235 Deansgate) A new 16-screen multiplex in a retail centre that was formerly a goods warehouse for the Northern Railway Company.

Theatre

Green Room (☎ 0161-236 1677; 54 Whitworth St W) The premiere fringe venue in town.

Manchester Opera House (☎ 0161-242 2509; www.manchesthertheatres.co.uk; Quay St) West End shows and lavish musicals make up the bulk of the program.

Library Theatre (☎ 0161-236 7110; Central Library, St Peter's Sq) Old plays and new work in a small theatre beneath the Central Library.

Royal Exchange (☎ 0161-833 9833; St Anne's Sq) Interesting contemporary plays are standard at this magnificent, modern theatre-in-the-round.

Live Music

ROCK MUSIC

Band on the Wall (☎ 0161-834 1786; www.bandonthewall.org; 25 Swan St) A top-notch venue that

THE MADCHESTER SOUND

It is often claimed that Manchester is the engine room of British pop. If this is indeed the case, then the chief engineer was TV presenter and music impresario Tony Wilson (1950–2007), founder of Factory Records. This is the label that in 1983 released New Order's ground-breaking 'Blue Monday', to this day the best-selling 12" in British history, which successfully fused the guitar-driven sound of punk with a pulsating dance beat.

When the money started pouring in, Wilson took the next, all-important step: he opened his own nightclub that would provide a platform for local bands to perform. The Hacienda opened its doors with plenty of fanfare but just wouldn't take off. Things started to turn around when the club embraced a brand new sound coming out of Chicago and Detroit: house. DJs Mike Pickering, Graeme Park and Jon Da Silva were the music's most important apostles, and when ecstasy hit the scene late in the decade, it seemed that every kid in town was 'mad for it'.

Heavily influenced by these new arrivals, the city's guitar bands took notice and began shaping their sounds to suit the clubbers' needs. The most successful was the Stone Roses, who in 1989 released 'Fools Gold', a pulsating hit with the rapid shuffle of James Brown's 'Funky Drummer' and a druggie guitar sound that drove dancers wild. Around the same time, Happy Mondays, fronted by the laddish Shaun Ryder and the wacked-out Bez (whose only job was to lead the dancing from the stage), hit the scene with the infectious 'Hallelujah'. The other big anthems of the day were 'The One I Love' by the Charlatans, 'Voodoo Ray' by A Guy Called Gerald, and 'Pacific' by 808 State – all local bands and producers. The party known as Madchester was officially opened.

The party ended in 1992. Overdanced and overdrugged, the city woke up with a terrible hangover. The Hacienda went bust, Shaun Ryder's legendary drug intake stymied his musical creativity and the Stone Roses withdrew in a haze of postparty depression. The latter were not to be heard of again until 1994 when they released *Second Coming*, which just couldn't match their eponymous debut album. They lasted another two years before breaking up. The fertile crossover scene, which had seen clubbers go mad at rock gigs, and rock bands play the kind of dance sounds that kept the floor thumping until the early hours, virtually disappeared and the two genres withdrew into a more familiar isolation.

The next five years saw the rise of Manchester's most successful band, Oasis, whose (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory* hit the shelves in 1995, selling more copies than all of the Manchester bands that preceded them. Despite their success and the in-your-face posturing of the Gallagher brothers, they were doomed to a limited run because they relied too much on the chord structures and infectious melodic lines created by the Beatles 25 years earlier. They're still going, but their one-time claim of being the most famous band in the world is sadly out of date.

Today, there is no such thing as Madchester. Eager to transcend the clichés that their success engendered, most of the city's musical talents refuse to be labelled as having any particular sound: jazzy house giant Mr Scruff (whose excellent *Keep It Unreal* nights are yours for the dancing at Music Box; see opposite), for instance, doesn't sound anything like the folksy guitar style of About a Boy or the funky hip-hop beats of Rae & Christian.

Madchester is legendary precisely because it is no more, but it was a lot of fun. If you missed the party, you can get a terrific sense of what it was like by watching Michael Winterbottom's *24-Hour Party People* (2002), which captures the hedonism, extravagance and genius of Madchester's cast of characters, particularly Tony Wilson, played with uncanny accuracy by Steve Coogan.

hosts everything from rock to world music, with splashes of jazz, blues and folk thrown in for good measure.

Manchester Central (☎ 0161-8342700; www.manchestercentral.co.uk; Windmill St) A mid-sized venue south-west of St Peter's Sq, hosting rock concerts by not-quite-supersuccessful bands as well as exhibitions and indoor sporting events.

MEN Arena (☎ 0161-9505000; Great Ducie St) A giant arena north of the centre that hosts large-scale rock concerts (as well as being the home of the city's ice-hockey and basketball teams).

Moho Live (☎ 0161-8348188; www.moholive.com; 21-31 Oldham St) A new 500-capacity live music venue that has already proven incredibly popular with its line-up of live music and club nights.

GAY & LESBIAN MANCHESTER

The city's gay scene is unrivalled outside London, and caters to every taste. Its healthy heart beats loudest in the Gay Village, centred on handsome Canal St. Here you'll find bars, clubs, restaurants and – crucially – karaoke joints that cater almost exclusively to the pink pound.

The country's biggest gay and lesbian arts festival, **Queer Up North** (☎ 0161-833 2288; www.queerupnorth.com), takes place every two years – the next in spring 2009. **Manchester Pride** (☎ 0161-236 7474; www.manchesterpride.com) is a 10-day festival in the middle of August each year and attracts over 500,000 people.

There are bars to suit every taste, but you won't go far wrong in **AXM** (☎ 0161-236 6005; www.axm-bar.co.uk; 10 Canal St), which is more of a cocktail lounge for the city's flash crowd; or **Taurus** (☎ 0161-236 4593; www.taurus-bar.co.uk; 1 Canal St), which is a little shabbier but equally good fun.

For your clubbing needs, look no further than **Club Alter Ego** (☎ 0161-236 9266; www.clubalterego.co.uk; 105-107 Princess St; admission £5-9; 🕒 11pm-5am Thu-Sat), home to the fabulous Poptastic, and **Essential Nightclub** (☎ 0161-236 0077; www.essentialmanchester.com; 8 Minshull St; admission £5-9; 🕒 11pm-5am Thu-Sat), which is just as popular.

And then there's karaoke, the ultimate choice for midweek fun. The best of the lot is at the **New Union Hotel** (☎ 0161-228 1492; www.newunionhotel.com; 111 Princess St; 🕒 9pm-2am), where you can find your inner Madonna and Cyndi Lauper every Tuesday and Thursday – for a top prize of £50.

For more information, check with the **Manchester Gay Centre** (☎ 0161-274 3814; Sydney St, Salford) and the **Lesbian & Gay Foundation** (☎ 0161-235 8035; www.lgf.org.uk; 105-107 Princess St; 🕒 4-10pm). The city's best pink website is www.visitgaymanchester.co.uk.

Ruby Lounge (☎ 0161-834 1392; 26-28 High St) Terrific new live music venue in the Northern Quarter that features mostly rock bands.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Bridgewater Hall (☎ 0161-907 9000; www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk; Lower Mosley St) The world-renowned Hallé Orchestra has its home at this enormous and impressive concert hall, which hosts up to 250 concerts and events a year. It has a widespread program that includes opera, folk music, children's shows, comedy and contemporary music.

Lowry (☎ 0161-876 2000; www.thelowry.com; Pier 8, Salford Quays) The Lowry has two theatres – the 1750-capacity Lyric and 460-capacity Quays – hosting a diverse range of performances, from dance to comedy.

Manchester Cathedral (☎ 0161-833 2220; Victoria St) Hosts a summer season of concerts by the Cantata Choir and ensemble groups.

Royal Northern College of Music (☎ 0161-907 5555; www.mcm.ac.uk; 124 Oxford Rd) Presents a full program of extremely high-quality classical music and other contemporary offerings.

Sport

For most people, Manchester plus sport equals football, and football means Manchester United. That may be true for outsiders (which is why United is covered in the Sights & Activities section, p660), but not for most Mancunians. Like all good northerners, they're more comfortable supporting the scrappy underdog with the huge heart, rather than the well-oiled football machine.

MANCHESTER CITY

Manchester's best-loved team is the perennial underachiever, Manchester City. But following a short-lived ownership by Thailand's ex-PM Thaksin Shinawatra, the club was bought by an Abu Dhabi-based investment group whose stated aim is to make the club the biggest in the world. City fans reeled at the news; some even allowed themselves to believe when Brazilian magician Robinho was snatched from mighty Chelsea's waiting

TOP FIVE MANCHESTER ALBUMS

- *Some Friendly* Charlatans
- *Pills 'n' Thrills & Bellyaches* Happy Mondays
- *Stone Roses* The Stone Roses
- *Strangeways Here We Come* The Smiths
- *Permanent Joy* Division

hands for a paltry £32.5 million. Although it's too soon to tell, these could be interesting times at the **Manchester City Experience** (☎ 0870 062 1894; www.mfc.co.uk; tours adult/child £9.50/6; 🕒 tours 10.30am, 2pm & 3.15pm Mon-Sat, 11.45am & 1.45pm Sun except match days) – a tour of the ground, dressing rooms and museum before the inevitable steer into the kit shop. Tours must be booked in advance. Take bus 216, 217, 230, X36 or X37 from Piccadilly Gardens.

LANCASHIRE COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

Cricket is a big deal here, and the **Lancashire club** (☎ 0161-282 4000; Warwick Rd), founded in 1816 as the Aurora before changing its name in 1864, is one of the most beloved of England's county teams. This is despite the fact that it hasn't won the county championship since 1930. The really big match in Lancashire's calendar is the Roses match against Yorkshire, but if you're not around for that, the other games in the county season (admission £11 to £17) are a great day out. The season runs throughout the summer.

International test matches, recently starring local hero Andrew 'Freddie' Flintoff, are also played here occasionally.

SHOPPING

The huge selection of shops here will send a shopper's pulse into orbit; every taste and budget is catered for. By the time you read this, the new Spinningfields retail centre on Deansgate will have opened, and the city will have yet *another* convenient, enclosed space for you to part with your money.

Millennium Quarter

The area around New Cathedral St, Exchange Sq and the impressive Triangle shopping arcade is the hot new shopping district, full of chichi boutiques and the king of all department stores, **Harvey Nichols** (☎ 0161-828 8888; 21 New Cathedral St).

Northern Quarter

Rag-trade wholesalers have given way to independent retailers stocking all manner of hip urban wear, retro fashions and other left-of-centre threads. Of the myriad shops, we like **Oi Polloi** (☎ 0161-831 7870; 70 Tib St), which specialises in trendy outdoor clothing and footwear; and the marvellous **Oxfam Original** (☎ 0161-839 3160; Unit 8, Smithfield Bldg, Oldham St), which has terrific retro gear from the 1960s and '70s.

West End

Everything needs a catchy name, so the traditionally upmarket shopping area around St Anne's Sq, King St and Bridge St – full of attractive boutiques for designers, both home-grown and international – is now called the West End.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Manchester Airport (☎ 0161-489 3000; www.manchesterairport.co.uk), south of the city, is the largest airport outside London and is served by 17 locations throughout Britain.

Bus

National Express (☎ 08717 818181; www.nationalexpress.com) serves most major cities almost hourly from Chorlton St coach station in the city centre. Destinations include Liverpool (£5, 1¼ hours, hourly), Leeds (£7.60, one hour, hourly) and London (£23, 3¼ hours, hourly).

Train

Manchester Piccadilly (east of the Gay Village) is the main station for trains to and from the rest of the country, although Victoria station (north of Urbis) serves Halifax and Bradford. The two stations are linked by Metrolink. Trains head to Blackpool (£12.20, 1¼ hours, half-hourly), Liverpool Lime St (£8.80, 45 minutes, half-hourly), Newcastle (£41.20, three hours, six daily) and London (£115, three hours, seven daily).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

The airport is 12 miles south of the city. A train to or from Victoria station costs £3.80, and a coach is £3.20. A taxi is nearly four times as much in light traffic.

Public Transport

The excellent public transport system can be used with a variety of **Day saver tickets** (bus £3, bus & train £3.80, bus & Metrolink £4.50, train & Metrolink £5, bus, train & Metrolink £6). For inquiries about local transport, including night buses, contact **Travelshop** (☎ 0161-228 7811; www.gmpte.com; 9 Portland St, Piccadilly Gardens; 🕒 8am-8pm).

BUS

Centreline bus 4 provides a free service around the heart of Manchester every 10 minutes. Pick up a route map from the

tourist office. Most local buses start from Piccadilly Gardens.

METROLINK

There are frequent **Metrolink** (☎ 0161-205 2000; www.metrolink.co.uk) trams between Victoria and Piccadilly train stations and G-Mex (for Castlefield) as well as further afield to Salford Quays. Buy your tickets from the platform machine.

TRAIN

Castlefield is served by Deansgate station with rail links to Piccadilly, Oxford Rd and Salford stations.

CHESHIRE

Quiet and genteel, pastoral Cheshire is a very black-and-white kind of place, full of half-timbered Tudor farmhouses (surrounded by fields populated by Friesian cows) that are more than just a little reminiscent of ye olde England. Which is exactly why so many of the soccerati millionaires plying their overpaid trades in nearby Manchester and Liverpool choose to live here, usually in OTT mansions carefully guarded by tall security gates (nothing gives the illusion of good taste like a bit of bling and tradition). For the rest of us mere mortals, however, Cheshire is really just about Chester.

CHESTER

pop 80,130

Marvellous Chester is one of English history's greatest gifts to the contemporary visitor. Its red-sandstone wall, which today gift-wraps a tidy collection of Tudor and Victorian buildings, was built during Roman times. The town was then called *Castra Devana*, and was the largest Roman fortress in Britain.

It's hard to believe today, but throughout the Middle Ages Chester made its money as the most important port in the northwest. However, the River Dee silted up over time and Chester fell behind Liverpool in importance.

Besides its obvious elegance and grace, Chester ekes out a fairly substantial living as a major retail centre and tourist hot spot: visitors come, see and shop.

Orientation

Most places of interest are inside the walls where the Roman street pattern is relatively intact. From the Cross (the stone pillar that marks the town centre), four roads fan out to the four principal gates.

Information

Cheshire Constabulary (☎ 01244-350000; Town Hall, Northgate St)

Chester Visitors' Centre (☎ 01244-351609; www.visitchester.com; Vicar's Lane; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr)

Countess of Chester Hospital (☎ 01244-365000; Health Park, Liverpool Rd)

Post office (2 St John St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 01244-402111; www.chester.gov.uk; Town Hall, Northgate St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr)

Sights & Activities

CITY WALLS

A good way to get a sense of Chester's unique character is to walk the 2-mile circuit along the walls that surround the historic centre. Originally built by the Romans around AD 70, the walls were altered substantially over the following centuries but have retained their current position since around 1200. The tourist office's *Walk Around Chester Walls* leaflet (£2) is an excellent guide.

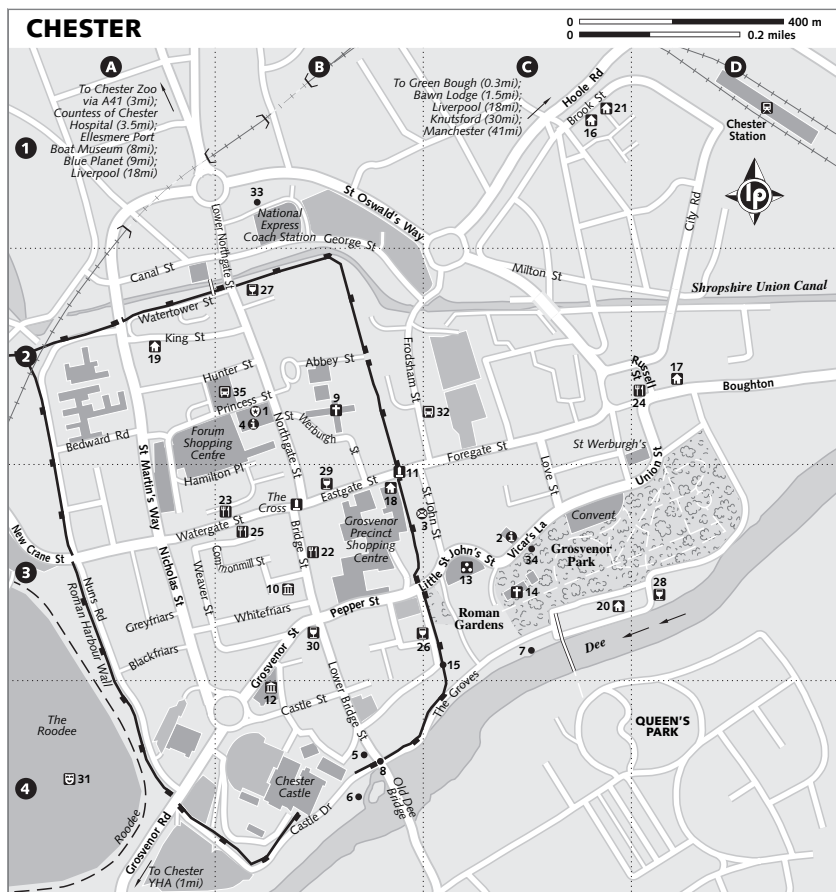
Of the many features along the walls, the most eye-catching is the prominent **Eastgate**, where you can see the most famous **clock** in England after London's Big Ben, built for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

At the southeastern corner of the walls are the **wishing steps**, added in 1785; local legend claims that if you can run up and down these uneven steps while holding your breath your wish will come true. We question the veracity of this claim because our wish was not to twist an ankle.

Just inside Southgate, known here as **Bridgeway** (as it's at the northern end of the Old Dee Bridge), is the 1664 **Bear & Billet** pub, Chester's oldest timber-framed building and once a tollgate into the city.

ROWS

Chester's other great draw is the **Rows**, a series of two-level galleried arcades along the four streets that fan out in each direction from the central Cross. The architecture is a handsome mix of Victorian and Tudor (original

**INFORMATION**

Cheshire Constabulary.....	1	B2
Chester Visitors' Centre.....	2	C3
Post Office.....	3	C3
Tourist Office.....	4	B2

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bear & Billet.....	5	B4
Bithell Boats.....	6	B4
Boat Hire.....	7	C3
Bridlegate.....	8	B4
Cathedral.....	9	B2
Dewa Roman Experience.....	10	B3
Eastgate Clock.....	11	B3
Grosvenor Museum.....	12	B4
Roman Amphitheatre.....	13	C3

St John the Baptist Church.....	14	C3
Wishing Steps.....	15	C3

SLEEPING

Aplas Guest House.....	16	C1
Chester Backpackers.....	17	D2
Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa.....	18	B3
Chester Townhouse.....	19	A2
Grove Villa.....	20	C3
Ormonde.....	21	C1

EATING

Arkle.....	(see 18)	
Boulevard de la Bastille.....	22	B3
Katie's Tea Rooms.....	23	B3
MD's Restaurant.....	(see 23)	

Old Harker's Arms.....	24	D2
Upstairs at the Grill.....	25	B3

DRINKING

Albion.....	26	C3
Alexander's Jazz Theatre.....	27	B2
Boat House.....	28	D3
Boot Inn.....	29	B3
Falcon.....	30	B3

ENTERTAINMENT

Roodie.....	31	A4
-------------	----	----

TRANSPORT

CITY-Rail Link Bus Stop.....	32	C2
Davies Bros Cycles.....	33	B3
National Express Coach Stop.....	34	C1
Town Hall Bus Exchange.....	35	B2

and mock) buildings that house a fantastic collection of individually owned shops. The origin of the Rows is a little unclear, but it is believed that as the Roman walls slowly crumbled, medieval traders built their shops against the resulting rubble banks, while later arrivals built theirs on top.

OTHER SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **cathedral** (☎ 01244-324756; www.chestercathedral.com; Northgate St; adult/child £4/1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-5pm Sun) was a Benedictine abbey built on the remains of an earlier Saxon church dedicated to St Werburgh, patron saint of Chester. The abbey was closed in 1540 as part of Henry VIII's dissolution frenzy, but was reconsecrated as a cathedral the following year. Although the cathedral itself was given a substantial Victorian facelift, the 12th-century cloister and its surrounding buildings are essentially unaltered and retain much of the structure from the early monastic years. There are 1¼-hour **guided tours** (free; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Sat) to really get to grips with the building and its history.

The excellent **Grosvenor Museum** (☎ 01244-402008; www.grosvenormuseum.co.uk; Grosvenor St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) is the place to go if you want to study Chester's rich and varied history, beginning with a comprehensive collection of Roman tombstones, the largest display in the country. At the back of the museum is a preserved Georgian house, complete with kitchen, drawing room, bedroom and bathroom.

The **Dewa Roman Experience** (☎ 01244-343407; www.dewaromanexperience.co.uk; Pierpoint Lane; adult/child £4.75/3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun), just off Bridge St, takes you through a reconstructed Roman street to reveal what Roman life was like.

Chester's most complete set of genuine Roman remains is opposite the visitors centre, outside the city walls. Here you'll find what's left of the **Roman amphitheatre** (admission free); once an arena that seated 7000 spectators (making it the country's largest), now it's little more than steps buried in grass.

Adjacent to the amphitheatre is **St John the Baptist Church** (Vicar's Lane; ☎ 9.15am-6pm), built on the site of an older Saxon church in 1075. It started out as a cathedral of Mercia before being rebuilt by the Normans. The eastern end of the church, abandoned in 1581 when St John's became a parish, now lies in peaceful

ruin and includes the remains of a Norman choir and medieval chapels.

Steps at the back of the church lead down to the riverside promenade known as the **Groves**. Here you can hire different kinds of **boats** (per hr £7-9; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep) with pedals, oars or small engines. The Groves is also the departure point for river cruises (see Tours, below).

Tours

City Sightseeing Chester (☎ 01244-347452; www.city-sightseeing.com; adult/child £8/3; every 15-30min Apr-Oct, Sat & Sun only Mar) offers open-top bus tours of the city, picking up from the tourist office and Chester Visitors' Centre and the visitor centre.

You can also take a cruise along the Dee; contact **Bithell Boats** (☎ 01244-325394; www.showboatsofchester.co.uk) for details of its 30-minute and hour-long cruises up and down the Dee, including a foray into the gorgeous Eaton Estate, home of the duke and duchess of Westminster. All departures are from the riverside along the Groves and cost from £6 to £12.

The tourist office and Chester Visitors' Centre offer a broad range of walking tours departing from both centres. Each tour lasts between 1½ and two hours.

Ghosthunter Trail (adult/child £5/4; ☎ 7.30pm Thu-Sat Jun-Oct, 7.30pm Sat Nov-May) The ubiquitous ghost tour, looking for things that go bump in the night.

History Hunter (adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 10.30am) Two thousand years of Chester history.

Secret Chester (adult/child £5/4; ☎ 2pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun May-Oct) Exactly what it says on the tin.

Festivals & Events

Held from mid-July to early August, the three-week **Summer Music Festival** (☎ 01244-320700; www.chesterfestivals.co.uk) is a season highlight, featuring performances by all manner of stars both big and small. The **Chester Jazz Festival** (☎ 01244-340005; www.chesterjazz.co.uk; admission free-£12) is a two-week showcase from late August to early September.

Sleeping

If you're visiting between Easter and September, you'd better book early if you want to avoid going over budget or settling for far less than you bargained for. Except for a handful of options – including the city's best – most of the accommodation is outside the city walls but within easy walking distance of the centre. Hoole Rd, a just under a mile's

walk from the centre and leading beyond the railway tracks to the M53/M56, is lined with budget to midrange B&Bs.

BUDGET

Chester Backpackers (☎ 01244-400185; www.chesterbackpackers.co.uk; 67 Boughton; dm from £14) Comfortable dorm rooms with nice pine beds in a typically Tudor white-and-black building. It's just a short walk from the city walls and there's also a pleasant garden.

Chester YHA (☎ 0845 371 9357; www.yha.org.uk; 40 Hough Green; dm £20) Located in an elegant Victorian home about a mile from the city centre, this hostel has a variety of dorms that sleep from two to 10 people; there's also a cafeteria, a kitchen and a shop on the premises.

Brook St, near the train station, has a couple of good-value B&Bs from around £24 per person. The friendly and accommodating **Ormonde** (☎ 01244-328816; 126 Brook St) and the comfortable **Aplas Guest House** (☎ 01244-312401; 106 Brook St) are both less than five minutes' walk from the train station.

MIDRANGE

Chester Townhouse (☎ 01244-350021; www.chestertownhouse.co.uk; 23 King St; s/d £45/75; 📍) Five beautifully decorated rooms in a handsome 17th-century house within the city walls make Chester Townhouse a terrific option – you're close to the action and you'll sleep in relative luxury.

Grove Villa (☎ 01244-349713; www.grovevillachester.com; 18 The Groves; r from £60) You won't find a more tranquil spot in town than this wonderfully positioned Victorian home overlooking the Dee. The rooms have antique beds and great river views.

Bawn Lodge (☎ 01244-324971; www.bawnlodge.co.uk; 10 Hoole Rd; r from £75) Spotless rooms with plenty of colour make this charming guest house a very pleasant option. It's like staying with a favourite relative: no fuss but plenty of friendliness (and a delicious breakfast). Rates go up during the Chester Races.

TOP END

our pick Green Bough (☎ 01244-326241; www.greenbough.co.uk; 60 Hoole Rd; r £175-345; 📍 📺 📺) The epitome of the boutique hotel, this exclusive, award-winning Victorian town house (winner of Small Hotel of the Year for 2006) has individually styled rooms dressed in the best Italian fabrics. The rooms come adorned with

wall coverings, superb antique furniture and period cast-iron and wooden beds, including a handful of elegant four-posters. Modern touches include plasma-screen TVs, mini stereos and a range of fancy toiletries.

Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa (☎ 01244-324024; www.chestergrosvenor.com; 58 Eastgate St; r from £195; 📍 📺 📺) The best hotel in town, with the best location. The huge, sprawling rooms have exquisite period furnishings and all mod cons; the spa (which is open to nonguests) offers a range of body treatments, including reiki, LaStone therapy, Indian head massage and four-handed massage. There's also Arkle, a Michelin-starred restaurant, downstairs (see Eating, below).

Eating

Chester has great food – it's just not in any of the tourist-oriented restaurants that line the Rows. Besides the better restaurants, you'll find the best grub in some of the pubs (see p674).

Katie's Tea Rooms (☎ 01244-400322; 38 Watergate St; tea & scones £3.80, restaurant 2-course dinner £13; 📍 tearoom 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, restaurant dinner Tue-Sat) This stone-walled tearoom located inside an historic building is the place to go for a light lunch. After 5pm it turns into MD's Restaurant, a Continental eatery with a pretty tasty menu.

Boulevard de la Bastille (Bridge St; sandwiches £4, meals £5-9; 📍 9am-6pm) Our favourite cafe in town is also one of the most handsome: a very French place on the top tier of the Rows that is perfect for a *cafe au lait* and *pain au chocolat* (a flat, chocolate-filled croissant).

Old Harker's Arms (☎ 01244-344525; www.harkersarms-chester.co.uk; 1 Russell St; mains £9-14; 📍 11am-late) An old-style boozier with a gourmet kitchen, this is the perfect place to tuck into Cumberland sausages or a Creole rice salad with sweet potatoes, and then rinse your palate with a pint of Waddies (as Wadworth Ale is known round here). It also serves bars snacks and sandwiches.

Upstairs at the Grill (☎ 01244-344883; www.upstairsatthegrill.co.uk; 70 Watergate St; mains £15-25; 📍 dinner) A superb steakhouse almost hidden on the 2nd floor, this is the place to devour every cut of meat from American-style porterhouse to a sauce-sodden chateaubriand.

Arkle (☎ 01244-895618; www.chestergrosvenor.com; Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa, 58 Eastgate St; 3-course dinner £59; 📍 dinner Tue-Sat) Named after the famous Irish champion racehorse, Simon Radley's

Arkle serves up a sumptuous feast of French-inspired classics such as tranche of monkfish with air-dried ham, and braised turbot with baby squid. It's elegant (gentlemen in jackets, please) and sophisticated and has a Michelin star to prove it.

Drinking

Falcon (☎ 01244-314555; Lower Bridge St; mains from £5.50) This is an old-fashioned boozier with a lovely atmosphere; the surprisingly adventurous menu offers up dishes such as Jamaican peppered beef or spicy Italian sausage casserole. Great for both a pint and a bite.

Albion (☎ 01244-340345; 4 Albion St; mains £8-11) No children, no music, and no machines or big screens (but plenty of Union Jacks). This 'family hostile' Edwardian classic pub is a throwback to a time when ale-drinking still had its own *rituals* – another word for ingrained prejudices. Still, this is one of the finest pubs in northwest England precisely because it doggedly refuses to modernise.

Other good pubs include the **Boat House** (The Groves), with great views overlooking the river, and the **Boot Inn** (Eastgate St), where 14 Roundheads were killed. **Alexander's Jazz Theatre** (☎ 01244-340005; Rufus Ct; admission after 10pm £3-10; ☎ 8pm-2am Mon-Sat, 7.30pm-12.30am Sun) is a combination wine bar, coffee bar and tapas bar.

Entertainment

SPORT

Horse Racing

Chester's ancient and very beautiful racetrack is the **Roodee** (☎ 01244-304600; www.chester-races.co.uk; ☎ May-Sep), on the western side of the walls, which has been hosting races since the 16th century. Highlights of the summer flat season include the two-day July Festival and the August equivalent.

Getting There & Away

BUS

National Express (☎ 08717 81 81 81; www.nationalexpress.com) coaches stop on Vicar's Lane, just opposite the tourist office by the Roman amphitheatre. Destinations include Birmingham (£10.70, 2½ hours, four daily), Liverpool (£6.90, one hour, three daily), London (£22.40, 5½ hours, three daily) and Manchester (£6.10, 1¼ hours, three daily).

For information on local bus services, ring the **Cheshire Bus Line** (☎ 01244-602666). Local buses leave from the Town Hall bus exchange

on Princess St. On Sundays and bank holidays a **Sunday adventurer ticket** (adult/child £4/3) gives you unlimited travel in Cheshire.

TRAIN

The train station is about a mile from the city centre via Foregate St and City Rd, or Brook St. City-Rail Link buses are free for people with rail tickets, and operate between the station and Bus Stop A on Frodsham St. Trains travel to Liverpool (£4.45, 45 minutes, hourly), London Euston (£61.60, 2½ hours, hourly) and Manchester (£11.20, one hour, hourly).

Getting Around

Much of the city centre is closed to traffic from 10.30am to 4.30pm, so a car is likely to be a hindrance. Anyway, the city is easy to walk around and most places of interest are close to the wall.

City buses depart from the **Town Hall Bus Exchange** (☎ 01244-602666).

Davies Bros Cycles (☎ 01244-371341; 5 Delamere St) has mountain bikes for hire at £14 per day.

AROUND CHESTER

Chester Zoo

The largest of its kind in the country, **Chester Zoo** (☎ 01244-380280; www.chesterzoo.org.uk; adult/child £15/11; ☎ 10am-dusk, last admission 4pm Mon-Fri, 5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct & 3pm Mon-Fri & 4pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) is about as pleasant a place as caged animals in artificial renditions of their natural habitats could ever expect to live. It's so big that there's even a **monorail** (adult/child £2/1.50) and a **waterbus** (adult/child £2/1.50) on which to get around. The zoo is on the A41, 3 miles north of Chester's city centre. Buses 11C and 12C (£2.50 return, every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday, half-hourly Sunday) run between Chester's Town Hall bus exchange and the zoo.

Blue Planet Aquarium

Things aren't done by halves around Chester: you'll also find the country's largest aquarium, **Blue Planet** (☎ 0151-357 8804; www.blueplanetaquarium.com; adult/child £14/10; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun). It's home to 10 different kinds of shark, which able to be viewed from a 70m-long moving walkway that lets you eye them up close. It's 9 miles north of Chester at junction 10 of the M53 to Liverpool. Buses 1 and 4 run there every half-hour from the Town Hall Bus Exchange in Chester.

Ellesmere Port Boat Museum

Near the aquarium, on the Shropshire Union Canal about 8 miles north of Chester, is the superb **Ellesmere Port Boat Museum** (☎ 0151-355 5017; www.boatmuseum.org.uk; South Pier Rd; adult/child £5.50/3.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat-Wed Nov-Mar), which has a large collection of canal boats as well as indoor exhibits. Take Bus 4 from the Town Hall Bus Exchange in Chester, or it's a 10-minute walk from Ellesmere Port train station.

KNUTSFORD

pop 12,660

Fascinating Knutsford would be a typical lowland English market town if it wasn't for the eccentric philanthropy of Richard Watt (1842-1913), a millionaire glove manufacturer with his own personal vision of Mediterranean architecture. The weird and wonderful buildings that he commissioned for the town make it one of the most interesting places in Cheshire.

Although Watt's influence was certainly greater, Knutsford makes the biggest deal of its links with Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-65), who spent her childhood here and used the town as the model for *Cranford* (1853), her most noteworthy novel. It was made into a BBC series starring Dame Judi Dench following the successful 2004 serialisation of another of her novels, *North And South* (1855). Gaskell, however, left Knutsford and spend her most productive years in the Manchester suburb of Ardwick, where you can visit her former home (see boxed text, p662)

The **tourist office** (☎ 01565-632611; Toft Rd; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is in the council offices opposite the train station.

The **Knutsford Heritage Centre** (☎ 01565-650506; 90A King St; admission free; 🕒 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat, 2-4.30pm Sun) is a reconstructed former smithy that has plenty of information on Gaskell, including the *Cranford Walk Around Knutsford* (£1), a leaflet about her local haunts. The most interesting displays, though, are on Watt and his quirky contributions to English architecture.

You can see the best of these along King St, which is a fine example of the splendidly haphazard harmony of English urban architecture. See in particular the **King's Coffee House** (meant to lure the men from the pubs) and the **Ruskin Reading Room** (Drury Lane).

ROYAL MAY DAY

Since 1864 Knutsford has liked to go a bit wild on Royal May Day. The main festivities take place on the Heath, a large area of common land, and include Morris dancing, brass bands and a pageant of historical characters from fiction and fact. Perhaps the most interesting tradition is that of 'sanding', whereby the streets are covered in colourful messages written in sand. Legend has it that the Danish King Knut, while crossing the marsh between Over and Nether Knutsford, scrawled a message in the sand wishing happiness to a young couple who were on the way to their wedding. The custom is also practised on weddings and feast days.

The eye-catching **Gaskell Memorial Tower** incorporates the swanky **Belle Epoque Brasserie** (☎ 01565-633060; www.thebelleepoque.com; 60 King St; mains £9-16, s/d £95/110; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat), a *fin-de-siècle*-style restaurant that Oscar Wilde would look perfectly at home in. Upstairs are seven gorgeous rooms styled in accordance with the overall late-19th-century theme of the building.

Getting There & Away

Knutsford is 15 miles southwest of Manchester and is on the Manchester-Chester train line (Chester £8.80, 45 minutes, hourly; Manchester £5.10, 30 minutes, hourly). The train station is on Adams Hill, at the southern end of King St.

AROUND KNUTSFORD

The southern end of King St in Knutsford marks the entrance to the 400-hectare **Tatton Park** (NT; ☎ 01625-534400; www.tattonpark.org.uk; admission free, individual attractions adult/child £4/2; 🕒 10am-7pm). At the heart is a Regency **manor** (🕒 1-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct); a wonderful Tudor **Old Hall** (🕒 noon-4pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct); a 1930s-style **working farm** (🕒 noon-5pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, Sat & Sun Nov-Feb); and a series of superb Victorian **gardens** (🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 11am-4pm Oct-Mar). The **Totally Tatton Ticket** (adult/child £6/3) allows you entry to all attractions over two days. Car admission to the park costs £4.50.

On Sundays bus X2 links Tatton Park with Chester (one hour). At other times you'll need your own wheels.

NANTWICH

pop 13,450

Cheshire's second-best example of black-and-white Tudor architecture after Chester is the elegant town of Nantwich. After a devastating fire in 1583, the town was rebuilt thanks to a nationwide appeal by Elizabeth I, who deemed the town's salt production so important that she had to intercede to help. The queen personally donated £1000, and her generosity is proudly commemorated with a plaque on the aptly named **Queen's Aid House** (High St), itself a striking Tudor building.

The rest of the largely pedestrianised centre has plenty of fine examples of the black-and-white style, although it's a wonder how so many of them stay standing, such is their off-kilter shape and design.

Very few buildings survived the fire; the most important of those that did is the 14th-century **Church of St Mary** (☎ 01565-625268; ☞ 9am-5pm), a fine example of medieval architecture.

Apart from salt, the town grew up around the production of cheese and leather, and all three are depicted in the **Nantwich Museum** (☎ 01565-627104; Pillory St; admission free; ☞ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Tue-Sat Oct-Mar).

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 01565-610983; fax 01565-610880; Church Walk; ☞ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, 11am-3pm Sun) is near the main square.

Sleeping & Eating

Crown Hotel (☎ 01565-625283; www.crownhotel.nantwich.com; High St; s/d from £68/84) There is barely a straight line in the place, but this gorgeous Tudor half-timbered hotel is easily top choice in town. The ground-floor Casa Italiana restaurant is a decent and popular spot that has every possible Italian dish on its menu, with mains priced from £9 to £13.

Pillory House & Coffee Shop (☎ 01565-623524; Pillory St; sandwiches £4-5) An old-style tearoom that serves sandwiches and inexpensive hot dishes – perfect for that quick lunch.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (Beam St) is 300m north of the tourist office; there is an hourly bus from Chester (£5.40, one hour).

To get to Manchester, Chester or Liverpool, you'll have to change trains in Crewe (15 minutes, half-hourly). The train station is about half a mile south of the centre.

LIVERPOOL

pop 469,020

Like the impatient belle who just couldn't wait to get to the ball, Liverpool took to its role as European Capital of Culture in 2008 with the kind of fervour that could only be mustered up by a city desperate for international recognition. Which is no bad thing, considering that for decades Liverpool was a bit of a mess, a perennial victim of an economic lashing that left much of the city centre an unattractive mix of ugly retail outlets and dereliction.

It's all changing, though, as a seemingly never-ending program of urban regeneration is restoring the city's architectural treasures and building some pretty swanky new ones, all in the hope of creating a 21st-century version of Liverpool's 19th-century greatness. At the heart of it is the new Liverpool ONE, a gigantic, ultraswish retail centre that occupies an almighty chunk of the city centre. It opened its (literally) hundreds of doors in the summer of 2008, and it's likely to be the financial backbone of Liverpool's efforts to return to the status of major city.

What have never been in question, however, are the city's cultural credentials. The city's store of superb museums and top-class art galleries – all free – have put paid to the scurrilous rumour that Liverpool peaked with the Beatles. In 2004 the whole of the waterfront and docks was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site because there are more listed buildings here than in any other city in England, except London. Oh, and the nightlife: as rich and varied as you'd expect from a good northern city.

Then there are the Scousers themselves, a proud and resilient bunch that have weathered every storm with great character and humour. Most people are familiar with the concept of hometown pride, but in Liverpool they're just that little bit more in love with their city. They'll slag it off, all right – slagging has always been an Olympic sport around here – but it's a critique born of a deep pride that these days is extremely well placed.

HISTORY

Liverpool grew wealthy on the back of the triangular trading of slaves, raw materials and finished goods. From 1700 ships carried cotton goods and hardware from Liverpool to West Africa, where they were exchanged

LIVERPOOL IN...

Two Days

Head to the waterfront and explore the Albert Dock museums – the **Tate Liverpool** (p681), the **Merseyside Maritime Museum** (p681) and the unmissable **International Slavery Museum** (p681) – before paying tribute to the Fab Four at the **Beatles Story** (p681). Keep to the Beatles theme and head north towards the Cavern Quarter around Mathew St before surrendering to the retail giant that is **Liverpool ONE** (p688), with its hundreds of shops. Round off your evening with dinner at **London Carriage Works** (p685) and a pint at the marvellous **Philharmonic** (p686), and wrap yourself in the crisp linen sheets of the **Hope Street Hotel** (p684). Night hawks can tear it up in the bars (see City Centre, p686) and clubs (see Nightclubs, p686) of the hip **Ropewalks** area. The next day, explore the city's two **cathedrals** (p680) and check out the twin delights of the **World Museum Liverpool** (p680) and the **Walker Art Gallery** (p679).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary but add in a **Yellow Duckmarine tour** (p683) to experience the docks from the water. Make a couple of pilgrimages to suit your interests: visit **Mendips** (see boxed text, p682) and **20 Forthlin Rd** (see boxed text, p682), the childhood homes of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, respectively; or walk on holy ground at Anfield, home of **Liverpool Football Club** (p688). Race junkies can head out to the visitor centre at **Aintree racecourse** (see boxed text, p687), which hosts England's most beloved race, the Grand National.

for slaves, who in turn were carried to the West Indies and Virginia, where they were exchanged for sugar, rum, tobacco and raw cotton.

As a great port, the city drew thousands of Irish and Scottish immigrants, and its Celtic influences are still apparent. However, between 1830 and 1930 nine million emigrants – mainly English, Scots and Irish, but also Swedes, Norwegians and Russian Jews – sailed from here for the New World.

The start of WWII led to a resurgence of Liverpool's importance. More than one million American GIs disembarked here before D-Day and the port was, once again, hugely important as the western gateway for transatlantic supplies. The GIs brought with them the latest American records, and Liverpool was thus the first European port of call for the new rhythm and blues that would eventually become rock 'n' roll. Within 20 years, the Mersey Beat was *the* sound of British pop, and four mop-topped Scousers had formed a skiffle band...

ORIENTATION

Liverpool is a cinch to get around. The main attractions are Albert Dock (west of the city centre), and the trendy Ropewalks area (south of Hanover St and west of the two cathedrals). Lime St station, the Paradise St bus station,

the 08 Place tourist office and the Cavern Quarter – a mecca for Beatles fans – lie just to the north.

The tourist office and many of the city's hotels have an excellent map with all of the city's attractions clearly outlined.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Waterstone's (☎ 0151-708 6861; 14-16 Bold St)

Emergency

Merseyside police headquarters (☎ 0151-709 6010; Canning Pl) Opposite Albert Dock.

Internet Access

CafeLatte.net (☎ 0151-709 9683; 4 South Hunter St; per 30min £1.50; ☎ 9am-6pm)

Planet Electra (☎ 0151-708 0303; 36 London Rd; per 30min £1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Internet Resources

Clubs in Liverpool (www.clubsinliverpool.co.uk)

Everything you need to know about what goes on when the sun goes down.

Liverpool Magazine (www.liverpool.com) Insiders' guide to the city, including lots of great recommendations for food and nights out.

Mersey Guide (www.merseyguide.co.uk) Guide to the Greater Mersey area.

LIVERPOOL



To Birkenhead (200m);
 Seacombe (200m);
 Woodside (200m).

INFORMATION		Yellow Duckmarine Tour Bus Stop.....(see 9)	Bar Ça Va.....47 D2
08 Place Tourist Office..... 1 D2			Blue Bar.....48 C3
Albert Dock Tourist Office.....(see 15)			Curzon.....49 C2
Albert Dock Tourist Office..... 2 C4	SLEEPING	62 Castle St..... 23 C2	Hannah's.....50 E3
CafeLatte.net.....(see 32)	Aachen Hotel..... 24 E2	Campanile Hotel..... 25 D4	Jacaranda.....51 E3
Mars Pharmacy..... 3 E1	Crowne Plaza Liverpool..... 26 B2	Feathers Hotel..... 27 F2	Magnet.....52 F3
Merseyside Police	Hanover Hotel..... 28 D3	Hard Days Night Hotel..... 29 C2	Masquerade Bar.....53 D1
Headquarters..... 4 C3	Hope Street Hotel..... 30 F3	Imagine Apartments..... 31 E3	Philharmonic.....54 F3
Planet Electra..... 5 E1	International Inn..... 32 F3	Liverpool YHA..... 33 D4	
Post Office..... 6 D2	Lord Nelson Hotel..... 34 E1	Premier Apartments..... 35 D1	ENTERTAINMENT
Waterstone's..... 7 D2	Premier Inn..... 36 C4		Academy.....55 E1
			Babystorm.....56 C1
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			Barfly.....57 E3
Beatles Shop..... 8 D2	EATING	Alma de Cuba..... 37 E3	Cavern Club.....58 C2
Beatles Store..... 9 C4	Everyman Bistro..... 38 F3	Italian Club..... 39 E3	Everyman Theatre.....(see 38)
Cunard Building.....10 B2	London Carriage Works.....(see 30)	Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds..... 40 C2	G-Bar.....59 C1
FACT.....11 E3	Meet Argentinean..... 41 C2	Pan-American Club..... 42 C4	Le Bateau..... 60 D3
International Slavery Museum.....(see 15)	Quarter..... 43 F3	Tea Factory..... 44 E3	Nation..... 61 D3
Liverpool Cathedral.....12 E4	Tokyou..... 45 E3		Philharmonic Hall.....62 F3
Liverpool War Museum.....13 C2			Superstar Boudoir.....63 D2
Magical Mystery Tour Bus Stop...14 C4			Unity Theatre.....64 F3
Merseyside Maritime Museum...15 C3			
Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King.....16 F2			SHOPPING
National Conservation Centre...17 D1			Hairy Records.....65 E3
Port of Liverpool Building.....18 B2			Liverpool ONE.....66 C3
River Explorer Cruise Departure Point.....(see 71)			Resurrection.....67 E3
Royal Liver Building.....19 B2			
St George's Hall..... 20 D1			TRANSPORT
Tate Liverpool..... 21 B3			Airport Xpress 500 stop.....68 E2
Walker Art Gallery.....(see 22)			National Express Coach Station.....69 E1
World Museum Liverpool.....22 D1			Paradise Street Bus Station & Parking.....70 D2
	DRINKING	Baby Cream.....46 C3	Pier Head Ferry Terminal.....71 B2

Merseyside Today (www.merseysidetoday.co.uk) Guide to the city and surrounding area.

Tourist office (www.visitliverpool.com)

Medical Services

Mars Pharmacy (☎ 0151-709 5271; 68 London Rd)
Open until 10pm every night.

Royal Liverpool University Hospital (☎ 0151-706 2000; Prescot St)

Post

Post office (Ranelagh St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

Liverpool's tourist office has three branches in the city. It also offers an **accommodation hotline** (☎ 0845 601 1125; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat).

08 Place tourist office (☎ 0151-233 2008; Whitechapel; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Oct-Mar) The main branch of the tourist office.

Albert Dock tourist office (☎ 0151-478 4599) Anchor Courtyard (☎ 10am-6pm) Merseyside Maritime Museum (☎ 10am-6pm)

SIGHTS

The wonderful Albert Dock is the city's biggest tourist attraction, and the key to understanding the city's history, but the city centre is where you'll find most of Liverpool's real day-to-day life.

City Centre

ST GEORGE'S HALL

Arguably Liverpool's most impressive building, **St George's Hall** (☎ 0151-707 2391; William Brown St; admission free; ☎ Tue-Sat 10am-5pm, 1-5pm Sun) was built in 1854 and restored in recent years to the tune of £27 million – it finally reopened in 2007. Curiously, it was built as law courts and a concert hall – presumably a judge could pass sentence and then relax to a string quartet. Tours (£5) of the hall are run in conjunction with the tourist office; check for times.

WALKER ART GALLERY

Touted as the 'National Gallery of the North', the city's foremost gallery (☎ 0151-478 4199; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker; William Brown St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) is the national gallery for northern England, housing an outstanding collection of art dating from the 14th

century. Its strong suits are Pre-Raphaelite art, modern British art, and sculpture – not to mention the rotating exhibits of contemporary expression.

WORLD MUSEUM LIVERPOOL

Natural history, science and technology are the themes of this sprawling **museum** (☎ 0151-478 4399; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/wml; William Brown St; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), whose exhibits range from birds of prey to space exploration. It also includes the country's only free planetarium. This vastly entertaining and educational museum is divided into four major sections: the Human World, one of the top anthropological collections in the country; the Natural World, which includes a new aquarium as well as live insect colonies; Earth, a geological treasure trove; and Space & Time, which includes the planetarium. Highly recommended.

NATIONAL CONSERVATION CENTRE

Ever wonder how art actually gets restored? Find out at this terrific **conservation centre** (☎ 0151-478 4999; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/conservation; Whitechapel; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm), housed in a converted railway goods depot. Hand-held audio wands help tell the story, but the real fun is actually attempting a restoration technique with your own hands. Sadly, our trembling paws weren't allowed near anything of value – that was left to the real experts, whose skills are pretty amazing.

FACT

Proof that Ropewalks isn't all about booze and bars, this **media centre** (Foundation for Art & Creative Technology; ☎ 0151-707 4450; www.fact.co.uk; 88 Wood St; 🕒 galleries 11am-6pm Tue & Wed, 11am-8pm Thu-Sat, noon-5pm Sun, cinemas noon-10pm) is all about film and new media such as digital art. Two galleries feature constantly changing exhibitions and three screens show the latest art-house releases, although we've noticed that the odd mainstream release has crept into the schedule – financial pressures overriding creative intent? There's also a bar and cafe.

LIVERPOOL WAR MUSEUM

The secret command centre for the Battle of the Atlantic, the **Western Approaches** (☎ 0151-227 2008; www.liverpoolwarmuseum.co.uk; 1 Rumford St; adult/child £5.25/4; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat Mar-Oct), was abandoned at the end of the war with virtually everything left intact. You can get a

good glimpse of the labyrinthine nerve centre of Allied operations.

THE CATHEDRALS

The city's two cathedrals are separated by the length of Hope St.

Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King

At the northern end of Hope St, off Mt Pleasant, you'll find the Roman Catholic **Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King** (☎ 0151-709 9222; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun Oct-Mar). It was completed in 1967 according to the design of Sir Frederick Gibberd, and after the original plans by Sir Edwin Lutyens, whose crypt is inside. It's a mightily impressive modern building that looks like a soaring concrete tepee, hence its nickname – Paddy's Wigwam.

Liverpool Cathedral

At Hope St's southern end stands the life work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880-1960), the neo-Gothic **Liverpool Cathedral** (☎ 0151-709 6271; www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk; Hope St; 🕒 8am-6pm). Sir Scott's other contributions to the world were the red telephone box, and the power station in London that is now home to the Tate Modern. Size is a big deal here: this is the largest church in England and the largest Anglican cathedral in the world. The central bell is the world's third-largest (with the world's highest and heaviest peal), while the organ, with its 9765 pipes, is likely the world's largest operational model.

A new visitor centre features the **Great Space Film & Audio Tour** (☎ 0151-702 7255; adult/child £4.25/3.50; 🕒 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, noon-2.30pm Sun), a 10-minute, panoramic high-definition movie about the history of the cathedral. It's followed by your own audiovisual tour, courtesy of a snazzy headset.

There are terrific views of Liverpool from the top of the cathedral's 101m **tower** (☎ 0151-702 7217; adult/child £4.25/3, combined tower & Great Space tour adult/child £6.75/5; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-2.30pm Sun).

Albert Dock

Liverpool's biggest tourist attraction is **Albert Dock** (☎ 0151-708 8854; www.albertdock.com; admission free), 2½ hectares of water ringed by enormous cast-iron columns and impressive five-storey warehouses; these make up the country's largest collection of protected buildings and are a World Heritage Site. A fabulous development

program has really brought the dock to life; here you'll find several outstanding museums and an extension of London's Tate Gallery, as well as a couple of top-class restaurants and bars.

MERSEYSIDE MARITIME MUSEUM

The story of one of the world's great ports is the theme of this excellent **museum** (☎ 0151-478 4499; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime; Albert Dock; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) and, believe us, it's a graphic and compelling page-turner. One of the many great exhibits is Emigration to a New World, which tells the story of nine million emigrants and their efforts to get to North America and Australia; the walk-through model of a typical ship shows just how tough conditions on board really were.

INTERNATIONAL SLAVERY MUSEUM

Museums are, by their very nature, like a still of the past, but the extraordinary **International Slavery Museum** (☎ 0151-478 4499; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ism; Albert Dock; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) resonates very much in the present. It reveals slavery's unimaginable horrors – including Liverpool's own role in the triangular slave trade – in a clear and uncompromising manner. It does this through a remarkable series of multimedia and other displays, and it doesn't balk at confronting racism, slavery's shadowy ideological justification for this inhumane practice.

The history of slavery is made real through a series of personal experiences, including a carefully kept ship's log and captain's diary. These tell the story of one slaver's experience on a typical trip, departing Liverpool for West Africa. The ship then purchased or captured as many slaves as it could carry before embarking on the gruesome 'middle passage' across the Atlantic to the West Indies. The slaves that survived the torturous journey were sold for sugar, rum and molasses, which were then brought back to England for profit. Exhibits include original shackles, chains and instruments used to punish rebellious slaves – each piece of metal is more horrendous than the next.

It's heady, disturbing stuff, but as well as providing an insightful history lesson, we are reminded of our own obligations to humanity and justice throughout the museum, not least by the displayed words of Gee Barton, whose son Anthony was murdered in a racially

motivated attack in the Liverpool suburb of Huyton on 30 July 2005: 'Do not let my son's death be in vain.' A visit to this magnificent museum is a good place to start.

TATE LIVERPOOL

Touted as the home of modern art in the north, this **gallery** (☎ 0151-702 7400; www.tate.org.uk/liverpool; Albert Dock; admission free, special exhibitions adult/child from £5/4; ☎ 10am-5.50pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5.50pm Tue-Sun Sep-May) features a substantial checklist of 20th-century artists across its four floors, as well as touring exhibitions from the mother ship on London's Bankside. But it's all a little sparse, with none of the energy we'd expect from the world-famous Tate.

BEATLES STORY

Liverpool's most popular **museum** (☎ 0151-709 1963; www.beatlesstory.com; Albert Dock; adult/child £12.50/6.50; ☎ 9am-7pm) won't illuminate any dark, juicy corners in the turbulent history of the world's most famous foursome – there's ne'er a mention of internal discord, drugs or Yoko Ono – but there's plenty of genuine memorabilia to keep a Beatles fan happy. Particularly impressive is the full-size replica Cavern Club (which was actually tiny) and the Abbey Rd studio where the lads recorded their first singles, while George Harrison's crappy first guitar (now worth half a million quid) should inspire budding, penniless musicians to keep the faith. The museum is also the departure point for the Yellow Duckmarine tour (see p683).

North of Albert Dock

The area to the north of Albert Dock is known as **Pier Head**, after a stone pier built in the 1760s. This is still the departure point for ferries across the River Mersey (see Boat, p689), and was, for millions of migrants, their final contact with European soil.

Their story – and that of the city in general – will be told in the enormous **Museum of Liverpool**, currently being built on an area known as Mann Island and not slated to open until 2010 or 2011. Until its opening, this part of the dock will continue to be dominated by a trio of Edwardian buildings known as the 'Three Graces', dating from the days when Liverpool's star was still ascending. The southernmost, with the dome mimicking St Paul's Cathedral, is the **Port of Liverpool Building**, completed in 1907. Next to it is the **Cunard Building**,

DOING THE BEATLES TO DEATH

Although it's kind of hard to stomach anyone banging on about the Beatles being the best band in the world – they broke up in 1970! That's nearly 40 years ago! – it is easy to understand how Liverpool is still making as much as it can out of the phenomenon that was the Fab Four.

It doesn't matter that two of them are dead, that the much-visited Cavern Club is an unfaithful reconstruction of the original club that was the scene of their earliest gigs, or that, if he were alive, John Lennon would have devoted much of his cynical energy to mocking the 'Cavern Quarter' that has grown up around Mathew St. No, it doesn't matter at all, because the phenomenon lives on and a huge chunk of the city's visitors come to visit, see and touch anything – and we mean anything – even vaguely associated with the Beatles.

Which isn't to say that a wander around Mathew St isn't fun: from shucking oysters in the Rubber Soul Oyster Bar to buying a Ringo pillowcase in the From Me to You shop, virtually all of your Beatles needs can be taken care of. For decent memorabilia, check out the **Beatles Shop** (☎ 0151-236 8066; www.thebeatleshop.co.uk; 31 Mathew St).

True fans will undoubtedly want to visit the National Trust-owned **Mendips**, the home where John lived with his Aunt Mimi from 1945 to 1963, and **20 Forthlin Rd**, the plain terraced home where Paul grew up; you can only do so by prebooked **tour** (☎ 0151-427 7231; adult/child £15/3; ☎ 10.30am & 11.20am Wed-Sun, Easter-Oct) from outside the National Conservation Centre (p680). Visitors to Speke Hall (see p690) can also visit both from there.

If you'd rather do it yourself, the tourist offices stock the *Discover Lennon's Liverpool* guide and map, and *Robin Jones' Beatles Liverpool*.

in the style of an Italian palazzo, once HQ to the Cunard Steamship Line. Finally, the **Royal Liver Building** (pronounced *lie-ver*) was opened in 1911 as the head office of the Royal Liver Friendly Society. It's crowned by Liverpool's symbol, the famous 5.5m copper Liver Bird.

LIVERPOOL FOR CHILDREN

The museums on Albert Dock are extremely popular with kids, especially the **Merseyside Maritime Museum** (p681) – which has a couple of boats for kids to mess about on – and the **Beatles Story** (p681). The **Yellow Duckmarine Tour** (opposite) is a sure-fire winner, as is the **National Conservation Centre** (p680), which gets everyone involved in the drama of restoration. Slightly older (and very old) kids – especially those into football – will enjoy the tour of Anfield Stadium, home to **Liverpool Football Club** (p688), as it means getting your feet on the sacred turf.

Need a break from the tots? Drop them off at **Zoe's Childminding Service** (☎ 0151-228 2685; 15 Woodbourne Rd), about 2 miles east of the city centre.

QUIRKY LIVERPOOL

When a working public toilet is a tourist attraction, you know you have something special, and the men's loo at the **Philharmonic** (p686) is just that. The **Yellow Duckmarine Tour** (opposite),

an amphibious exploration of Albert Dock, is a bit silly but the guides are hilarious, and the **ferry across the Mersey** (see River Explorer Cruise, opposite) is something special – the tired commuters will give you more than a stare if you sing the song too loudly. The **Grand National Experience** (see boxed text, p687) at Aintree is proof that the English really do love their horses, and the concerts at the **Philharmonic Hall** (p687) often throw up something avant-garde, instead of the Beethoven concerto you might expect.

TOURS

Beatles Fab Four Taxi Tour (☎ 0151-601 2111; www.thebeatlesfabfourtaxitour.co.uk; per tour £45) Get your own personalised 2½-hr tour of the city's moptop landmarks. Pick-ups arranged when booking. Up to five people!

Liverpool Beatles Tour (☎ 0151-281 7738; www.beatlestours.co.uk; tours £45-80) Your own personalised tour of every bit of minutiae associated with the Beatles, from cradle to grave. Tour range from the two-hour Helter Skelter excursion to There Are Places I Remember, by the end of which, presumably, you'll be convinced you were actually in the band. Pick-ups are arranged upon booking.

Magical Mystery Tour (☎ 0151-709 3285; www.cavernclub.org; per person £13; ☎ 2.30pm year round, plus noon Sat Jul & Aug) This two-hour tour takes in all Beatles-related landmarks – their birthplaces, childhood homes, schools and places such as Penny Lane and Strawberry Field – before finishing up in the Cavern Club

(which isn't the original). Departs from outside the tourist office at the 08 Place.

River Explorer Cruise (☎ 0151-639 0609; www.merseyferries.co.uk; adult/child return £5.30/3; ⚓ hourly 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun) Do as Gerry & the Pacemakers wanted and take a ferry 'cross the Mersey, exploring the bay and all its attractions as you go. Departs from Pier Head.

Yellow Duckmarine Tour (☎ 0151-708 7799; www.theyellowduckmarine.co.uk; adult/child/family £12/10/34; ⚓ from 11am) Take to the dock waters in a WWII amphibious vehicle after a quickie tour of the city centre's main points of interest. It's not especially educational, but it is a bit of fun. Departs from Albert Dock, near the Beatles Story.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Aintree Festival (☎ 0151-522 2929; www.aintree.co.uk) A three-day race meeting culminating in the world-famous Grand National steeplechase, held on the first Saturday in April.

Africa Oye (www.africaoye.com) The UK's largest free festival celebrating African music and culture takes place in the suburb of Sefton Park in the second half of June.

Liverpool Comedy Festival (☎ 0870 787 1866; www.liverpoolcomedyfestival.co.uk) A fortnight of comedy, both local and international, in venues throughout the city. Usually kicks off in mid-July.

Merseyside International Street Festival (www.brouhaha.uk.com) A three-week extravaganza of world culture beginning in mid-July and featuring indoor and outdoor performances by artists and musicians from pretty much everywhere.

Ecdectica Music Festival (☎ 01744-755150; www.visitsthelens.com) A free festival of folk, alternative and roots music in nearby St Helen's town centre, held on one day in mid-August.

Creamfields (☎ 0208-969 4477; www.cream.co.uk) An alfresco dance-fest that brings together some of the world's best DJs and dance acts during the last weekend in August. It takes place at the Daresbury Estate near Halton, Cheshire.

Mathew St Festival (☎ 0151-239 9091; www.mathewstreetfestival.com) The world's biggest tribute to the Beatles features six days of music, a convention and a memorabilia auction during the last week of August.

SLEEPING

There have been some stylish new arrivals on the scene, but lean towards the boutique and luxury end of the scale. For the rest, standardised business hotels and midrange chains dominate the city centre's hotel lists. Beds are extremely tough to find when Liverpool FC are playing at home (it's less of a problem with

Everton) and during the Beatles convention in the last week of August.

City Centre

BUDGET

International Inn (☎ 0151-709 8135; www.internationalinn.co.uk; 4 South Hunter St; dm/d from £15/36) A superb converted warehouse in the middle of uni-land: heated rooms with tidy wooden beds and bunks, accommodate from two to 10 people. Facilities include a lounge, baggage storage, laundry and 24-hour front desk. The staff is terrific and CafeLatte.net (see p677) internet cafe is next door.

University of Liverpool (☎ 0151-794 6440; www.liv.ac.uk; Greenbank Lane; r from £17.50) Accommodation in comfortable, modern rooms is provided out of term at the Roscoe and Gladstone Residence Hall, located at one end of Penny Lane. Besides its Beatles connections, this is a beautiful part of the city, with nice parks and a duck-filled lake nearby.

MIDRANGE

Aachen Hotel (☎ 0151-709 3477; www.aachenhotel.co.uk; 89-91 Mt Pleasant; s/d from £50/70) This funky listed building is a perennial favourite, with a mix of rooms (some with attached bathroom, some shared). The decor is strictly late '70s to early '80s – lots of flower patterns and crazy colour schemes – but it's all part of the welcoming, offbeat atmosphere.

Feathers Hotel (☎ 0151-709 9655; www.feathers.uk.com; 119-125 Mt Pleasant; s/d from £55/80) A better choice than most of the similar-priced chain hotels, this rambling place spreads itself across a terrace of Georgian houses close to the Metropolitan Cathedral. The rooms are all comfortable (except for the wardrobe-sized singles at the top of the building) and all feature nice touches such as full-package satellite TV. The all-you-can-eat buffet breakfast is a welcome morning treat.

Alicia Hotel (☎ 0151-727 4411; www.feathers.uk.com; 3 Aigburth Dr, Sefton Park; r from £65) Once a wealthy cotton merchant's home, Alicia is a sister hotel to Feathers (see above), but it's a far more handsome place. Most of the rooms have extra luxuries, such as CD players and PlayStations. There's also a nice park on the grounds.

Other midrange options in town:

Lord Nelson Hotel (☎ 0151-709 5161; Hotham St; s/d from £40/55) Modern rooms and contemporary style in the middle of town.

Hanover Hotel (☎ 0151-709 6223; www.hanover-hotel.co.uk; 62 Hanover St; s/d from £48/75) Older breed of hotel-over-a-pub, with decent if unspectacular rooms.

TOP END

our pick Hope Street Hotel (☎ 0151-709 3000; www.hopestreethotel.co.uk; 40 Hope St; r/stg from £115/180) Luxurious Liverpool's pre-eminent flag-waver is this stunning boutique hotel, on the city's most elegant street. The building's original features – heavy wooden beams, cast-iron columns and plenty of exposed brickwork – have been incorporated into a contemporary design inspired by the style of a 16th-century Venetian palazzo. King-sized beds draped in Egyptian cotton; oak floors with underfloor heating; LCD wide-screen TVs; and sleek modern bathrooms (with REN bath and beauty products) are but the most obvious touches of class at this supremely cool address. Breakfast, taken in the marvellous London Carriage Works (opposite), is not included.

Hard Days Night Hotel (☎ 0151-236 1964; www.harddaysnighthotel.com; Central Bldgs, North John St; r £120-160, stg from £180) You don't have to be a fan to stay here, but it helps: unquestionably luxurious, the 110 ultramodern, fully equipped rooms come with a specially commissioned piece of artwork by Shannon, who has made a career out of drawing John, Paul, George and Ringo. And if you opt for one of the suites, named after Lennon and McCartney (even the hotel acknowledges the band's pecking order) you'll get a white baby grand piano in the style of 'Imagine'.

62 Castle St (☎ 0151-702 7898; www.62castlest.com; 62 Castle St; s/d from £150/180; (P) (Q)) As exclusive a boutique hotel as you'll find anywhere, this wonderful new property successfully blends the traditional Victorian features of the building with a sexy, contemporary style. The 20 fabulously different suites come with plasma screen TVs, drench showers and Elemis toiletries as standard.

Around Albert Dock

BUDGET

Liverpool YHA (☎ 0845 371 9527; www.yha.org.uk; 25 Tabley St; dm £16) It may have the look of an Eastern European apartment complex, but this award-winning hostel, adorned with plenty of Beatles memorabilia, is one of the most comfortable you'll find anywhere in the country. The dorms with attached bath-

room even have heated towel rails, and rates include breakfast.

MIDRANGE

Campanile Hotel (☎ 0151-709 8104; www.campanile-liverpool-queens-dock.co.uk; Chaloner St, Queen's Dock; r £49; (P)) Functional, motel-style rooms in a purpose-built hotel. Great location and perfect for families – children under 12 stay for free.

Premier Inn (☎ 0870 990 6432; www.premierinn.co.uk; Albert Dock; r from £55; (P)) As chain hotels go, this is perfectly fine; what makes us include it is its location, which is about two steps away from the Beatles Story museum on Albert Dock.

Crowne Plaza Liverpool (☎ 0151-243 8000; www.cpliverpool.com; St Nicholas Pl, Princes Dock, Pier Head; r from £82; (P)) The paragon of the modern and luxurious business hotel, the Crowne Plaza has a marvellous waterfront location and plenty of facilities including a health club and swimming pool.

EATING

Liverpool's dining scene is getting better all the time. There are plenty of choices in Ropewalks, along Hardman St and Hope St, along Nelson St in the heart of Chinatown or slightly further afield in Lark Lane, near Sefton Park, which is packed with restaurants.

Budget

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds (☎ 0151-236 0096; 8 Cavern Walks, Mathew St; mains about £4; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) It's hard to imagine that a cafe with this name, in a shopping arcade in a touristy area of town, should be authentic in any way. But this cluttered caff (with a vaguely Mediterranean feel) is a great place for a sandwich or a greasy fry.

Keith's Wine Bar (☎ 0151-728 7688; 107 Lark Lane; mains around £5; ☎ 11am-11pm) This friendly, bohemian and mostly vegetarian hang-out (that happens to have a sensational wine cellar) is the favourite resting place of the city's alternative-lifestyle crowd.

Everyman Bistro (☎ 0151-708 9545; www.everyman.co.uk; 13 Hope St; mains £5-8; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Fri, 11am-2am Sat, 7-10.30pm Sun) Out-of-work actors and other creative types on a budget make this great cafe-restaurant (located beneath the Everyman Theatre) their second home – with good reason. Great tucker and a terrific atmosphere.

APARTMENT LUXURY

If you want to live it up in self-catering style, you can opt for a luxury apartment that's along the waterfront or in the heart of town. Apartments are available on a per-night basis; the price includes gas and electricity.

Imagine Apartments (☎ 0844 870 0123; www.imagineapartments.com; Renshaw St; apt from £105)

Beautiful one- and two-bedroom apartments perfectly situated in the middle of the city and furnished to four-star standard.

Premier Apartments (☎ 0151-487 7440; www.premierapartments.com; 23 Hatton Gardens; apt from £79)

Award-winning apartments with interiors designed by Irish fashion star John Rocha.

Waterfront Penthouse (☎ 01695-727877; www.stayinginliverpool.com; Clippers Quay; apt from £120) One luxury pad with sensational views and all the trimmings.

Italian Club (☎ 0151-708 5508; 85 Bold St; mains £6-10; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) The Picinisco family must have been homesick for southern Italy, so they opened this fabulous spot, adorned it with family pictures and began serving the kind of food relatives visiting from the home country would be glad to tuck into.

Midrange

Tea Factory (☎ 0151-708 7008; 79 Wood St; mains £7-12; ☎ 11am-late) Who knew that cod 'n' chips could be so...cool? The wide-ranging menu covers all bases from typical Brit to funky finger food such as international tapas, but it's the room, darling, that makes this place so popular. Rock stars and the impossibly beautiful have found a home here.

Tokyou (☎ 0151-445 1023; 7 Berry St; mains £8-13; ☎ 5-11.30pm) Cheap, healthy Asian cuisine from Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea reminds us of a larger chain like Wagamama, but this place is friendlier and more intimate. Whether takeaway or eat-in (at long picnic-style benches), the food is terrific.

Quarter (☎ 0151-707 1965; 7-11 Falkner St; mains £9-13; ☎ lunch & dinner) A gorgeous little wine bar and bistro with outdoor seating for that elusive summer's day. It's perfect for a lunchtime plate of pasta or just a coffee and a slice of mouth-watering cake.

Top End

Pan-American Club (☎ 0151-709 7097; Britannia Pavilion, Albert Dock; mains £13-24; ☎ 11am-2am) A truly beautiful warehouse conversion has created this top-class restaurant and bar, easily one of the best dining addresses in town. Fancy steak dinners and other American classics can be washed down with drinks from the Champagne Lounge.

Meet Argentinean (☎ 0151-258 1816; 2 Brunswick St; mains lunch £9-26, dinner £15-21; ☎ noon-11pm) Liverpool's first Argentinean restaurant is really an elegant tribute to grilled beef served the size of a small wheel – just as any self-respecting gaucho would demand. Thankfully, there are some cuts that are smaller but just as good; the 16oz grilled fillet steak was plenty for us.

Alma de Cuba (☎ 0151-709 7097; www.alma-de-cuba.com; St Peter's Church, Seel St; mains £16-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) This extraordinary venture has seen the transformation of a Polish church into a Miami-style Cuban extravaganza, a bar and restaurant where you can feast on a suckling pig (the menu heavily favours meat) or clink a perfectly made mojito at the long bar. ¡Salud!

London Carriage Works (☎ 0151-705 2222; www.tlcw.co.uk; 40 Hope St; 2-/3-course meals £35/45; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-8pm Sun) Liverpool's dining revolution is being led by Paul Askew's award-winning restaurant. Its followers are the fashionistas, socceristas and other members of the style brigade who share the large, open space that is the dining room – actually more of a bright glass box divided only by a series of sculpted glass shards. They indulge in the marvellous, eclectic ethnic menu, which reveals influences from every corner of the world.

DRINKING

Put mildly, Scousers like a good night out. Health officials may despair, but Liverpool's wealth of pubs and bars of every hue only exist to satisfy a seemingly inexhaustible desire to get loaded, especially in the 'party zone' that is Ropewalks. Unless specified, all the bars included here open 11am until 2am Monday

GAY & LESBIAN LIVERPOOL

There's no discernible gay quarter in Liverpool, with most of the gay-friendly clubs and bars spread about Dale St and Victoria St in Ropewalks. **G-Bar** (☎ 255 1148; 1-7 Eberle St), in a small lane off Dale St behind Metrolink, is the city's premier gay bar, even though it attracts a mixed crowd. **Curzon** (☎ 236 5160; 8 Temple Lane) is what one might euphemistically term a man's bar, with lots of hairy, tough-looking guys getting to know each other. For something a little less provocative, **Masquerade Bar** (☎ 236 7786; 10 Cumberland St) attracts a real mix of gays, lesbians and bis looking for a few laughs and a sing-song.

Many clubs host gay nights, but **Babystorm** (☎ 07845 298863; 12 Stanley St), a relatively new club and bar aimed primarily at the lesbian and bi community, has really taken off; it is a good rival to **Superstar Boudoir** (22-24 Stanley St) as the best gay club in town. For online listings, check out www.realliverpool.com.

to Saturday, although most have a nominal entry charge after 11pm.

City Centre

Bar Çà Va (☎ 0151-709 9300; 4A Wood St) Our favourite of the Ropewalks bars, this place has more of an indie vibe than the others that surround it. You can still get coloured jello shots and cheap bottles of alcopops, but the crowd here is a little more discerning, meaning it takes a lot more booze than usual to start a conga line.

Hannah's (☎ 0151-708 5959; 2 Lece St) One of the top student bars in town. Try to land yourself a table on the outdoor patio, which is covered in the event of rain. Staying open late, a friendly, easygoing crowd and some pretty decent music make this one of the better places in which to have a drink.

Magnet (☎ 0151-709 6969; 39 Hardman St) Red leather booths, plenty of velvet and a suitably seedy New York-dive atmosphere where Iggy Pop or Tom Waits would feel right at home. The upstairs bar is very cool but totally chilled out, while downstairs the dance-floor shakes to the best music in town, spun by up-and-comers and supported with guest slots by some of England's most established DJs.

Philharmonic (☎ 0151-707 2837; 36 Hope St; ☎ to 11.30pm) This extraordinary bar, designed by the shipwrights who built the *Lusitania*, is one of the most beautiful bars in all of England. The interior is resplendent with etched and stained glass, wrought iron, mosaics and ceramic tiling – and if you think that's good, just wait until you see inside the marble men's toilets, the only heritage-listed lav in the country.

Jacaranda (☎ 0151-708 9424; 21-23 Slater St) The Beatles used to play in this cellar bar – the clue is in the pictures on the walls and the constant

playing of their albums – but this is a great, no-nonsense boozier in its own right.

Albert Dock

Blue Bar (☎ 0151-709 7097; Edward Pavilion) You don't need a premiership contract to guarantee entry anymore, which means that mere mortals can finally enjoy the relaxed ambience of this elegant waterside lounge. So where have all the footballers gone? Downstairs, to the far more glam Baby Blue, a private members' bar.

Baby Cream (☎ 0151-702 5823; www.babycream.co.uk; Atlantic Pavilion) This supertrendy bar, run by the same crowd that created Liverpool's now-defunct-but-still-legendary Cream nightclub, is gorgeous and pretentious in almost equal measure. One pretty cool feature, though, is Creamselector – a set of touch screens where you can make your own compilation CD from a databank of more than 4000 tracks (for a price) – it's like taking a piece of the famous nightclub home with you.

ENTERTAINMENT

The schedule is pretty full these days, whether it's excellent fringe theatre, a performance by the superb Philharmonic or an all-day rock concert. And then there's the constant backbeat provided by the city's club scene, which pulses and throbs to the wee hours, six nights out of seven. For all information, consult the *Liverpool Echo*.

Nightclubs

Most of the city's clubs are concentrated in Ropewalks, where they compete for customers with a ton of late-night bars; considering the number of punters in the area on a Friday or Saturday night, we're guessing

there's plenty of business for everyone. Most clubs open at 11pm and turf everyone out by 3am.

Barfly (☎ 0870 907 0999; 90 Seel St; admission £4-11; ☹ Mon-Sat) This converted theatre is home to our favourite club in town. The fortnightly Saturday Chibuku Shake Shake (www.chibuku.com) is one of the best club nights in all of England, led by a mix of superb DJs including Yousef (formerly of Cream nightclub) and superstars such as Dmitri from Paris and Gilles Peterson. The music ranges from hip-hop to deep house – if you're in town, get in line. Other nights feature a superb mixed bag of music, from trash to techno.

Le Bateau (☎ 0151-709 6508; 62 Duke St; admission £2-5; ☹ Thu-Sat) This oddly named club – there's nothing boatlike about this building – is home to a superb indie club, where 500 punters cram the dance-floor and shake it to sounds that have nothing to do with the charts – you'll hear everything from techno to hard rock.

Nation (☎ 0151-709 1693; 40 Slater St, Wolstenholme Sq; admission £4-13) It looks like an air-raid shelter, but it's the big-name DJs dropping the bombs at the city's premier dance club, formerly the home of Cream. These days, it also hosts live bands as well as pumping techno nights.

Theatre

Most of Liverpool's theatres feature a mixed bag of revues, musicals and stage successes that are as easy on the eye as they are on the

mind, but there is also more interesting work on offer.

Everyman Theatre (☎ 0151-709 4776; 13 Hope St) This is one of England's most famous repertory theatres, and it's an avid supporter of local talent, which has included the likes of Alan Bleasdale.

Unity Theatre (☎ 0151-709 4988; Hope Pl) Fringe theatre for those keen on the unusual and challenging. There's also a great bar on the premises.

Live Music

ROCK MUSIC

Academy (☎ 0151-794 6868; Liverpool University, 11-13 Hotham St) This is the best venue to see major touring bands.

Cavern Club (☎ 0151-236 1965; 8-10 Mathew St) The 'world's most famous club' is not the original basement venue where the Fab Four began their careers, but it's a fairly faithful reconstruction. There's usually a good selection of local bands, and look out for all-day gigs.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Philharmonic Hall (☎ 0151-709 3789; Hope St) One of Liverpool's most beautiful buildings, the art-deco Phil is home to the city's main classical orchestra, but it also stages the work of avant-garde musicians such as John Cage and Nick Cave.

Sport

Liverpool's two football teams – the reds of Liverpool FC and the blues of Everton – are

THE GRAND NATIONAL

England loves the gee-gees, but never more so than on the first Saturday in April, when 40-odd veteran stalwarts of the jumps line up at Aintree to race across 4.5 miles and over the most difficult fences in world racing. Since the first running of the Grand National in 1839 – won by the aptly named Lottery – the country has taken the race to heart. There's hardly a household that doesn't tune in, with betting slips nervously in hand.

The race has captured the national imagination because its protagonists aren't the pedigreed racing machines that line up for the season's other big fixtures, the Derby and the Gold Cup: they're ageing bruisers full of the oh-so-English qualities of grit and derring-do. They need these in abundance to get over tough jumps like the Chair, Canal Turn and Becher's Brook, named after a Captain Becher who fell into it in 1839 and later commented that he had no idea water could taste so awful without whisky in it.

You can book **tickets** (☎ 0151-522 2929; www.aintree.co.uk) for the Grand National, or visit the **Grand National Experience** (☎ 0151-523 2600; adult/child with tour £8/5, without tour £4/3), a visitor centre that includes a race simulator – those jumps are very steep indeed. We recommend the racecourse tour, which takes in the stableyard and the grave of three-time winner Red Rum, the most loved of all Grand National winners.

pretty much the alpha and the omega of sporting interest in the city. There is no other city in England where the fortunes of its home football clubs are so inextricably linked with those of its inhabitants. It's almost easy to forget Liverpool is also home to the Grand National – the world's most famous steeplechase event – which is run on the first weekend in April at Aintree, north of the city (see boxed text, p687).

LIVERPOOL FC

Doff o' the cap to Evertonians and Beatle-maniacs, but no single institution represents the Mersey spirit and strong sense of identity more powerfully than **Liverpool FC** (☎ 0151-263 9199, ticket office 220 2345; www.liverpoolfc.tv; Anfield Rd), England's most successful football club. Virtually unbeatable for much of the 1970s and '80s, they haven't won the league championship since 1990, but their fortunes have improved dramatically under Spanish manager Rafa Benitez and a pair of billionaire American owners. They pay local boy and legend Steve Gerrard the huge salary commensurate with his talent.

The club's home is the marvellous Anfield, but plans relocate to a new 60,000-capacity stadium a stone's throw away in Stanley Park are still pending at the time of writing; construction on the new ground may well have begun by the time you read this. The experience of a live match is a memorable one, especially the sound of 40,000 fans singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone', but tickets are pretty tricky to come by. You may have to settle for a **tour** (☎ 0151-260 6677; combined ticket with museum adult/child £10/6; ☹ every 2hrs except match days), which includes the home dressing room, a walk down the famous tunnel and a seat in the dugout, or you could just head to the **museum** (admission £5), which features plenty of memorabilia.

EVERTON FC

Liverpool's 'other' team are the blues of **Everton FC** (☎ 0151-330 2400, ticket office 330 2300; www.evertonfc.com; Goodison Park), who may not have their rivals' winning pedigree but are just as popular locally.

Tours (☎ 0151-330 2277; adult/child £8.50/5; ☹ 11am & 2pm Sun-Wed & Fri) of Goodison Park run throughout the year, except on the Friday before home matches.

SHOPPING

Frankly, Liverpool's shopping scene was pretty paltry – the most interesting shops were along Bold St – but the opening of the simply ginormous **Liverpool ONE** shopping district ('centre' just feels too small) has changed all that. There are over 160 high street stores and trendy boutiques under one huge roof: you need never go anywhere else again.

Alternative shoppers should still venture along Bold St, home to **Hairy Records** (☎ 0151-709 3121; 124 Bold St; ☹ 11am-5.30pm Mon-Sat), the best record shop in the city, and **Resurrection** (☎ 0151-709 2676; 25 Bold St; ☹ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri-Sat, to 8pm Thu, 11am-5pm Sun), where you can find individualistic styles far removed from the similar brands sold by high street retailers.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Liverpool John Lennon Airport (☎ 0870 750 8484; www.liverpooljohnlennonairport.co.uk) serves a variety of international destinations including Amsterdam, Barcelona, Dublin and Paris, as well as destinations in the UK (Belfast, London and the Isle of Man).

Bus

The **National Express Coach Station** (☎ 08705 808080; Norton St) is situated 300m north of Lime St station. There are services to/from most major towns, including Manchester (£5, 1¼ hours, hourly), London (£24, five to six hours, seven daily), Birmingham (£10.20, 2¾ hours, five daily) and Newcastle (£20.50, 6½ hours, three daily).

Train

Liverpool's main station is Lime St. It has hourly services to almost everywhere, including Chester (£4.45, 45 minutes), London (£61.60, 3¼ hours), Manchester (£8.80, 45 minutes) and Wigan (£4.60, 50 minutes).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

The airport is 8 miles south of the centre. **Arriva Airlink** (per person £1.70; ☹ 6am-11pm) buses 80A and 180 depart from Paradise St station, and **Airportxpress 500** (per person £2.50; ☹ 5.15am-12.15am) buses leave from outside Lime St station. Buses from both stations take half an hour and run every 20 minutes. A taxi to the city centre should cost no more than £15.

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Let's get a little greedy and do a two-for-one weekend, making the most of the fact that, despite their huge historic rivalries, Manchester and Liverpool are only 37 miles apart. Spend the first night in Liverpool – check in to the **Hope Street Hotel** (p684) to really do it in style. It's Friday night, so dinner downstairs in the **London Carriage Works** (p685) or down the street at **Alma de Cuba** (p685), should be followed by a pint in the **Philharmonic** (p686) or a spot of dancing at one of the many clubs in and around Ropewalks. Saturday is all about the museums of the city centre and Albert Dock, which should leave you plenty of time to make your train to Manchester (a trip that's less than an hour).

Claim your room at Manchester's **Great John Street Hotel** (p663) – yup, we're still stylin', but if you're looking for something a little more demure, the **Ox** (p662) offers affordable cool. Then do a little window shopping before grabbing a bite. Pick a bar, any bar, and keep going: there's an unhealthy choice of clubs if you're not that keen on a Sunday morning start.

You have your choice of things to visit, but we recommend **Urbis** (p658) and the **Imperial War Museum North** (p659) for a mere taste of the city's cool culture.

But, if dreams could come true, this would be our ideal way to spend the weekend: we'd have tickets to see Liverpool play (and beat) Chelsea on Saturday afternoon at **Anfield** (opposite), while Sunday afternoon would see us make the trek to **Old Trafford** (p660) to see United struggle to get a draw against Manchester City in the derby. Ah, to sleep, perchance to dream...

Boat

The famous cross-Mersey **ferry** (adult/child £1.35/1.05) for Woodside and Seacombe departs from Pier Head Ferry Terminal, next to the Royal Liver Building (to the north of Albert Dock).

Car & Motorcycle

You won't really have much use for a car in Liverpool, and it'll no doubt end up costing you plenty in parking fees. If you have to drive, there are parking meters around the city and a number of open and sheltered car parks. Car break-ins are a significant problem, so leave absolutely nothing of value in the car.

Public Transport

Local public transport is coordinated by **Merseytravel** (☎ 0151-236 7676; www.merseytravel.gov.uk). Highly recommended is the **Saveaway ticket** (adult/child £3.70/1.90), which allows for one day's off-peak travel on all bus, train and ferry services throughout Merseyside. Tickets are available at shops and post offices throughout the city. Paradise St bus station is in the city centre.

MERSEYRAIL

Merseyrail (☎ 0151-702 2071; www.merseyrail.org) is an extensive suburban rail service linking

Liverpool with the Greater Merseyside area. There are four stops in the city centre: Lime St, Central (handy for Ropewalks), James St (close to Albert Dock) and Moorfields (for the Liverpool War Museum).

Taxi

Mersey Cabs (☎ 0151-298 2222) operates tourist taxi services and also has some wheelchair-accessible cabs.

AROUND LIVERPOOL

PORT SUNLIGHT

Southwest of Liverpool, across the River Mersey on the Wirral Peninsula, picturesque Port Sunlight is a 19th-century village created by the philanthropic Lever family to house workers from their soap factory. The main reason to come here is the wonderful **Lady Lever Art Gallery** (☎ 0151-478 4136; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/ladylever; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm), off Greendale Rd, where you can see some of the greatest works of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (see boxed text, p534), as well as some fine Wedgwood pottery.

Take the Merseyrail to Bebington on the Wirral line; the gallery is a five-minute walk from the station. Alternatively, bus 51 from Woodside will get you here.

SPEKE

A marvellous example of a black-and-white half-timbered hall can be visited at **Speke Hall** (NT; ☎ 0151-427 7231; www.nationaltrust.org.uk; house & gardens adult/child £7.50/3.80, gardens only adult/child £4.50/2.50; 🕒 1-5.30pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), six miles south of Liverpool in the plain suburb of Speke. It contains several priest's holes where 16th-century Roman Catholic priests could hide when they were forbidden to hold Masses. Any airport bus from Paradise St will drop you within a half-mile of the entrance. Speke Hall can also be combined with a National Trust 1½-hour **tour** (☎ 0151-486 4006; with Speke Hall adult/child £15/3) to the childhood homes of both Lennon and McCartney (see boxed text, p682) – you can book at Speke Hall or at the tourist offices in Liverpool.

LANCASHIRE

As industrious as it is isolated, Lancashire has a bit of everything. The southern half is just a teeny bit urban – indeed, there's no part of England so heavily urbanised – and it includes mighty Manchester, so big that it's administered separately (and given its own section in this chapter). But once you go north, past Blackpool – the empress of the traditional British seaside resort – you arrive at the undulating rolls of the Ribble Valley, a gentle and beautiful warm-up for the Lake District that lies just beyond Lancashire's northern border. Head north of the Ribble Valley you'll come across a the handsome Georgian county town of Lancaster.

BLACKPOOL

pop 142,290

The queen bee of England's fun-by-the-sea-type resorts is unquestionably Blackpool. It's bold and brazen in its efforts to cement its position as the country's second-most-visited town after London. Tacky, trashy and, in recent years, a little bit tawdry, Blackpool doesn't care because 16 million annual visitors don't either.

Blackpool works so well because it has mastered the time-tested, traditional British holiday-by-the-sea formula with high-tech, 21st-century amusements that thrill even the most cynical observer. Basically, a holiday here is all about pure, unadulterated fun.

STAYING IN THE BLACK

A visit to all of Blackpool's attractions – including those dreaded words 'again, Daddy, again!' – can put a strain on the budget. Consider booking all of your tickets online – try www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com, where you can benefit from substantial discounts on standard prices. It all adds up!

The town is famous for its tower, its three piers, its Pleasure Beach and its Illuminations, the latter being a successful ploy to extend the brief summer holiday season. From early September to early November, 5 miles of The Promenade are illuminated with thousands of electric and neon lights.

Orientation & Information

Blackpool is surprisingly spread out, but can still be managed easily without a car; trams run the entire 7-mile length of the seafront Promenade.

Tourist office (www.visitblackpool.com) Clifton St (☎ 01253-478222; 1 Clifton St; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat); Central Promenade (☎ 01253-403223; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Sep)

Sights

PLEASURE BEACH

The main reason for Blackpool's immense popularity is the simply fantastic **Pleasure Beach** (☎ 0870 444 5566; www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com; Freedom Pass £5; 🕒 from 10.30am Apr-early Nov), a 16-hectare collection of more than 145 rides. It attracts some seven million visitors annually, and, as amusement parks go, this is the best you'll find anywhere in Europe.

The park's major rides include the Big One, the tallest and fastest roller coaster in Europe, reaching a top speed of 85mph before hitting a near-vertical descent of 75m; the Ice Blast, which delivers you up a 65m steel tower before returning to earth at 80mph; and the vertiginous Infusion, which features five loops, a double-line twist and a suspended looping coaster – which should help bring up that lunch just nicely.

The hi-tech, modern rides draw the biggest queues, but spare a moment to check out the marvellous collection of old-style wooden roller coasters, known as 'woodies'. You can see the world's first Big Dipper (1923), but be sure to have a go on the Grand National

(1935), whose carriages trundle along a 1½-mile track in an experience that is typically Blackpool – complete with riders waving their hands (despite the sombre-toned announcement not to).

Rides are divided into categories, and once you've gained entry to the park with your Freedom Ticket you can buy tickets for individual categories or for a mixture of them all. Alternatively, an Unlimited Ride **wristband** (1-day adult/child £26/17, 2-day £45) includes the £5 entrance fee; there are good discounts to be had if you book your tickets online.

There are no set times for closing; it depends how busy it is.

OTHER SIGHTS

Blackpool's most recognisable landmark is the 150m-high **Blackpool Tower** (☎ 01253-622242; www.theblackpooltower.co.uk; adult/child £17/13; ☎ 10am–6pm), built in 1894. Inside is a vast entertainment complex that should keep the kids happy, including a dinosaur ride, Europe's largest indoor jungle gym and a Moorish circus.

The highlight is the magnificent rococo **ballroom** (☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri & Sun, to 11pm Sat), with extraordinary sculptured and gilded plasterwork, murals, chandeliers and couples gliding across the beautifully polished wooden floor to the melodramatic tones of a huge Wurlitzer organ.

Across from Pleasure Beach is **Sandcastle Waterpark** (☎ 01253-343602; www.sandcastle-waterpark.co.uk; adult/child £12.60/11; ☎ from 10am May–Oct, from 10am Sat & Sun Nov–Feb), an indoor water complex. It has 15 different slides and rides, including the Master Blaster, the world's largest indoor waterslide. Forget the beach – this is the most pleasant place to have a swim.

Of the three Victorian piers, the most famous – and the longest – is the **North Pier**, built in 1862 and opening a year later, charging a penny for admission. Today admission to its plethora of assorted rides and attractions is free.

Near the Central Pier is the state-of-the-art **Sealife Centre** (☎ 01253-622445; www.sealifeeurope.com; New Bonny St; adult/child £12.50/9.50; ☎ 10am–8pm), which features 2½m-long sharks and a giant octopus.

Sleeping

With more than 2500 hotels, B&Bs and self-catering units, Blackpool knows how to put

visitors up for the night. Whatever you do, though, book ahead if you want a decent room during the Illuminations. If you want to stay close to the waterfront, prepare for a noisy, boisterous night; accommodation along Albert and Hornby Rds, 300m back from the sea, is that little bit quieter. The tourist offices will assist you in finding a bed.

ourpick Number One (☎ 01253-343901; www.numberoneblackpool.com; 1 St Lukes Rd; s/d from £70/120; ☎) Far fancier than anything else around, this stunning boutique guesthouse is all luxury and contemporary style. Everything exudes a kind of discreet elegance, from the dark-wood furniture and high-end mod cons to the top-notch breakfast. It's on a quiet road just set back from the South Promenade near Pleasure Beach.

Big Blue Hotel (☎ 0845 367 3333; www.bigbluehotel.com; Blackpool Pleasure Beach; s/d/ste from £75/90/160; ☎) Cool, minimalist and very much a look into Blackpool's future, this hotel caters to 21st-century demands: smartly kitted-out rooms come with DVD players and computer games, while its location at the southern entrance to Pleasure Beach should ensure that everyone has something to do.

Other options you can try:

Dutchman (☎ 01253-404812; www.dutchmanhotel.co.uk; 269 The Promenade; s/d from £20/45) Harsh blue neon out the front invites you into a self-styled party hotel whose prices double at weekends.

New President Hotel (☎ 01253-624460; www.thepresidenthotel.co.uk; 320-324 North Promenade; s/d from £45/70; ☎) Newly renovated with 65 comfortable rooms. Also serves meals (£8 to £13) in the fancy-ish Atlanta restaurant.

Ruskin Hotel (☎ 01253-624063; www.ruskinhotel.com; Albert Rd; s/d £45/80) Victorian-style hotel at the prom end of Albert Rd, near Blackpool Tower.

Eating

Forget gourmet meals – the Blackpool experience is all about stuffing your face with burgers, doughnuts, and fish and chips. Most people eat at their hotels, where roast and three vegetables often costs just £5 per head.

There are a few restaurants around Talbot Sq (near the tourist office) on Queen St, Talbot Rd and Clifton St. Our favourite meal in town is at the Mediterranean **Kwizeen** (☎ 01253-290045; www.kwizeenrestaurant.co.uk; 49 King St; mains £13; ☎ lunch & dinner), which serves a delicious suckling pig in a Sardinian style, topped with a bacon roulade.

DETOUR: NATIONAL FOOTBALL MUSEUM

It is fitting that this **museum** (☎ 01772-908442; Sir Tom Finney Way, Preston; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun), dedicated to the world's most popular game, should have its home in the stand of Preston North End FC. Although the game originated in the public schools of southern England, it was the Lancashire mill towns, led by Preston, that first began employing professionals in the 1870s and 1880s – basically because the working-class players couldn't afford to take the time off work to play. The towns helped launch the first professional league in 1888 (Preston North End were its first champions but they haven't won it since 1889). Besides outlining the history of the game, the museum is home to a number of fascinating (for football fans, anyway) exhibits, including a shirt worn in the world's first international match (30 November 1872: a thrilling 0-0 draw between England and Scotland); the oldest FA Cup trophy (from 1896); and jerseys worn by some of the game's true greats, including Sir Stanley Matthews and Diego Maradona. Oh, and just so you don't think that football is strictly a man's game, you'll find out that the world's first organised women's team were the Dick Kerrs Ladies from Preston. Preston is easily reached by train from Blackpool (£6.30, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

Getting There & Away**BUS**

The central coach station is on Talbot Rd, near the town centre. Destinations include Liverpool (£8.60, 1½ hours, one daily), London (£27, 6½ hours, five daily) and Manchester (£6.90, 1¾ hours, five daily).

TRAIN

The main train station is Blackpool North, about five blocks east of the North Pier on Talbot Rd. There is a direct service from Manchester (£12.20, 1¼ hours, half-hourly) and Liverpool (£13.80, 1½ hours, seven daily), but most other arrivals change in Preston (£6.30, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

Getting Around

A host of travel-card options for trams and buses ranging from one day to a week are available at the tourist offices and most news-agents. With more than 14,000 car-parking spaces in Blackpool, you'll have no problem parking. In 2008 a new **land train service** (one way/return £2/3; 🕒 from 10.30am Apr-Oct) began. It shuttles funsters between the central corridor car parks and the main entrance to Pleasure Beach every five minutes or so throughout the day.

LANCASTER

pop 45,960

Lancashire's county seat is handsome Lancaster, lined with Georgian buildings that lend the place an air of austere gentility. Folks have done business here since Roman times, but none more successfully than during the 18th century, when Lancaster was an impor-

tant port in the slave trade (see International Slavery Museum, p681).

Information

Post office (85 Market St; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 01524-841656; www.citycoastcountry.co.uk; 29 Castle Hill; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

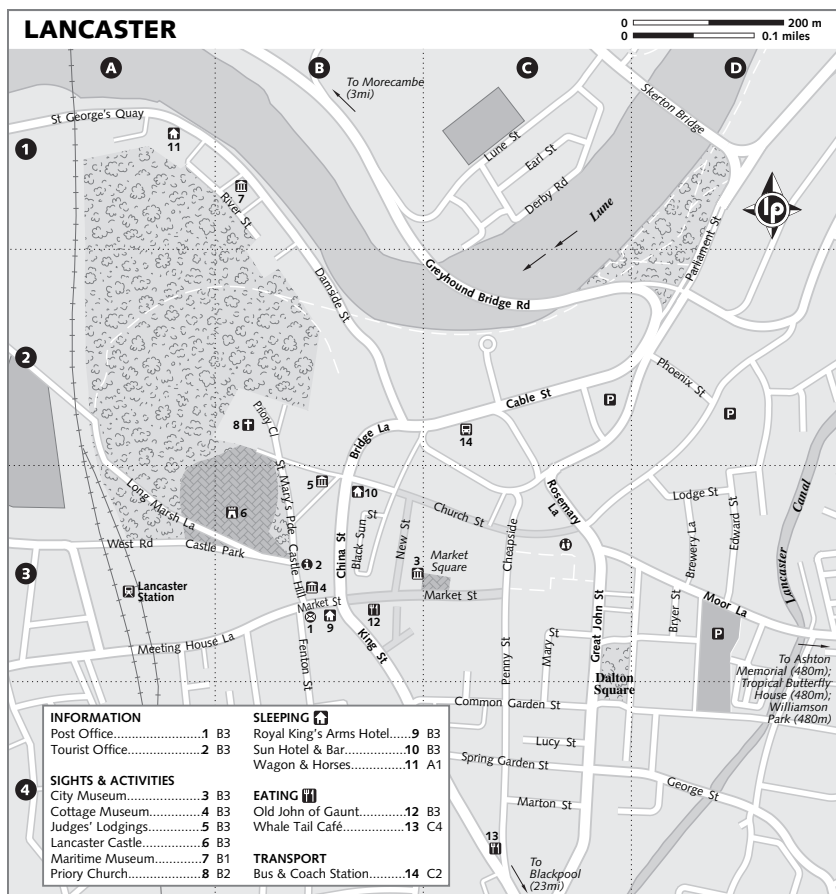
Sights**LANCASTER CASTLE & PRIORY**

Lancaster's imposing **castle** (☎ 01524-64998; www.lancastercastle.com; adult/child £5/4; 🕒 10am-5pm) was originally built in 1150. Later additions include the **Well Tower**, more commonly known as the Witches' Tower because it was used to incarcerate the accused of the famous Pendle Witches Trial of 1612 (see Pendle Hill, p695), and the impressive twin-towered **gatehouse**, both of which were added in the 14th century. However, most of what you see today dates from the 18th and 19th centuries, when the castle was substantially altered to suit its new, and still current, role as a prison. Consequently, you can only visit the castle as part of a 45-minute **guided tour** (🕒 every 30min 10.30am-4pm), but you do get a chance to experience what it was like to be locked up in the dungeon.

Immediately next to the castle is the equally fine **priory church** (☎ 01524-65338; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5pm), founded in 1094 but extensively remodelled in the Middle Ages.

OTHER SIGHTS

The steps between the castle and the church lead down to the 17th-century **Judges' Lodgings**



(☎ 01524-32808; adult/child £3/2; 🕒 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat Jul-Sep, 2-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Jun). Once the home of witch-hunter Thomas Covell (he who 'caught' the poor Pendle women), it is now home to a Museum of Furnishings by master builders Gillows of Lancaster, whose work graces the Houses of Parliament. It also houses a Museum of Childhood, which has memorabilia from the turn of the 20th century.

A trio of other museums complete the picture: the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 01524-64637; St George's Quay; adult/child £3/2; 🕒 11am-5pm Easter-Oct, 12.30-4pm Nov-Easter), in the 18th-century Custom House, recalls the days when Lancaster was a flourishing port at the centre of the slave trade; the **Cottage Museum** (☎ 01524-64637; 15 Castle

Hill; adult/child £1/free; 🕒 2-5pm Easter-Sep) gives us a peep into life in early Victorian times; and the **City Museum** (☎ 01524-64637; Market Sq; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) has a mixed bag of local historical and archaeological exhibits.

Lancaster's highest point is the 22-hectare spread of **Williamson Park** (www.williamsonpark.com; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Easter), from which there are great views of the town, Morecambe Bay and the Cumbrian fells to the north. In the middle of the park is the **Ashton Memorial**, a 67m-high baroque folly built by Lord Ashton (the son of the park's founder, James Williamson) for his wife. More beautiful, however, is the Edwardian Palm House, now the **Tropical Butterfly House** (adult/child £4.50/3.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Easter),

full of exotic and stunning species. Take bus 25 or 25A from the station, or else it's a steep short walk up Moor Lane.

Sleeping & Eating

Wagon & Horses (☎ 01524-846094; 27 St George's Quay; s/d £35/48) A pleasant pub near the Maritime Museum with five comfortable rooms upstairs; only one has attached bathroom, but all have river views.

Sun Hotel & Bar (☎ 01524-66006; www.thesunhotelandbar.co.uk; 63 Church St; s/d from £45/65; 📍) An excellent hotel in a 300-year-old building with a rustic, old world look that stops at the bedroom door; a recent renovation has resulted in 16 pretty snazzy rooms. The pub downstairs is one of the best in town and a top spot for a bit of grub; there are three menus to choose from, with meals from £8 to £15.

Royal King's Arms Hotel (☎ 01524-32451; www.bestwestern.com; Market St; s/d from £50/70; 📍) Lancaster's top hotel is a period house with modern, comfortable rooms and an all-round businesslike interior. Look out for the beautiful stained-glass windows, one of the only leftovers from the mid-19th century when Charles Dickens frequented the place. The hotel restaurant is an excellent dining choice, with mains around £11.

Old John of Gaunt (☎ 01524-32358; 53 Market St; mains £5-6) Your one stop for traditional pub grub, decent ale and live music.

Whale Tail Cafe (☎ 01524-845133; www.whaletailcafe.co.uk; 78A Penny St; mains £6-7; ☎ dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun) This gorgeous 1st-floor veggie restaurant has an elegant dining room and a more informal plant-filled yard for lunch on a sunny day. The spicy bean burger (£6) is particularly good.

Getting There & Away

Lancaster is on the main west-coast railway line and on the Cumbrian coast line. Destinations include Carlisle (£23, one hour, hourly), Manchester (£12.60, one hour, hourly) and Morecambe (£1.80, 15 minutes, half-hourly).

MORECAMBE

pop 49,570

Blackpool is tough enough competition for traditional seaside resorts in *other* parts of England, so imagine what it must be like for Morecambe. It was a minding-its-own-business fishing village until the middle of the

19th century, when the railway brought trains packed with mill workers and their families to its shores. Its popularity with the bucket-and-spade brigade fell away dramatically after WWII, when bolder and brasher Blackpool to the south really began to flex its muscles.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01524-582808; Old Station Bldgs; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat year round, plus 10am-4pm Sun Jun-Sep) is on Central Promenade and runs a free accommodation service.

The town is in the middle of a regeneration project that will bring new life to the crumbling arcades that line the glorious bay. The bay is considered the country's most important wintering site for birds, and sunsets here can be quite spectacular.

Further down the promenade is the town's most famous statue: Graham Ibbeson's tribute to Ernie Bartholomew, better known as Eric Morecambe, one half of comic duo Morecambe and Wise.

There are plenty of hotels in the town, none more inviting than the newly restored **Midland Hotel** (☎ 01524-424000; www.midlandmorecambe.co.uk; Marine Rd West; s/d from £60/90; 📍 📺), an art-deco masterpiece with 44 thoroughly modern rooms that have retained the essence of their 1930s style.

Trains run half-hourly from Lancaster (15 minutes), only 5 miles to the southeast.

RIBBLE VALLEY

Lancashire's most attractive landscapes lie east of the brash tackiness of Blackpool and north of the sprawling conurbations of Preston and Blackburn.

The northern half of the valley is dominated by the sparsely populated moorland of the Forest of Bowland, which is a fantastic place for walks, while the southern half features rolling hills, attractive market towns and ruins, with the River Ribble flowing between them.

Activities

WALKING & CYCLING

The **Ribble Way**, a 70-mile footpath that follows the River Ribble from its source at Ribbleshead (in the Yorkshire Dales) to the estuary at Preston, is one of the more popular walks in the area and passes through Clitheroe. For online information check out www.visitlancashire.com.

The valley is also well covered by the northern loop of the **Lancashire Cycle Way**; for more information about routes, safety and so on

DETOUR: HELMSHORE MILLS TEXTILE MUSEUM

If you're on your way to the Ribble Valley from Manchester, or if, like us, you have an insatiable curiosity about the Industrial Revolution's early years, then a visit to this **textile museum** (☎ 01706-226459; Holcombe Rd, Helmsnore, Rossendale; adult/child £4/free; 🕒 noon-4pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Jan-Oct) will go a long way towards quenching your thirst for knowledge. The museum is made up of two of Lancashire's original textile mills – Higher Mill and Whitaker's Mill – beautifully situated at the bottom of the Rossendale Valley. The museum exhibits, including a version of Richard Arkwright's Water Frame and a working water wheel, tell the story of how cotton and wool became cloth. These fabrics made the fortunes of many an 18th-century industrialist, and helped determine the course of human history, which is no mean boast. There's the ubiquitous gift shop and coffee shop. The museum is in Helmsnore (on the outskirts of Haslingden), about 16 miles north of Manchester.

contact **Blazing Saddles** (☎ 01442-844435; www.blazing-saddles.co.uk), a Yorkshire-based bike store.

The tourist office in Clitheroe (below) has three useful publications: *Bowlands by Bike* (£1), *Mountain Bike Ribble Valley Circular Routes* (£2.50) and *Mountain Bike Rides in Gisburn Forest* (£2).

Clitheroe

pop 14,700

Located northeast of Preston, the Ribble Valley's largest market town is best known for its impressive **Norman keep** (admission free; 🕒 dawn-dusk), built in the 12th century and now, sadly, standing empty; there are great views of the river valley below. The extensive grounds are home to the mildly interesting **castle museum** (☎ 01200-424635), currently closed for repairs – it should reopen in the summer of 2009.

The **tourist office** (☎ 01200-425566; www.ribblevalley.gov.uk; 14 Market Place; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) has information on the town and surrounding area. **Pedal Power** (☎ 01200-422066; Waddington Rd) has bikes for rent.

Decent accommodation options include **Brooklyn Guesthouse** (☎ 01200-428268; 32 Pimlico Rd; s/d from £26/44), a handsome Georgian house

with comfy flower-print rooms, and **Swan & Royal Hotel** (☎ 01200-423130; www.swanandroyal.co.uk; 26 Castle St; s/d from £35/55), a family-run, half-timbered hotel with six rooms. **Halpenny's of Clitheroe** (☎ 01200-424478; Old Toll House, 1-5 Parson Lane; mains around £5) is a traditional tearshop that serves sandwiches, and dishes such as Lancashire hotpot.

Pendle Hill

The Valley's top attraction is Pendle Hill (558m), made famous in 1612 as the stomping ground of the Pendle Witches. These were 10 women who, allegedly, practised all kinds of malefic doings until they were convicted on the sole testimony of a child, and hanged. The tourist authority makes a big deal of the mythology surrounding the unfortunate women, and every Halloween a pseudomystical ceremony is performed here to commemorate their 'activities'.

If that isn't enough, the hill is also renowned as the spot where George Fox had a vision in 1652 that led him to found the Quakers. Whatever your thoughts on witchcraft and religious visions, the hill, a couple of miles east of Clitheroe, is a great spot to walk to.

A WALK THROUGH MIDDLE EARTH

Ever wondered what it would be like to walk in Frodo Baggins' beloved Shire...without the aid of hallucinogens? JRR Tolkien's descriptions of Hobbiton and the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* were inspired by the countryside around Hurst Green, about 5 miles southwest of Clitheroe. Tolkien was a regular guest in the grounds of Stonyhurst College during the years in which he wrote the epic novel, a favourite of fantasy nerds all over the world (including this author).

A 5.5-mile circular walk has been created, following Tolkien's own footsteps – it begins at Shireburn Arms (where he was partial to the ale) and includes the crossing of the Rivers Ribble and Hodder (Rivers Shirebourne and Brandywine in the book). The Ribble Valley official website (www.ribblevalley.gov.uk) has details of the walk; Hurst Green is on the Clitheroe–Preston bus line.

Forest of Bowland

☎ 01200

This vast, grouse-ridden moorland is somewhat of a misnomer. The use of 'forest' is a throwback to an earlier definition, when it served as a royal hunting ground. Today it is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which makes for good walking and cycling. The **Pendle Witch Way**, a 45-mile walk from Pendle Hill to northeast of Lancaster, cuts right through the area, and the **Lancashire Cycle Way** runs along the eastern border. The forest's main town is Slaidburn, about 9 miles north of Clitheroe on the B6478.

Other villages worth exploring are Newton, Whitewell and Dunsop Bridge.

SLEEPING & EATING

The popular **Slaidburn YHA** (☎ 0845 371 9343; www.yha.org.uk; King's House, Slaidburn; dm £12; ☹ Apr-Oct), a converted 17th-century village inn, is especially popular with walkers and cyclists.

More-luxurious accommodation is limited. In Slaidburn, the wonderful 13th-century **Hark to Bounty Inn** (☎ 01200-446246; www.harktobounty.co.uk; s/d £43/85) has atmospheric rooms with exposed oak beams. An excellent restaurant (mains £8 to £13) downstairs specialises in homemade herb breads.

Elsewhere, the stunning **Inn at Whitewell** (☎ 01200-448222; www.innatwhitewell.com; Whitewell Village; s/d from £70/96) is a remarkable place set amid 1½ hectares of grounds. Once the home of Bowland's forest keeper, it is now a superb guest house with a wonderfully eccentric feel. The gorgeous rooms have antique furniture, peat fires and Victorian claw-foot baths. The restaurant (mains £10 to £16) specialises in traditional English game dishes.

Getting There & Around

Clitheroe is served by regular buses from Preston and Blackburn as well as by hourly train from Manchester (£8.30, 75 minutes) and Preston (£5.60, 50 minutes). Once here, you're better off if you have your own transport, as there is only a Sunday bus service between Clitheroe and the rest of the valley villages. If you need a rental, go to **Castle Car Hire** (☎ 01200-426000; 6 St Anne's Sq, Clitheroe).

ISLE OF MAN

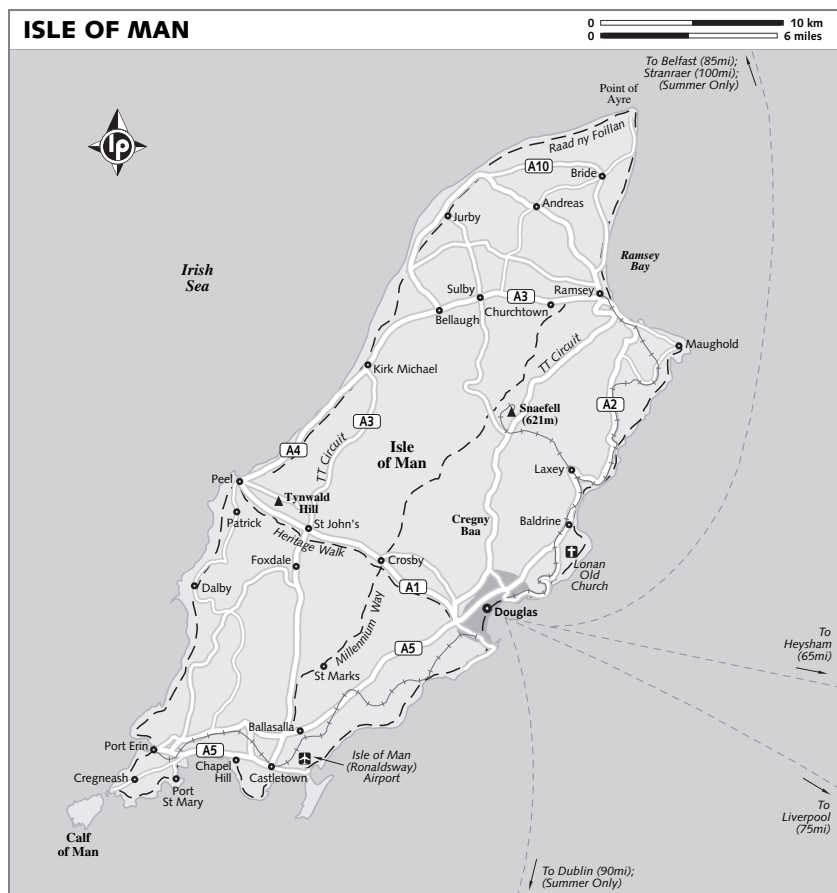
Beloved of tax dodgers, petrol-heads and folks who like tailless cats, the Isle of Man (Ellan Vannin in Manx, the Gaelic language of the island) has long had to endure notions about being populated by odd folk with even odder ways. This unfounded prejudice is hard to fathom, but a clue is perhaps in the islanders' dogged refusal to relinquish their quasi-independent status and become fully fledged Englishers, which invariably makes mainlanders suspicious.

But chances are that those same mainlanders have never actually seen the lush valleys, barren hills and rugged coastlines of what is a beautiful island. Perfect for walking, cycling, driving or just relaxing, this is a place that refuses to sell itself down the river of crass commercialism and mass tourism. Except, of course, for the world-famous summer season of Tourist Trophy (TT) motorbike racing, which attracts around 50,000 punters and bike freaks every May and June. Needless to say, if you want a slice of silence, be sure to avoid the high-rev bike fest.

Home to the world's oldest continuous parliament, the Isle of Man enjoys special status in Britain, and its annual parliamentary ceremony honours the thousand-year history of the Tynwald (a Scandinavian word meaning 'meeting field'). Douglas, the capital, is a run-down relic of Victorian tourism with fading B&Bs.

Orientation & Information

Situated in the Irish Sea, equidistant from Liverpool, Dublin and Belfast, the Isle of Man is about 33 miles long by 13 miles wide. Ferries arrive at Douglas, the port and main town on the southeast coast. Flights come in to Ronaldsway airport, 10 miles south of Douglas. Most of the island's historic sites are operated by Manx Heritage, which offers free admission for National Trust or English Heritage members. Unless otherwise indicated, **Manx Heritage** (MH; ☎ 01624-648000; www.gov.im/mnh) sites are open 10am to 5pm daily, from Easter to October. The Manx Heritage **4 Site Pass** (adult/child £11/5.50) grants you entry into four of the island's heritage attractions; pick it up at any of the tourist offices.



Activities

WALKING & CYCLING

With plenty of great marked trails, the Isle of Man is a firm favourite with walkers and is regularly voted one of the best walking destinations in Britain. Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger Map 95 (£6.99) covers the whole island, while the free *Walks on the Isle of Man* is available from the tourist office in Douglas. The **Millennium Way** is a walking path that runs the length of the island amid some spectacular scenery. The most demanding of all the island's walks is the 95-mile **Raad ny Foillan** (Road of the Gull), a well-marked path that makes a complete circuit of the island and normally takes about five days to complete. The **Isle of Man**

Walking Festival (www.isleofmanwalking.com) takes place over five days in June and has proven such a success that a three-day **autumn festival** was added in 2007.

There are six designated off-road cycling trails on the island, each with varying ranges of difficulty. See www.gov.im/tourism/activities/events/mountainbiking.xml for details.

Besides some great cycling trails, the Isle of Man is also the birthplace of the UK's top cyclist of the moment, Mark Cavendish, who won an unprecedented four stages in the 2008 Tour de France. He withdrew from the remainder of the tour in order to prepare for the Beijing Olympics, but failed to win a medal...

Getting There & Away

AIR

Ronaldsway Airport (☎ 01624-821600; www.iom-airport.com; Ballasalla) is 10 miles south of Douglas near Castletown.

Airline contacts:

Aer Arann (☎ 0800 587 2324; www.aerann.com; one way £45) From Dublin.

Blue Islands (☎ 0845 620 2122; www.blueislands.com; one way £170) From Guernsey & Jersey.

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.ba.com; one way £113) From Glasgow Prestwick and Edinburgh; linked with Loganair.

Eastern Airways (☎ 01652-681099; www.easternairways.com; one way £90) From Newcastle and Birmingham.

Flybe (☎ 0871 700 0535; www.flybe.com) From Birmingham (£30), London Gatwick (£60), Luton (£50), Manchester (£27), Southampton (£35), Liverpool (£27) and Newquay (£61).

Manx2 (☎ 0871 200 0440; www.manx2.com; from £49) From Belfast, Blackpool, Leeds-Bradford, Gloucester M5 and East Midlands.

VLM Airlines (☎ 0870 850 5400; www.flyvlm.com; from £120) From London, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Brussels and Luxembourg.

BOAT

Isle of Man Steam Packet (☎ 0870 552 3523; www.steam-packet.com; foot passenger single/return £30/32, car & 2 passengers single/return £122/94) is a car ferry and high-speed catamaran service from Liverpool and Heysham to Douglas. There is also a summer service (mid-April to mid-September) to Dublin (three hours) and Belfast (three hours). It's often cheaper to buy a return ticket than to pay the single fare.

Getting Around

Buses link the airport with Douglas every 30 minutes between 7am and 11pm; a taxi should cost you no more than £18.

The island has a comprehensive **bus service** (www.iombusandrail.info); the tourist office in Douglas has timetables and sells tickets. It also sells the **Island Explorer** (1-day adult/child £13/6.50, 3-day £26/13), which gives you free rides on all public transport, including the tram to Snaefell and Douglas' horse-trams.

Bikes can be hired from **Eurocycles** (☎ 01624-624909; 8A Victoria Rd; per day £15-18; ☹ Mon-Sat).

Petrol-heads will love the scenic, sweeping bends that make for some exciting driving – and the fact that outside of Douglas town there's no speed limit. Naturally, the most popular drive is along the TT route. Car-hire

operators have desks at the airport, and charge from around £35 per day.

The 19th-century electric and steam **rail services** (☎ 01624-663366; ☹ Easter-Sep) are a thoroughly satisfying way of getting from A to B: **Douglas–Castletown–Port Erin Steam Train** (return £9.40)

Douglas–Laxey–Ramsey Electric Tramway (return £5.80)

Laxey–Summit Snaefell Mountain Railway (return £8)

DOUGLAS

pop 26,218

All roads lead to Douglas, which is still recovering from the faded glories of its Victorian seaside past. Back then, the town was an exotic getaway for businessmen and their families during the 19th century. Still, it has the best of the island's hotels and restaurants – as well as the bulk of the finance houses that are frequented so regularly by tax-allergic Brits. The **tourist office** (☎ 01624-686766; www.visitisleofman.com; Sea Terminal Bldg; ☹ 9.15am–7pm May-Sep, 9am–5pm Apr & Oct, 9am–5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am–12.30pm Sat Nov-Mar) makes accommodation bookings for free.

The **Manx Museum** (MH; admission free; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon-Sat) gives an introduction to everything from the island's prehistoric past to the latest TT race winners.

Sleeping

The seafront promenade is crammed with B&Bs. Unless you booked back in the 1990s, however, there's little chance of finding accommodation during TT week and the weeks either side of it. The tourist office's camping information sheet lists sites all around the island.

Ascot Hotel (☎ 01624-675081; www.hotel-ascot.co.uk; 7 Empire Tce; s/d from £40/80; (P)) If you can ignore the fact that it's just a little bit worn around the edges (the beds are in dire need of replacement, for instance), this hotel is one of the friendliest hotels on the island. It has first-rate service and an excellent English breakfast, and it's a short walk uphill from the harbour. Make sure to get a room with a harbour view, otherwise you'll be stuck staring at a yard.

Hilton Hotel (☎ 01624-662662; www.hilton.co.uk/isleofman; Central Promenade; r from £70; (P) (a)) The Hilton's brand of business hotel has come to Douglas and made a very good first impression; the rooms are modern and functional (high-speed internet is standard throughout),

if a little lacking in decorative imagination. There's also a small gym and a casino on the premises, but don't bother with the awfully bland Colours Bar and Atlantis restaurant.

Sefton Hotel (☎ 01624-645500; www.seftonhotel.co.im; Harris Promenade; r from £95; (P) ♿) Douglas' best hotel is an upmarket oasis with its own indoor water garden and rooms that range from plain and comfy to elegant and very luxurious. The rooms overlooking the water garden are superb, even better than the ones with sea views. You save up to 10% if you book online.

Admiral House (☎ 01624-629551; www.admiralhouse.com; Loch Promenade; s/d from £95/110; (P) ♿) This elegant guest house overlooks the harbour near the ferry port. The 23 spotless and modern rooms are a cheerful alternative to the worn look of a lot of other seafront B&Bs. In the basement, the smart Ciapelli's is a top-notch Italian restaurant that is probably the best eatery in town, serving mains for around £9 to £12.

Eating & Drinking

Spill the Beans (☎ 01624-614167; 1 Market Hill; snacks £3-5; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) The most pleasant coffee shop in Douglas delivers proper caffeine kicks – who says you can't have coffee in a bowl? – as well as cakes, buns and other freshly made pastries.

Tanroagan (☎ 01624-472411; www.tanroagan.co.uk; 9 Ridgeway St; mains £9-18; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner Sat) The place for all things from the sea, this elegant eatery is the trendiest in Douglas. It serves fresh fish straight off the boats, giving them the merest of Continental twists or just a spell on the hot grill. Reservations are recommended.

There are a few good pubs around, including the trendy **Bar George** (☎ 01624-617799; St George's Chambers, 3 Hill St), and **Rover's Return** (☎ 01624-676459; 11 Church St), which specialises in the local brew, Bushy Ales.

AROUND DOUGLAS

You can follow the TT circuit up and over the mountain or wind around the coast. The mountain route goes close to the summit of **Snaefell** (621m), the island's highest point. It's an easy walk up to the summit, or you can take the electric tram from Laxey, near the coast.

On the edge of Ramsey, on the north of the island, is the **Grove Rural Life Museum** (MH; admission £3.30; ☎ 10am-5pm Apr-Oct). The church in the small village of **Maughold** is on the site of

an ancient monastery; a small shelter houses quite a good selection of stone crosses and ancient inscriptions.

It's no exaggeration to describe the **Lady Isabella Laxey Wheel** (MH; admission £3.30), built in 1854 to pump water from a mine, as a 'great' wheel; it measures 22m across and can draw 1140L of water per minute from a depth of 550m. It is named after the wife of the then lieutenant-governor and is the largest wheel of its kind in the world.

The wheel-headed cross at **Lonan Old Church**, just north of Douglas, is the island's most impressive early Christian cross.

CASTLETOWN & AROUND

At the southern end of the island is Castletown, a quiet harbour town that was originally the capital of the Isle of Man. The town is dominated by the impressive 13th-century **Castle Rushen** (MH; admission £4.80). The flag tower affords fine views of the town and coast. There's also a small **Nautical Museum** (MH; admission £3.30) displaying, among other things, its pride and joy, *Peggy*, a boat built in 1791 and still housed in its original boathouse. There is a school dating back to 1570 in **St Mary's church** (MH; admission free), behind the castle.

Between Castletown and Cregneash, the Iron Age hillfort at **Chapel Hill** encloses a Viking ship burial site.

On the southern tip of the island, the **Cregneash Village Folk Museum** (MH; admission £3) recalls traditional Manx rural life. The **Calf of Man**, the small island just off Cregneash, is a bird sanctuary. **Calf Island Cruises** (☎ 01624-832339; adult/child £10/5; ☎ 10.15am, 11.30am & 1.30pm Apr-Oct, weather permitting) run between Port Erin and the island.

For a decent bit of grub, the **Garrison Tapas Bar** (☎ 01624-824885; 5 Castle St; tapas £4-6; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) brings Iberian flavour to a handsome 17th-century building in the centre of town. The paella (£20) is fantastic, but it feeds four. A new terrace upstairs will keep smokers happy.

Port Erin & Port St Mary

Port Erin, another Victorian seaside resort, plays host to the small **Railway Museum** (admission £1; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct), which reveals the history of steam railway on the island.

Port Erin has a good range of accommodation, as does Port St Mary, across the headland and linked by steam train.

Our Port Erin choice would be the Victorian **Falcon's Nest Hotel** (☎ 01624-834077; falconsnest@enterprise.net; Station Rd; s/d from £35/70), once supremely elegant, now just handsome in a nostalgic sort of way. The rooms are nothing special, but the views over the water are superb.

The slightly more splendid Victorian-style **Aaron House** (☎ 01624-835702; www.aaronhouse.co.uk; The Promenade, Port St Mary; s/d from £35/70) is a B&B that has fussed over every detail, from the gorgeous brass beds and claw-foot baths to the old-fashioned photographs on the walls; it's like stepping back in time, minus the inconvenience of cold and discomfort. The sea views are also sensational.

PEEL & AROUND

The west coast's most appealing town, Peel has a fine sandy beach, but its real attraction is the 11th-century **Peel Castle** (MH; admission £3.30),

stunningly positioned atop St Patrick's Island and joined to Peel by a causeway.

The excellent **House of Manannan** (MH; admission £5.50; ☎ 10am-5pm) museum uses interactive displays to explain Manx history and its seafaring traditions. A combined ticket for both the castle and museum costs £7.70.

Three miles east of Peel is **Tynwald Hill** at St John's, where the annual parliamentary ceremony takes place on 5 July.

Peel has several B&Bs, including the **Ferneleigh Hotel** (☎ 01624-842435; www.isleofman.com/accommodation/ferneleigh; Marine Pde; r per person incl breakfast from £24; ☎ Feb-Nov), which has 12 decent bedrooms. For a better-than-average bite, head for the **Creek Inn** (☎ 01624-842216; jeanmcaleer@manx.net; East Quay; mains around £8), opposite the House of Manannan, which serves Manx queenies (scallops served with white cheese sauce) and has self-catering rooms from £38.

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