

Northwest England



Britain's industrial heartbeat thumped loudest in the northwest of England, which may be a fact of great fascination to historians and gadget boffins, but it's hardly an invitation to visit; after all, what could there possibly be of enduring interest in jam-packed conurbations and the heaving hulks of the industrial past?

Crammed into the relatively tight confines are a couple of the most exciting cities in Britain, a picture-postcard whose rich layers of history are revealed in its multitiered architecture and the most eye-popping, stomach-turning rollercoaster we've ever been dizzy on. Oh, and the birthplace of the world's best-ever band, bar none. Life, music, history and hedonism. And for those eager for a bit of respite from the concrete pawprint of man, there's some of the most beautiful countryside in England. Not bad for a region that changed the world.

That's right, for the northwest was the very place where the Industrial Revolution was born and raised 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 did for the last couple. 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.

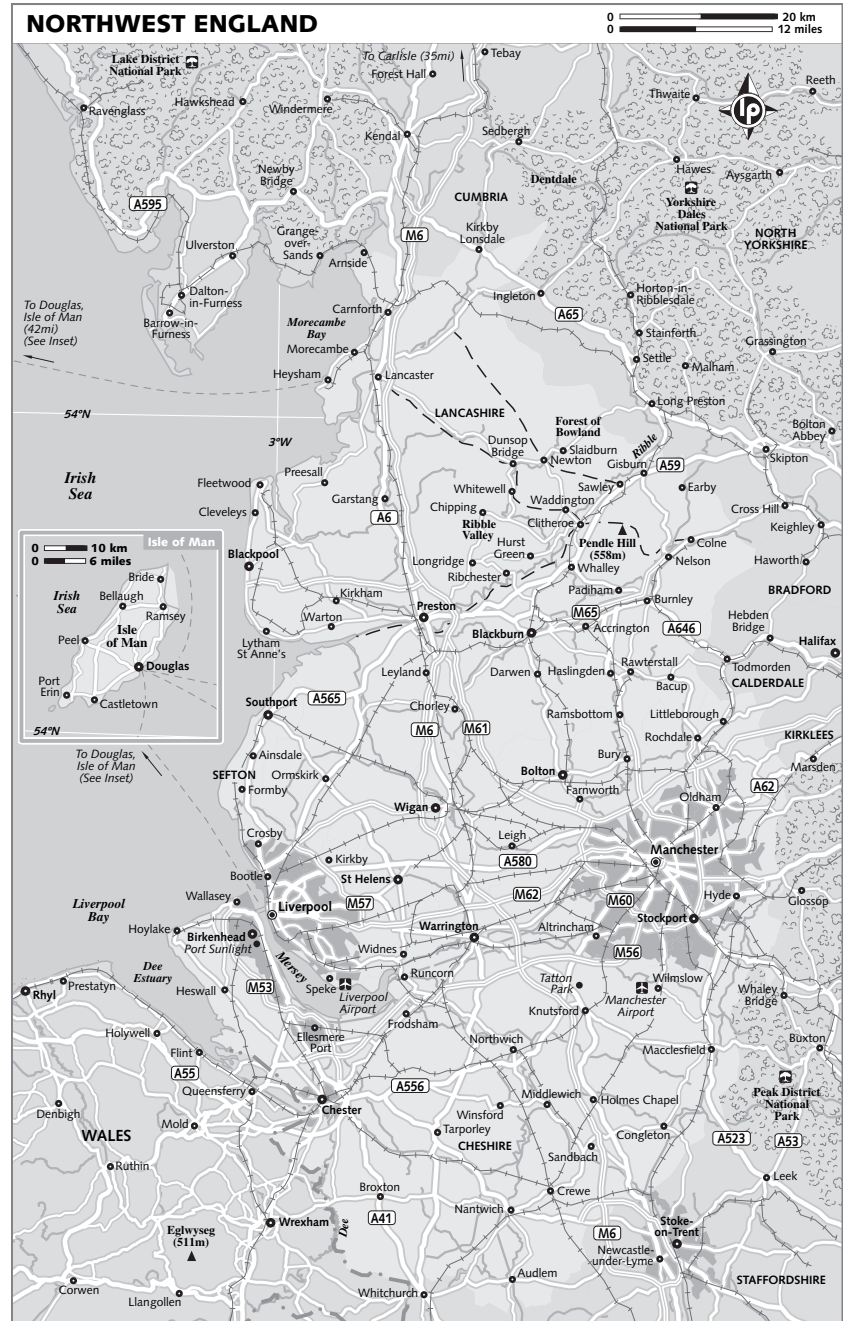
HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the stunning **Imperial War Museum North** (p560) in Manchester
- Walking in Roman footsteps around Chester's **city walls** (p568)
- Getting queasy on the rollercoasters at Blackpool's **Pleasure Beach** (p583)
- Exploring the **Isle of Man** (p585) – not just for tax-dodgers and petrol-heads
- Experiencing the simply marvellous **World Museum Liverpool** (p574)
- Catching the ferry across the **Mersey** (p582): hum the song while enjoying the best views of Liverpool



■ POPULATION: 6.7 MILLION

■ AREA: 5473 SQ MILES



NORTHWEST ENGLAND

NORTHWEST ENGLAND

Information

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

Getting Around

The two main cities, Manchester and Liverpool, are only 34 miles apart and are linked by hourly bus and train services. Chester is only 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 (☎ 236 7676; www.merseytravel.gov.uk) Taking care of all travel in Merseyside.

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) Extensive coach services in the northwest; Manchester and Liverpool are major hubs.

MANCHESTER

☎ 0161 / pop 394,270

If ever London was to quit being capital – or was fired for some kind of terrible wrongdoing – Manchester would be a readymade substitute with the necessary wherewithal to take on the job. It's a modern metropolis embracing change like few others in Europe; it's where much of the best music of the last couple of decades came from; and it has the world's best-supported football team. Oh, and it likes to call itself the uncrowned capital of the north. Northern bluster? Sure, but it's surely more than just northern one-upmanship that Manchester looks past London to Barcelona to find its urban soul mate and inspiration.

Manchester knows all about improbable scenarios and has never shied away from dramatic responsibility. After all, this was the city that gave birth to capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, so what's a little self-inflating urban redesign to a burgh that knows a thing or two about altering the history of the world?

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 the envy

of any urban centre in Europe, a modern metropolis that has embraced 21st-century style and technology like no other in Britain.

Not only does Manchester have a wealth of fascinating museums that reflect its unique role in the pioneering developments of the Industrial Age, but it has managed to weave the mementos of its past with a forward-looking, ambitious programme of urban development that has already offered us a vision of what the future holds in store.

HISTORY

Canals and steam-powered cotton mills were how Manchester was transformed from a small disease-infested provincial town into a very 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 1776, Manchester – now 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 (1801, population 90,000; 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: impossibly long hours, child labour, work-related accidents and fatalities were 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 the train toward 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 down and then it stopped altogether. By WWII there was hardly enough cotton produced in the city to make a tablecloth. In 1996 an IRA bomb wrecked a chunk of the city centre, but from the wreckage sprung the glass-and-chrome revolution so much in evidence today.

ORIENTATION

All public transport converges at Piccadilly Gardens, just southeast of the cathedral. Directly north is the on-the-up boho Northern Quarter, with its offbeat boutiques, hip cafés and fabulous record shops. A few blocks south-east 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 centre is Castlefield and Deansgate Locks, a supertrendy 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 the Old Trafford football stadium, where Manchester United's stars earn their keep.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

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

Waterstone's Deansgate (☎ 832 1992; St Anne's Sq (☎ 837 3000))

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 436 3999)

Police station (☎ 872 5050; Bootle St)

Internet Access

Central Library (☎ 234 1982; St Peter's Sq; per 30min

£1; ☎ internet access 1-6pm Mon-Sat)

easyInternetcafé (8-10 Exchange St; per 30min £1;

☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-9pm Sat & Sun)

Internet Resources

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

Mad For It (www.madforit.com) Restaurants, bars, clubs and other night-time activities using the Manchester clarion call: are you mad for it?

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

Virtual Manchester (www.manchester.com)

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

Medical Services

Camelord Chemist (☎ 236 1445; St Peter's Sq;

☎ 10am-10pm)

Manchester Royal Infirmary (☎ 276 1234; Oxford Rd)

Post

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

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 0871 222 8223; www.manchester.gov.uk; Town Hall Extension, St Peter's Sq; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4.30pm Sun) Sells tickets for all sorts of guided walks, which operate almost daily year-round and cost adult/child £5/3.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

City Centre

The city's main administrative centre is the superb Victorian Gothic **town hall** (tours £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 as it's the city's main administrative centre you won't get the same access as you do by organised tour, which departs from the tourist office.

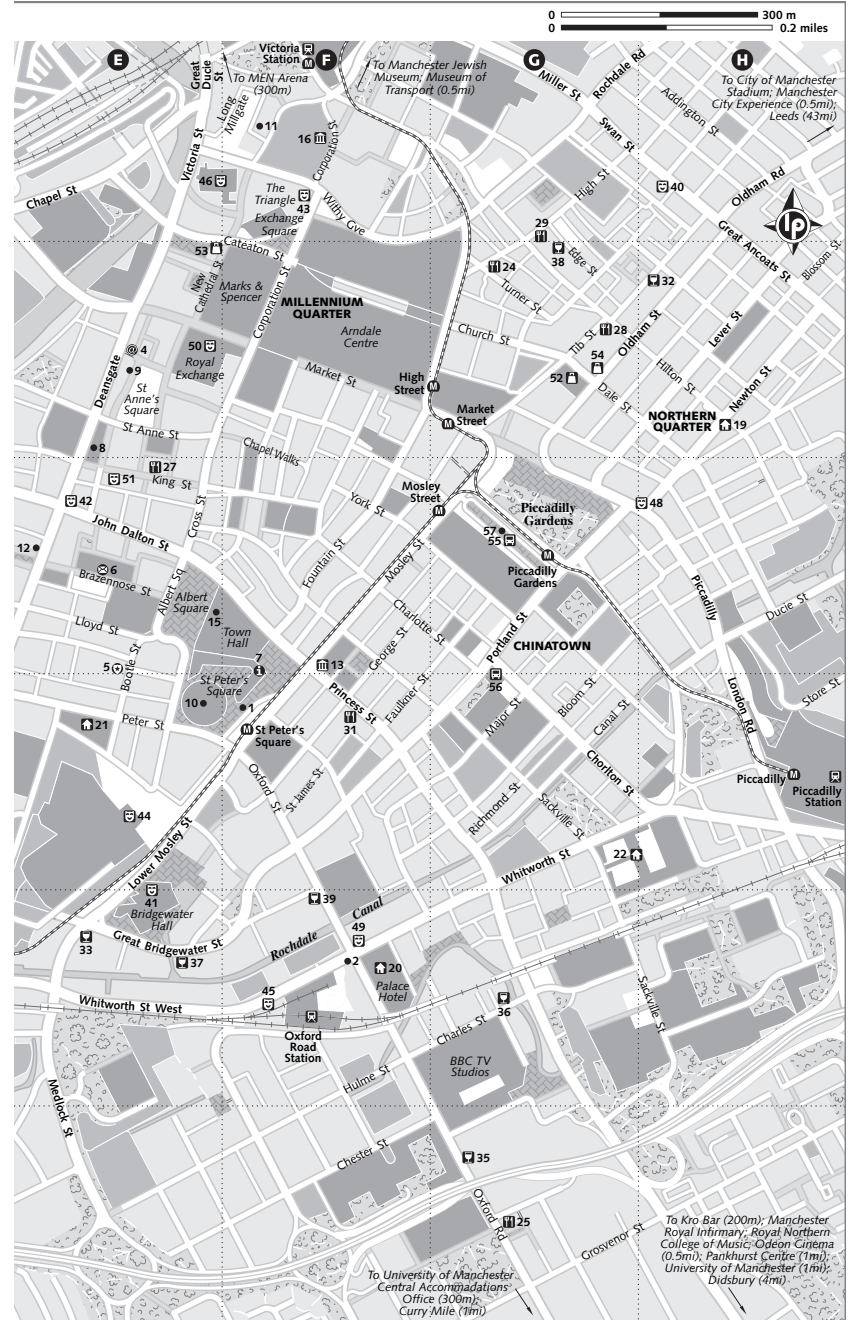
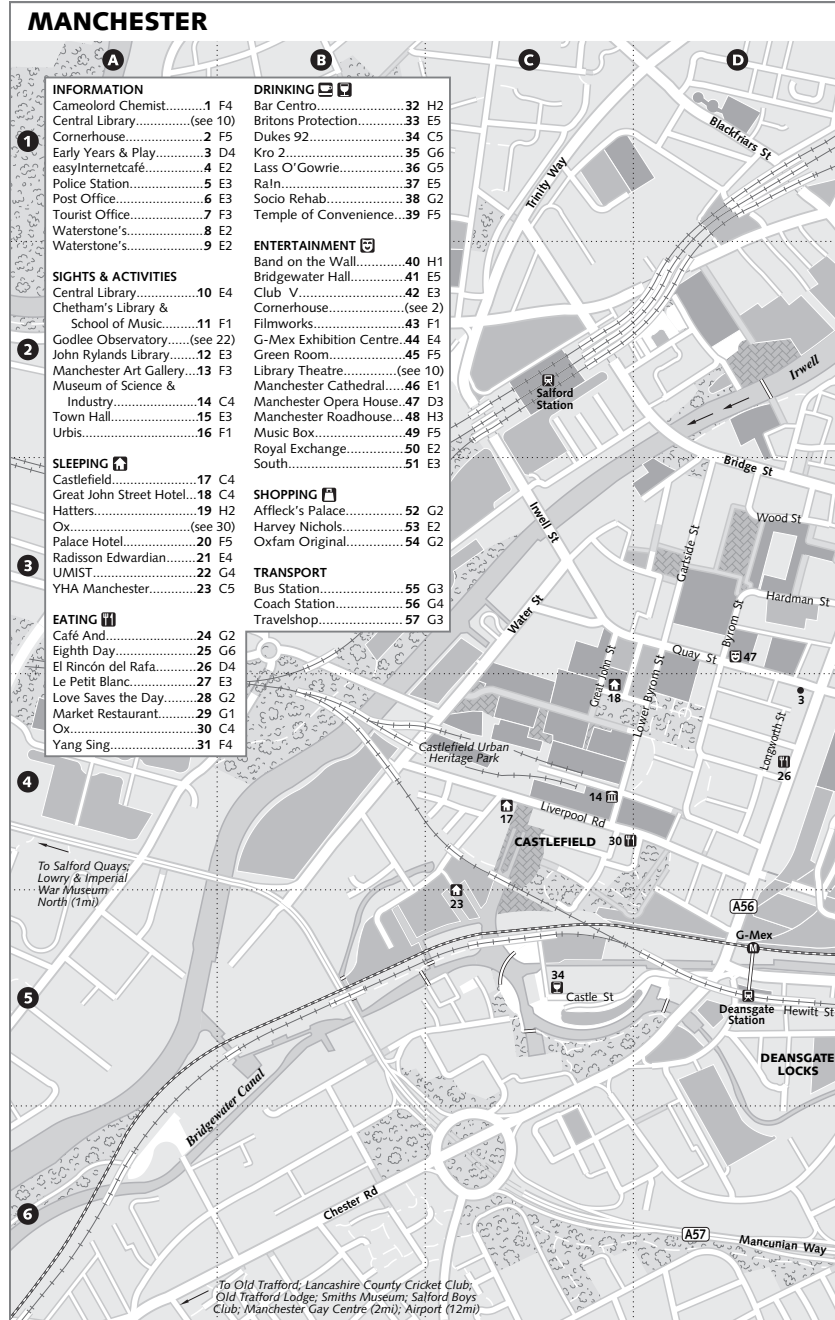
Just behind the town hall, the elegant Roman Pantheon lookalike **Central Library** (☎ 234 1900; St Peter's Sq; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri & Sat) was built in 1934. It is the country's largest municipal library, with more than 20 miles of shelves.

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** (☎ 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 new gallery features a permanent collection of 20th-century British art starring Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, Stanley Spencer, Henry Moore and David Hockney.

JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY

An easy candidate for top building in town, this marvellous Victorian Gothic **library** (☎ 834 5343; 35 Deansgate) was one hell of a way for Rylands' widow to remember her husband John. It was slated to reopen by the middle of 2006 after a major renovation, but we were still tapping our feet at the end of that summer – call the library for the latest. Come on, people! It's been too long since we set foot inside Basil Champneys' breathtaking Reading Room,



MANCHESTER IN...**Two Days**

After you've explored the glorious trophies of the Industrial Age around **Albert Square** (p557), hop on a tram and get down to Salford Quays and its trio of top attractions: the **Imperial War Museum North** (below), the **Lowry** (opposite) and then the **Manchester United Museum** (opposite). Pick a restaurant – **Yang Sing** (p564) will do to kick off the evening – then find a bar and round the night off in a club. The next day, head towards **Castlefield Urban Heritage Park** (below) before indulging in a spot of retail therapy around the **Millennium Quarter** (p567), breaking up the spendfest with a visit to **Urbis** (below). Venture east and go alternative in the boutiques and offbeat shops of the **Northern Quarter** (p567).

Four Days

Spread the two-day itinerary over three days, including a whole day devoted to the Salford Quays; spend more time perusing the city's excellent shopping districts before examining the riches of the **Manchester Art Gallery** (p557).

designed to look like a monastic library, or had the chance to gawk at the stunning collection of early printed books and rare manuscripts. Hey, some folks just *love* books!

URBIS

The stunning glass triangle that is **Urbis** (☎ 907 9099; www.urbis.org.uk; City Park, Corporation St; admission free to levels 2-4, charge varies 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, 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.

CHEATHAM'S LIBRARY & SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Beautiful **Chetham's** (☎ 834 7861; www.chethams.org.uk; Long Millgate; admission free; ♿ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Mon-Fri) is the city's oldest complete structure (1421). It wouldn't be half as interesting were it not for the fact that during the mid-19th century two of its regular users were Messrs Marx and Engels, whose favourite seats were by the large bay window in the main reading room.

Castlefield Urban Heritage Park

The heart of 19th-century industrial Manchester, a landscape of enormous, weather-stained

brick buildings and rusting cast-iron relics of canals, viaducts, bridges, warehouses and market buildings, Castlefield has been successfully transformed into an interesting heritage park. Aside from the huge science museum, the big draw here is the Castlefield Basin. The Bridgewater Canal runs through it; in summertime thousands of people amble about the place and patronise its fine pubs and trendy restaurants.

MUSEUM OF SCIENCE & INDUSTRY

The city's largest **museum** (☎ 832 1830; www.msim.org.uk; Liverpool Rd; admission free, charge varies for special exhibitions; ♿ 10am-5pm) comprises 2.8 hectares spread about two huge Victorian warehouses and the world's oldest passenger railway terminal. If there's anything you want to know about the Industrial (and postindustrial) Revolution and Manchester's key role in it, you'll find it 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.

Salford Quays

West of the city, three major attractions draw in the punters, and a shopping centre makes sure they have outlets to spend their money. It's a cinch to get there from the city centre via Metrolink (£1.80); for the Imperial War Museum North and the Lowry look for the Harbour City stop.

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** (☎ 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.

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 separate-but-linked structures, or shards, that represent the three main theatres of war: air, land and sea.

LOWRY

Directly across the canal from the war museum is a futuristic ship in permanent dock. No, not really, but the **Lowry** (☎ 876 2020; www.thelowry.com; Pier 8, Salford Quays; ♿ 11am-8pm Tue-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun & Mon) looks a bit like one. It caused quite a stir when it opened in 2000, but has proved an unqualified success, attracting more than a million visitors a year.

The complex is named after one of England's favourite artists, LS Lowry, who is mostly noted for his industrial landscapes and impressions of northern towns. The Lowry contains more than 300 of his paintings and drawings. It also encapsulates two theatres (see p566), galleries, shops, restaurants and bars.

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 rivals, Manchester City. 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 that play there like minor deities. Such arrogance is enough to turn the rest of us into ABUs (Anyone But United) and cheer the fact that it's been a few years since Fergie's boys have won a championship (even though Chelsea's dominance is just as irritating, heralding the arrival of ABCs).

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 £9/6; ♿ 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 pitchside 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 £5.50/3.75; ♿ 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 so you can view your favourite goals.

MANCHESTER FOR CHILDREN

Urbis (opposite) is always full of kids who find the interactive displays quite engaging, and Castlefield Urban Heritage Park (opposite) is the perfect all-day destination, offering a host of different activities and exhibits suited to

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** (☎ 834 9879; www.manchesterjewishmuseum.com; 190 Cheetham Hill Rd; adult/child £2.50/1.75; ♿ 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** (☎ 205 2122; www.gmts.co.uk; Boyle St, Cheetham Hill; adult/child £4/2; ♿ 10am-5pm Wed, Sat & Sun) is packed with old buses, fire engines and lorries built in the last 100 years.

The **Pankhurst Centre** (☎ 273 5673; www.pankhurstcentre.org.uk; 60-62 Nelson St; admission free; ♿ 10am-5pm 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.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

Maybe it's the vertiginous spiral staircase, but hardly anyone ever visits the fabulous **Godlee Observatory** (☎ 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 University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST).

gust 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 (£3) can help.

City Centre**BUDGET**

University of Manchester/University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology (UMIST) (☎ 275 2888; Central Accommodations Office, Precinct Centre, Oxford Rd; dm/d from £11/26; ☎ Jun-Sep) With more than 9000 beds in a variety of rooms, from traditional residence halls to smart, modern flats spread throughout the campuses and suburbs, the university does a roaring summer trade. Call the office (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) for details and bookings.

Hatters (☎ 236 9500; www.hattersgroup.com; 50 Newton St; dm/s/d/tr from £15.50/27.50/50/68; ☎ ☎ ☎) 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.

YHA Manchester (☎ 839 9960; www.yha.org.uk; Potato Wharf; dm ind breakfast £20.95; ☎ ☎ ☎) This purpose-built canal-side hostel in the Castlefield area is one of the best hostels in the country. It's a top-class facility with four- and six-bed dorms, all with en suite, and a host of good facilities.

MIDRANGE

Castlefield (☎ 832 7073; www.castlefield-hotel.co.uk; 3 Liverpool Rd; s/d from £45/80; ☎ ☎) 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.

Ox (☎ 839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd; r £50) Not quite your traditional B&B (breakfast is extra), but an excellent choice nonetheless: nine oxblood-red rooms with tidy amenities above a fine gastropub (see opposite) in the heart of Castlefield. It's the best deal in town for the location.

TOP END

Palace Hotel (☎ 288 1111; www.principal-hotels.com; Oxford St; r from £80) An elegant refurbishment of one of Manchester's most magnificent Victorian palaces has resulted in a pretty special boutique

hotel, combining the grandeur of the public areas with the modern look of the bedrooms.

Radisson Edwardian (☎ 835 9929; www.radissonedwardian.com/manchester; Peter St; r from £100; ☎ ☎ ☎) 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.

Great John Street Hotel (☎ 831 3211; www.greatjohnstreet.co.uk; Great John St; r £235-450; ☎ ☎) Elegant, designer luxury? Present. Fabulous rooms with all the usual delights (Egyptian cotton sheets, fabulous toiletries, free-standing baths and lots of hi-tech electronics)? Present. A butler to run your bath in the grandest rooms? Present. It's all pretty swanky in Manchester's newest boutique hotel, a converted schoolhouse (ah, now we get it) 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

Old Trafford Lodge (☎ 874 3333; www.lccc.co.uk; Talbot Rd; r Mon-Fri/Sat & Sun from £59/88) 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.

Lowry (☎ 827 4000; www.rfhotels.com; 50 Dearman's Pl, Chapel Wharf; s/d from £85/130) 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 in Italian porcelain tiles and glass mosaic. You can soothe yourself with a skin-brightening treatment or an aromatherapy head massage at the health spa.

EATING

Only London can outdo Manchester for the choice of cafés and restaurants. There's literally 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 in the Northern Quarter (where you'll also find some excellent veggie spots), while the city's fancy fare is spread pretty much all over. Many bars and pubs also do food. Below is but a small starter course.

BUDGET

Café And (☎ 834 1136; 74-76 High St; sandwiches £3; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun) A trendy café, hip record store, contemporary art gallery and retro furniture shop all in one, this is your one stop for everything you might possibly need in the Northern Quarter. The toasties and wraps are delicious, but it's the excellent organic soups that kept us coming back for more.

Eighth Day (☎ 273 4878; 111 Oxford Rd; mains around £4; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) New and definitely improved after a major cleanup, this environment-friendly hang-out is a favourite with students and sells everything to make you feel good about your place in the world, from Fairtrade teas to homeopathic remedies. The vegetarian and vegan-friendly menu is substantial.

Love Saves the Day (☎ 832 0777; Tib St) The Northern Quarter's most popular café 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.

MIDRANGE

Ox (☎ 839 7740; www.theox.co.uk; 71 Liverpool Rd; mains £9-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) Manchester's only gastropub has elevated boozier-dining to a whole new level and earned plenty of kudos in the process. The Brit *nouvelle cuisine* – how about an oven-roasted T-bone steak with tempura onion rings, beefsteak tomatoes and

TOP FIVE PUBS FOR A PINT

- Albion (p571; Chester)
- Britons Protection (p564; Manchester)
- Hannah's (p579; Liverpool)
- Philharmonic (p579; Liverpool)
- Temple of Convenience (p564; Manchester)

younger visitors. Manchester United's ground Old Trafford (p561) is always popular with fans, who are getting younger and younger, while the Imperial War Museum North (p560) is designed to engage the interest of kids barely into double figures with its themes based on war not being a bunch of laughs.

City Life Kids (£4), available at the tourist office and all bookshops in the city, is a comprehensive guide to virtually every aspect of family-oriented Manchester.

If you're looking for some free time away from the kids, **Early Years & Play** (☎ 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 on Piccadilly Circus 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 the boxed text, above), a place virtually nobody visits. It's a far cry from the alternative circus that is Affleck's Palace (p567), where in order to go unnoticed it's best if you look like Marilyn Manson or a really scruffy Kurt Cobain.

When you're done, you'll have to unwind with a pint in the Temple of Convenience (p564), a tiny basement pub with a terrific atmosphere located in... a former public toilet.

SLEEPING

Designer digs and business hotels are the mainstay of the city's accommodations. Remember that during the football season (Au-

Portobello mushrooms – is complemented by an almost exclusively Australian wine list.

El Rincón del Rafa (☎ 839 8819; Longworth St; mains £9-13; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Descend the steps into this basement restaurant and find yourself in a little corner of Spain, complete with mouth-watering tapas, posters depicting bullfighting and the kind of buzz more in keeping with Madrid than Manchester. It's always packed so book ahead.

Yang Sing (☎ 236 2200; 34 Princess St; mains £9-16; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A serious contender for best Chinese restaurant in Britain, 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.

Le Petit Blanc (☎ 832 1000; www.lepetitblanc.co.uk; 55 King St; mains £9-18; 🍷 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.

Market Restaurant (☎ 834 3743; www.market-restaurant.com; 104 High St; mains £10-14; 🍷 lunch & dinner Wed-Fri, dinner Sat) Excellent British cuisine is on the menu at this Northern Quarter restaurant – and it changes every month or so to take account of the season's best. It ain't especially pretty, but it's very good.

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; below we list a mere handful.

Bars

Bar Centro (☎ 835 2863; 72-74 Tib St) 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 (mains £5 to £8) make this one of the choice spots in the area.

Kro Bar (☎ 274 3100; www.kro.co.uk; 325 Oxford Rd) The ice-cool hand of Scandinavian design is all over this terrific bar in the middle of student-land. An excellent bar menu (mains £7 to £9) packs the punters in at lunch, while DJs keep it going at night until closing. Sandwiches are £2.50.

Kro 2 (☎ 236 1048; Oxford House, Oxford Rd) Kro Bar's younger brother is next to the BBC. It's closer to the city but not quite as classy as the original.

RaIn (☎ 235 6500; 80 Great Bridgewater St) A rival to Dukes 92 for best outdoor drinking, indoors RaIn is both trendy new-style bar and old-fashioned boozier. Whatever your mood, you'll find the right ambience in this former umbrella factory.

Socio Rehab (☎ 757 3422; Edge St) Tiny, super-cool and boasting one of the best cocktail menus in town, this terrific bar is the kind that will make you think you're onto a really good secret. You kind of are.

Temple of Convenience (☎ 288 9834; Great Bridgewater St) 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

Lass O'Gowrie (☎ 273 6932; 36 Charles St) 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 (mains around £6).

Britons Protection (☎ 236 5895; 50 Great Bridgewater St) Whisky – 200 different kinds of it – is the beverage of choice at this liver-threatening, proper English pub that also does Tudor-style meals (boar, venison and the like; mains around £7). An old-fashioned boozier, no fancy stuff.

Dukes 92 (☎ 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.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Manchester is dead, long live Madchester. The city has a terrific club scene and it remains at the vanguard of the culture of the dance floor. There's a forever-changing mixture of club nights, so check the *Manchester Evening News* for details of what's on. These are our favourites.

Music Box (☎ 236 9971; www.themusicbox.info; 65 Oxford St; admission £6-12; 🍷 Wed-Sat) Deep in Jilly's

GAY & LESBIAN MANCHESTER

The city's gay scene is unsurpassed outside London, and caters to every taste. The useful *Gay & Lesbian Village Guide*, available from the tourist office, lists numerous gay bars, clubs, galleries and groups. It also runs the **Lesbian & Gay Heritage Trail** (£5; 🍷 3pm 1st Sun of month), a 90-minute walking tour of the city's pink links, some of which date back to the early 1800s. For other information, check with the **Manchester Gay Centre** (☎ 274 3814; Sydney St, Salford) and the **Lesbian & Gay Foundation** (☎ 235 8035; www.lgf.org.uk; 🍷 4-10pm). The city's best pink website is www.visitgaymanchester.co.uk.

At the heart of it all is the Gay Village, centred on gorgeous Canal St. Here you will find bars, clubs, restaurants and hotels that cater almost exclusively to the pink pound.

The country's biggest gay and lesbian arts festival, **Queer Up North** (IQUP; ☎ 833 2288; www.queerupnorth.com), takes place every two years – the next in spring 2007. **Manchester Pride** (☎ 0870 166 0434; www.manchesterpride.com) is a 10-day festival in the middle of August each year and attracts more than 500,000 people.

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.

Club V (☎ 834 9975; 111 Deansgate; admission £5; 🍷 Fri & Sat) White leather sofas and club nights with names like Angel Deelite and Venus don't always augur well if you're looking for some really good music, but this little basement club defies all expectations with its devotion to garage and funky house.

South (☎ 831 7756; www.south-club.co.uk; 4a South King St; admission £5-6; 🍷 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 (☎ 228 2463; www.cornerhouse.org; 70 Oxford St) Your only destination for good art-house releases; also has a gallery, bookshop and café.

Filmworks (☎ 0870 010 2030; www.thefilmworks.co.uk; Printworks, Exchange Sq) Ultramodern 20-screen complex in the middle of the Printworks centre; there's also an IMAX theatre.

Odeon Cinema (☎ 0870 505 0007; www.odeon.co.uk; 1 Oxford Rd) Chain cinema that shows only mainstream releases on its seven screens.

Theatre

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

Manchester Opera House (☎ 242 2509; www.manchestertheatres.co.uk; Quay St) West End shows

and lavish musicals make up the bulk of the programme.

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

Royal Exchange (☎ 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 (☎ 834 1786; www.bandonthewall.org; 25 Swan St) A top-notch venue that hosts everything from rock to world music, with splashes of jazz, blues and folk thrown in for good measure.

G-Mex Exhibition Centre (☎ 834 2700; www.gmex-micc.co.uk) A midsize venue that hosts rock concerts by not-quite-supersuccessful bands as well as exhibitions and indoor sporting events.

Manchester Roadhouse (☎ 228 1789; www.theroadhouselive.co.uk; 8-10 Newton St) Local bands are put through their paces in front of what is usually an enthusiastic crowd.

MEN Arena (☎ 950 5000; Great Ducie St) Giant arena that hosts large-scale rock concerts (as well as being the home of the city's ice-hockey and basketball teams).

TOP FIVE MANCHESTER ALBUMS

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

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, founder of Factory Records – the label that in 1983 released New Order's ground-breaking 'Blue Monday', to this day the best-selling 12in in British history.

With the cash, Wilson opened the now-legendary Hacienda, which really took off when it embraced the 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 the Happy Mondays hit the scene with the infectious 'Hallelujah'. The party known as Madchester was officially opened.

It was over by 1992. Overdanced and overdressed, the city woke up with a terrible hangover. The Hacienda went bust, the Happy Mondays went nuts and the Stone Roses eventually fell apart. The fertile crossover scene virtually disappeared and the two genres withdrew into a more familiar isolation. And then Oasis hit the scene.

They may have been Manchester's most successful ever band – and authors of a catchy tune or two – but Oasis' almost total debt to the Beatles' chord structures and melody lines, as well as the tiresome posturing of the Gallagher brothers, resulted in their inability to establish themselves as anything other than a super-successful flash-in-the-pan. They may have their millions, but give us Morrissey, Maher and co any day of the week.

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 p564), for instance, doesn't sound anything like the folksy guitar style of Badly Drawn Boy or the funky hip-hop beats of Rae & Christian.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Bridgewater Hall (☎ 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, with a widespread programme that includes opera, folk music, children's shows, comedy and contemporary music.

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

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

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

Sport

For most people, Manchester plus sport equals football, and football means Man-

chester United. That may be true everywhere else (which is why United are covered in the Sights & Activities section, p561) but not here in Manchester. Like all good northerners, most Mancunians are 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. In 2003 the team moved to the spanking-new **City of Manchester Stadium** (Sportcity, Rowsley St). Here you can enjoy the **Manchester City Experience** (☎ 0870 062 1894; www.mcfcc.co.uk; adult/child £8.75/4.75; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-3pm Sun), a tour of the ground, dressing rooms and museum before inevitably being steered into the kit shop. Tours must be booked in advance.

LANCASHIRE COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

Cricket is a big deal here, and the **Lancashire club** (☎ 282 4000; Warwick Rd), founded in 1816 as the

Aurora before changing its name in 1864, is one of the most beloved of all England's county teams, despite not having 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 one, the other games in the county season (admission £10 to £15) 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.

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** (☎ 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.

Affleck's Palace (Oldham St), At the heart of the Northern Quarter, this is a four-storey warehouse full of outlets that Manchester's teenage Goths and the rest of the gloomerati have turned into a social day out.

The rest of the neighbourhood is full of great shops, including the marvellous **Oxfam Original** (☎ 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 (☎ 489 3000; www.manchesterairport.co.uk) is the largest airport outside London; it's served by 17 locations throughout Britain.

Bus

National Express (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) serves most major cities almost hourly from Chorlton St coach station in the city centre. Destinations include Liverpool (£5.80, 1¼ hours, hourly), Leeds (£7.80, one hour, hourly) and London (£21, 4¼ hours, hourly).

Train

Manchester Piccadilly is the main station for trains to and from the rest of the country, although Victoria station serves Halifax and Bradford. The two stations are linked by Metrolink. Trains head to Blackpool (£11.75, 1¼ hours, half-hourly), Liverpool Lime St (£8.30, 45 minutes, half-hourly), Newcastle (£40.70, three hours, six daily) and London (£101, 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 £3.40, and a coach £3.

Public Transport

The excellent public transport system can be used with a variety of Day Saver tickets (bus £3.50; bus and train £4.50; bus and Metrolink £5; train and Metrolink £5.50; bus, train and Metrolink £7). For inquiries about local transport, including night buses, contact **Travelshop** (☎ 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. You can pick up a route map from the tourist office. Most local buses start from Piccadilly Gardens.

METROLINK

There are frequent **Metrolink** (☎ 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

The favourite county of residence for the scrota millionaires of Manchester and Liverpool, largely agricultural Cheshire is a very black-and-white kind of place – if you focus on the genuine half-timbered Tudor farmhouses and the Friesian cows that graze in the fields around them. It's a little bit of ye olde Englede, which is probably why so many footballers choose to live in the mansions and monstrosities behind the top-grade security gates: nothing gives the illusion of good taste like a bit of bling and tradition. For the rest of us, however, handsome, gentle Cheshire is mostly about Chester.

CHESTER

☎ 01244 / pop 80,130

Marvellous Chester is one of English history's greatest gifts to the contemporary visitor. Its red-sandstone wall giftwraps a tidy collection of Tudor and Victorian buildings originally built during Roman times when it was Castra Devana, the largest Roman fortress in Britain.

It's hard to believe it today, but throughout the Middle Ages Chester made its money as the most important port in the northwest, but 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 which marks the town centre), four roads fan out to the four principal gates.

Information

Cheshire Constabulary (☎ 350000; Castle Esplanade)
Chester Royal Infirmary (☎ 365000; St Martin's Way)
Chester Visitors' Centre (☎ 351609; www.visitchester.com; Vicar's Lane; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat & 10am-4pm Sun May-Oct, 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Nov-Apr)
i-station (☎ 401680; Rufus Ct; net access per 30min £1)
Post office (2 St John St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)
Tourist office (☎ 402111; www.chester.gov.uk; 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 core. 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.

Of the many features along the walls, the most eye-catching is the prominent **Eastgate**, where you can see the most famous **clock** in Britain 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 a twisted ankle.

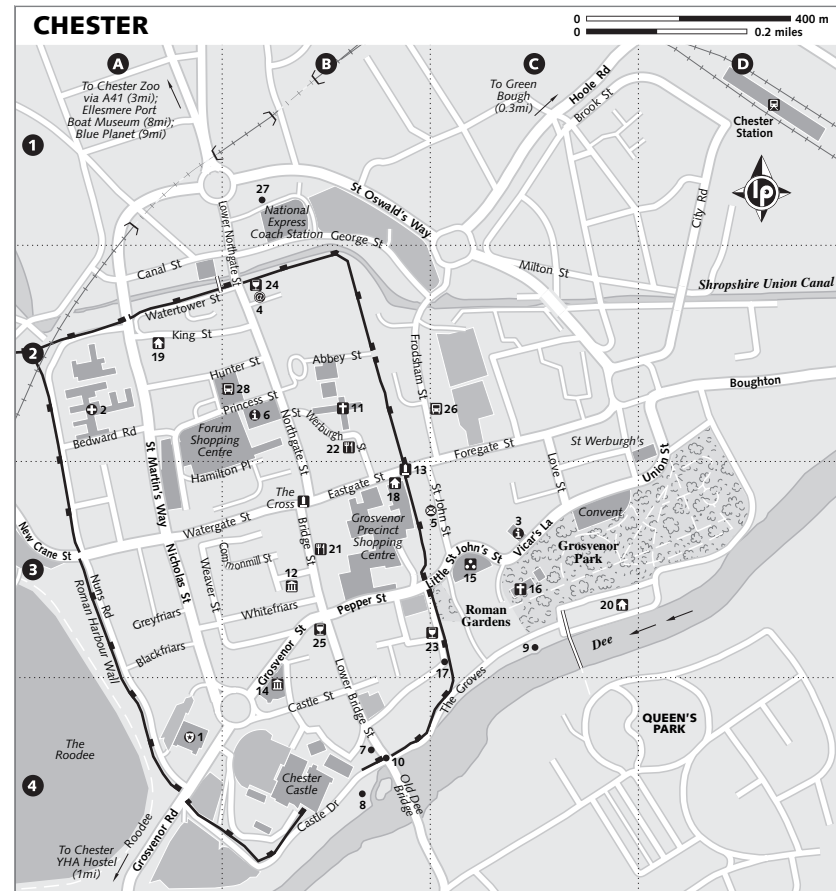
Just inside Southgate, known here as **Bridgegate** (as it's at the northern end of the Old Dee Bridge), is the 1664 **Bear & Billet** pub, Chester's oldest timber-framed building and once a tollgate into the city.

THE 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 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** (☎ 324756; Northgate St; www.chester.cathedral.com; adult/child £4/1.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) was a Benedictine abbey built on the remains of an earlier Saxon church dedicated to St Werburgh. 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 face-lift, the 12th-century cloister and its surrounding buildings are essentially unaltered and retain much of the structure from the early monastic years. Take a 1¼-hour **guided tour** (free; ☎ 9.30am-4pm



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Chester Royal Infirmary.....	2	A2
Chester Visitors' Centre.....	3	C3
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Post Office.....	5	C3
Tourist Office.....	6	B2

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Bear & Billet.....	7	B4
Bithell Boats.....	8	B4
Boat Hire.....	9	C3
Bridgegate.....	10	B4
Cathedral.....	11	B2

Mon-Sat) to really get to grips with the building and its history.

The excellent **Grosvenor Museum** (☎ 402008; Grosvenor St; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-

Dewa Roman Experience.....	12	B3
Eastgate Clock.....	13	B3
Grosvenor Museum.....	14	B4
Roman Amphitheatre.....	15	C3
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SLEEPING

Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa.....	18	B3
Chester Townhouse.....	19	A2
Grove Villa.....	20	C3

EATING

Arkle.....	(see 18)	
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Boulevard de la Bastille.....	21	B3
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DRINKING

Albion.....	23	C3
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Falcon.....	25	B3

TRANSPORT

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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** (☎ 343407; www.dewaromanexperience.co.uk; Pierpoint Lane; admission £4.25; ☎ 9am-5pm), just off Bridge St, takes you through a reconstructed Roman street with the aim of showing you what Roman life was like.

The city's most complete set of genuine Roman remains is opposite the Chester 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 little more than steps buried in grass.

Steps at the back of the amphitheatre lead down to the riverside promenade known as the **Groves**. Here you can hire different kinds of **boats** (per hr £6-8; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Sep) with pedals, oars or small engines. This is also the departure point for river cruises (see below).

Tours

The two tourist offices offer a broad range of walking tours departing from both centres. Each tour lasts between 1½ and two hours.

Ghosthunter Trail (adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 7.30pm Thu-Sat Jun-Oct, Sat only Nov-May) The ubiquitous ghost tour, looking for things that go bump in the night.

History Hunter (adult/child £4/3; ☎ 10.15am) Two thousand years of Chester history.

Roman Soldier Patrols (adult/child £4.50/3.50;

☎ 1.45pm Thu-Sat Jun-Aug) This tour of Fortress Deva is led by Caius Julius Quartus; perfect if you've kids in tow.

Secret Chester (adult/child £4.50/3.50; ☎ 2pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun May-Oct) Exactly what it says on the tin.

You can also take a cruise along the Dee; contact **Bithell Boats** (☎ 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 £13.50.

A BIT OF CHARISMA

Buy the new **Charisma Card** (www.chestercharisma.com; £5.99), available from the tourist offices or online, to get 20% discount at more than 200 restaurants, shops and visitor attractions.

Sleeping

If you're visiting between Easter and September, book early. 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 10- to 15-minute walk from the centre and leading beyond the railway tracks to the M53/M56, is lined with low- to mid-price B&Bs.

Brook St, near the train station, has a couple of good-value B&Bs from around £22 per person.

Chester YHA Hostel (☎ 0870 770 5762; www.yha.org.uk; 40 Hough Green; dm £17.50) 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.

Grove Villa (☎ 349713; 18 The Groves; s/d from £30/48) 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.

Chester Townhouse (☎ 350021; 23 King St; s/d £45/70; P) Five beautifully decorated rooms in a handsome 17th-century house within the city walls make for a terrific option – you're close to the action and you'll sleep in relative luxury.

Ourpick Green Bough (☎ 326241; www.greenbough.co.uk; 60 Hoole Rd; r from £150) This exclusive Victorian town house won England Tourism's 'Best Small Hotel of the Year' award for 2006 – and a worthy winner it was too. The individually styled rooms are dressed in the best Italian fabrics and wall coverings, superb antique furniture and period cast-iron and wooden beds, including a handful of elegant four-posters.

Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa (☎ 324024; www.chestergrosvenor.com; 58 Eastgate St; s/d/ste from £120/190/380; P) 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 non-residents) offers a range of body treatments. There's also a Michelin-starred restaurant downstairs (see opposite).

Eating

There's no shortage of places to eat, but the quality of the fare is often barely above tourist-menu standard. Some pubs do great grub (see opposite).

Boulevard de la Bastille (Bridge St; sandwiches £3, meals £5-7; ☎ 9am-6pm) Our favourite café 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 *café au lait* (white coffee) and *pain au chocolat* (chocolate croissant).

Living Room (☎ 0870 442 2805; 13 St Werburgh St; mains £9-11; ☎ 11am-late) It's a chain all right, but a very pleasing and popular one at that. The Chester version is spread over three floors, which include the Dining Room and the Study private bar. It's behind the cathedral.

Arkle (☎ 895618; www.chestergrosvenor.com; Chester Grosvenor Hotel & Spa, 58 Eastgate St; 3-course dinners £55; ☎ 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), sophisticated and has a Michelin star to prove it.

Drinking

Falcon (☎ 314555; Lower Bridge St) This is an old-fashioned boozier with a lovely atmosphere; the surprisingly adventurous menu (mains from £4.95) offers up dishes such as Jamaican peppered beef or spicy Italian sausage casserole. Great for both a pint and a bite.

Albion (☎ 340345; 4 Albion St) 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. Also serves meals (mains £8 to £10).

Alexander's Jazz Theatre (☎ 340005; Rufus Ct; admission £3-10, free before 10pm) A combination wine bar, coffee bar and tapas bar.

Getting There & Away BUS

The coach station for **National Express** (☎ 08705 808080; www.nationalexpress.com) is just north of the city inside the ring road. Destinations include Birmingham (£10.20, 2½ hours, four daily), Liverpool (£6.20, one hour, three daily), London (£21, 5½ hours, three daily) and Manchester (£5.70, 1¼ hours, three daily).

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

Sundays and Bank Holidays a Sunday Adventurer ticket (adult/child £3.50/2.50) gives you unlimited travel in Cheshire.

TRAIN

The train station is a 15-minute walk 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 run between the station and Bus Stop A on Frodsham St. Trains go to Liverpool (£4, 40 minutes, hourly), London Euston (£56.20, three hours, hourly) and Manchester (£10.30, 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** (☎ 602666).

Davies Bros Cycles (☎ 371341; 5 Delamere St) has mountain bikes for hire at £13 per day.

AROUND CHESTER Chester Zoo

The largest of its kind in the country, **Chester Zoo** (☎ 380280; www.chesterzoo.org.uk; adult/child £14.50/10.50; ☎ 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) to get around on. 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 the town hall and the zoo.

LIVERPOOL

☎ 0151 / pop 469, 020

Dogged, determined and for many decades down-at-heel, Liverpool just refused to go down. When unfancied Liverpool FC overcame a 3-0 half-time deficit to win the 2005 European Champions' League final, it transcended the much narrower boundaries of football and was quickly adopted by this passionate, football-mad city as the latest – and most poetic – expression of Scouse defiance in the face of all the odds.



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Metropolitan Cathedral of	29 C4	
Christ the King.....	13 F2	Quarter.....	
Port of Liverpool Building.....	14 B2	Quynny's Quisine.....	
Royal Liver Building.....	15 B231 E3	
St George's Hall.....	16 D1	Yuet Ben.....	
Tate Liverpool.....	17 B332 E3	TRANSPORT
Walker Art Gallery.....(see 18)			National Express Coach Station..
World Museum Liverpool.....	18 D1	50 E1
		DRINKING 🍷	Paradise Street Bus Station &
		Baa Bar.....	Parking.....
	33 D351 D2
		Baby Cream.....	Pier Head Ferry Terminal.....
	34 C352 B2

Liverpool will be European Capital of Culture in 2008, and the city has spent the last few years getting ready for the ball. Handsome old buildings have had facials and brand-new ones shine spotlessly on the skyline. The once boarded-up warehouses of the city centre have been transformed into new shops, cafés and fancy apartments.

Impressive stuff, no doubt, but it's the culture on offer that really has us buzzing. The city's 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. And then, of course, the nightlife: as rich and varied as you'd expect from a good northern city.

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 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 and 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 bus station, the 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 (☎ 708 6861; 14-16 Bold St)

Emergencies

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

Internet Access

CaféLatte.net (☎ 709 9683; 4 S Hunter St; per 30min £1; ☎ 9am-6pm)

Planet Electra (☎ 708 0303; 36 London Rd; per 30min £1; ☎ 9am-5pm)

Internet Resources

08 Place (www.liverpool08.com) Info on the capital of culture.

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

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

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

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

Tourist office (www.visitliverpool.com)

Medical Services

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

Royal Liverpool University Hospital (☎ 706 2000; Prescott St)

Post

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

Tourist Information

The tourist office has three branches in the city. It also has an **accommodation hotline** (☎ 0845 601 1125).

08 Place tourist office (☎ 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 (☎ 478 4599; Merseyside Maritime Museum; ☎ 10am-6pm)

SIGHTS

The wonderful Albert Dock is the city's biggest tourist draw 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** (☎ 707 2391; www.stgeorghall.com) was built in 1854 and is the first European offering of neoclassical architecture. 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** (£4.50) of the newly renovated hall are run in conjunction with the tourist office; check for times.

WALKER ART GALLERY

The 'National Gallery of the North', the city's foremost **gallery** (☎ 478 4199; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker; William Brown St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) is Liverpool's answer to critics who question the city's cultural credentials in the lead-up to 2008. The history of art from the 14th to the 20th centuries is covered in exquisite detail; strong suits are Pre-Raphaelite art, modern British art, and sculpture.

WORLD MUSEUM LIVERPOOL

Natural history, science and technology are the themes of this sprawling **museum** (☎ 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.

CATHEDRALS

The city's two cathedrals are separated by the length of Hope St. At the northern end, the Roman Catholic **Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King** (☎ 709 9222; off Mt Pleasant; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat, 8am-5pm Sun Oct-Mar) 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.

At Hope St's southern end stands the neo-Gothic **Liverpool Cathedral** (☎ 709 6271; www.liverpoolcathedral.org.uk; Hope St; voluntary donation £3; ☎ 8am-6pm), the life work of Sir Giles Gilbert Scott (1880–1960), whose 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 Britain 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 probably the world's largest operational model. Construction on a new visitor centre was

SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND

Let's get a little greedy and do a two-for-one weekend: separated by the spine of the Pennines and historic rivalries of nearly epic proportions, Liverpool and Manchester are only 37 miles apart. Spend the first night in Liverpool – check in to the **Hope Street Hotel** (p577) to really do it in style. It's Friday night, so dinner at **Alma de Cuba** (p579) should be followed by a pint in the **Philharmonic** (p579) 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.

Claim your room at Manchester's **Great John Street Hotel** (p563) – yup, we're still stylin', but if you're looking for something a little more demure, the **Ox** (p562) 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** (p560) and the **Imperial War Museum North** (p560) 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** (p581), while Sunday afternoon would see us make the trek to **Old Trafford** (p561) to see United struggle to get a draw against Manchester City in the derby. Ah, to sleep, perchance to dream...

underway throughout 2006, but should be open in early 2007.

There are terrific views of Liverpool from the top of the 101m **tower** (admission £4.25; ☎ 11am-3pm Mon-Sat).

Albert Dock

Liverpool's biggest tourist attraction is **Albert Dock** (☎ 708 8854; www.albertdock.com; admission free), 2.75 hectares of water ringed by a colonnade of enormous cast-iron columns and impressive five-storey warehouses that make up the country's largest collection of protected buildings, now a World Heritage Site. A fabulous development programme 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** (☎ 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. But the real highlight is the Transatlantic Slavery exhibit, which pulls no punches in its portrayal of the shameful trade

that made Liverpool rich and left us with the scourge of modern racism. This is heady stuff, and should on no account be missed.

TATE LIVERPOOL

Touted as the home of modern art in the north, this **gallery** (☎ 702 7400; www.tate.org.uk/liverpool; Albert Dock; admission free, special exhibitions adult/child £4/3; ☎ 10am-5.50pm Jun-Aug, Tue-Sun only Sep-May) features a substantial check-list 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** (☎ 709 1963; www.beatlesstory.com; Albert Dock; adult/child £8.99/5.99; ☎ 10am-6pm) 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, Yoko Ono or the Frog Song – 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 Road 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 Magical Mystery and Yellow Duckmarine tours (see p577).

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 p582), and was, for millions of migrants, their final contact with European soil.

Today this area is 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**, 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 complex of museums on Albert Dock is extremely popular with kids, especially the Merseyside Maritime Museum (p575) – which has a couple of boats for kids to mess about on – and the Beatles Story (p575). The Yellow Duckmarine Tour (opposite) is a sure-fire winner. Slightly older (and very old) kids – especially those into football – will enjoy the tour of Liverpool FC's Anfield stadium (p581) as you can get your feet on the sacred turf.

Need a break from the tots? Drop them off at **Zoe's Childminding Service** (☎ 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 (p579) is just that. The Yellow Duckmarine Tour (opposite), an amphibious exploration of Albert Dock, is a bit silly but the guides are hilarious, and taking the ferry across the River Mersey (opposite) is always something special – the tired commuters will give you more than a stare if you sing the song too loudly. The Grand National Experience (p581) at Aintree is proof that the English really do love their horses, and the concerts at the Philharmonic Hall (p581) often throw up something completely different and avant-garde instead of the Beethoven concerto you might expect.

TOURS

Liverpool Beatles Tour (☎ 281 7738; www.beatles-tours.co.uk; from adult £18; 🕒 2hr-1 day) Your own personalised tour of every bit of minutiae associated with the Beatles, from cradle to grave. Tour lengths range from the two-hour Helter Skelter excursion to A Day in the Life, by the end of which you'll presumably be convinced you were actually in the band. Pick-ups are arranged upon booking.

Magical Mystery Tour (☎ 709 3285; www.cavern-liverpool.co.uk; £12.95; 🕒 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 Beatles Story on Albert Dock.

LIVERPOOL IN...

Two Days

Head to the waterfront and explore the Albert Dock museums – the **Tate** (p575) and **Merseyside Maritime Museum** (p575) – before paying tribute to the Fab Four at the **Beatles Story** (p575). Keep to the Beatles theme and head north towards the Cavern Quarter around Mathew St. Round off your evening with dinner at **London Carriage Works** (p579), a pint at the marvellous **Philharmonic** (p579) and wrap yourself in the crisp linen sheets of the **Hope Street Hotel** (opposite). Night hawks can tear it up in the bars and clubs of the hip **Ropewalks area** (p580). The next day, explore the city's two **cathedrals** (p574) and check out the twin delights of the **World Museum Liverpool** (p574) and the **Walker Art Gallery** (p574).

Four Days

Follow the two-day itinerary but add in a **Yellow Duckmarine tour** (opposite) to experience the docks from the water. Make a couple of pilgrimages to suit your interests: visit **Mendips** (p578) and **20 Forthlin Rd** (p578), the childhood homes of John Lennon and Paul McCartney, respectively; or walk on holy ground at **Anfield** (p581), home of Liverpool Football Club.

River Explorer Cruise (☎ 639 0609; www.mersey-ferries.co.uk; adult/child return £4.95/2.75; 🕒 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 (☎ 708 7799; www.theyell-lowduckmarine.co.uk; adult/child/family £11.95/9.95/34; 🕒 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 (☎ 522 2929; www.aintree.co.uk) A three-day race meet culminating in the world-famous Grand National on the first Saturday in April.

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.

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

Mathew Street Festival (☎ 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

As Liverpool's cultural scene heats up, so do its hotels. Stylish new arrivals and business chains have muscled in on the traditional stalwarts and forced them to buck up or close down, with the result that while the choice has improved dramatically, you'll end up paying for the privilege. Beds are 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

Embassie Hostel (☎ 707 1089; www.embassie.com; 1 Falkner Sq; dm £14.50) Until 1986 this lovely Georgian house was the Venezuelan consulate; it has since been converted into a decent hostel that serves free tea, coffee and toast at all times. There's also a TV lounge, a games room and a self-catering kitchen.

International Inn (☎ 709 8135; www.internationalinn.co.uk; 4 S Hunter St; dm/d £18/40) A superb converted

warehouse in the middle of uni-land: en suite, 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 are terrific and the CafféLatte.net internet café is next door.

MIDRANGE

Aachen Hotel (☎ 709 3477; www.aachenhotel.co.uk; 89-91 Mt Pleasant; s/d from £32/50) A perennial favourite is this funky listed house with a mix of rooms both shared or with en suite. The décor 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 (☎ 709 9655; www.feathers.uk.com; 119-125 Mt Pleasant; s/d from £52.50/75) 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-size 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 (☎ 727 4411; www.feathers.uk.com; 3 Aigburth Dr, Sefton Park; r £55) Once a wealthy cotton merchant's home, Alicia is a sister hotel to the more central Feathers, 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.

TOP END

Liverpool Racquet Club (☎ 236 6676; www.racquetclub.org.uk; Hargreaves Bldg, 5 Chapel St; r £110) Eight individually styled rooms with influences that range from French country house to Japanese minimalist chic (often in the same room). This boutique hotel is one of the most elegant choices in town. Antique beds, sumptuous Frette linen, free-standing baths and exclusive toiletries are all teasers to a pretty classy stay.

62 Castle St (☎ 702 7898; www.62castlest.com; 62 Castle St; s/d £145/175; 📍) 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.

ourpick Hope Street Hotel (☎ 709 3000; www.hopestreethotel.co.uk; 40 Hope St; r/ste from £140/205)

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-size beds draped in Egyptian cotton, oak floors with underfloor heating, LCD wide-screen TVs (with DVD players) and sleek modern bathrooms replete with a range of 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.

Around Albert Dock

YHA Liverpool International (☎ 0870 770 5924; www.yha.org.uk; 25 Tabley St; dm £20.95) It may look like an Eastern European apartment complex, but this award-winning hostel, adorned with Beatles memorabilia, is one of the most comfortable you'll find anywhere in the country. The en-suite dorms even have heated towel rails, and rates include breakfast.

Campanile Hotel (☎ 709 8104; fax 709 8725; cnr Wapping & Chaloner Sts; r £46.50; P) Functional, motel-style rooms in a purpose-built hotel next to Albert Dock. Great location and perfect for families – children under 12 stay for free.

Dolby Hotel (☎ 708 7272; www.dolbyhotels.co.uk; 36-42 Chaloner St; r from £45) Well-run hotel with

good-sized, well-equipped rooms aimed to rival some of the more renowned budget chains. The Dolby does a great job and we applaud it for it.

Crowne Plaza Liverpool (☎ 243 8000; www.cpliverpool.com; St Nicholas Pl, Princes Dock, Pier Head; r from £90; 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 to Sefton Park, which is packed with restaurants.

City Centre BUDGET

Everyman Bistro (☎ 708 9545; 13 Hope St; mains £4-7; ☎ 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 café-restaurant beneath the Everyman Theatre their second home – with good reason. Great tucker and a terrific atmosphere.

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

DOING THE BEATLES TO DEATH

Between March 1961 and August 1963, the Beatles played a staggering 275 gigs in a club on Mathew St called the Cavern, which was essentially a basement with a stage and a sound system. They shared the stage with other local bands who helped define the Mersey Beat, but it was John, Paul, George and Ringo who emerged into the sunlight of superstardom, unparalleled success and crass marketing.

Forty years later, the club is gone, the band has long broken up and two of its members are dead, but the phenomenon lives on and is still the biggest tourist magnet in town. The Cavern Quarter – basically a small warren of streets around Mathew St – has been transformed to cash in on the band's seemingly unending earning power: the Rubber Soul Oyster Bar, the From Me to You shop and the Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds café should give you an idea of what to expect. For decent memorabilia, check out the **Beatles Shop** (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 rather plain terraced home where Paul grew up; you can only do so by prebooked **tour** (☎ 427 7231; £12; ☎ 10.30am & 11.20am Wed-Sun Easter-Oct) from outside the National Conservation Centre. Visitors to Speke Hall (see p582) can also visit both from there.

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

Quynny's Quisine (☎ 708 7757; 45a Bold St; mains £5-7; ☎ 9.30am-9pm) Refried beans, plantains, salads and other Caribbean goodies are hearty and genuine at this basement restaurant. Going underground isn't normally ideal for dining, but in this case it just ensures that fewer people crowd in and there's more room for you.

MIDRANGE

Quarter (☎ 707 1965; 7 Falkner St; mains £8-13; ☎ 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.

Yuet Ben (☎ 709 5772; 1 Upper Duke St; mains £9-13; ☎ 5-11pm Tue-Sun) When it comes to the best Chinese food in town, you won't hear too many dissenting voices: Yuet Ben's Beijing cuisine usually comes out tops. The veggie banquet could bring round even the most avid carnivore. Get a seat by the window to eat in the shadow of Europe's largest Chinese gate.

TOP END

Alma de Cuba (☎ 709 7097; www.alma-de-cuba.com; St Peter's Church, Seel St; mains £15-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) This extraordinary new 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* (rum-based cocktail) at the long bar. ¡Salud!

London Carriage Works (☎ 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 foot soldiers 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 – and indulge themselves in the marvellous, eclectic ethnic menu, which reveals influences from every corner of the world.

Around Albert Dock

Pan-American Club (☎ 709 7097; Britannia Pavilion, Albert Dock; mains £12-22) 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.

DRINKING

A recent survey has put Merseyside at the top of the All-England drinking league. It's official: Scousers love boozing. Health officials may be in despair, but Liverpool has pubs and bars to suit every taste imaginable. Most of the party action takes place in and around Ropewalks, the heart of which is Concert Sq. Unless specified, all the bars included here open until 2am Monday to Saturday, although most have a nominal entry charge after 11pm.

City Centre

Baa Bar (☎ 707 0610; 43-45 Fleet St) One of the first and still the best of Liverpool's style bars, Baa is packed most nights and remains a favourite watering hole with anyone looking for a good night out; the patio is perfect during the longer summer evenings.

Hannah's (☎ 708 5959; 2 Leece 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, easy-going crowd and some pretty decent music make this one of the better places to get drunk in.

Magnet (☎ 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 Britain's most established DJ names.

Philharmonic (☎ 707 2837; 36 Hope St; ☎ closes 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.

Albert Dock

Blue Bar (☎ 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 (☎ 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 £3-11; ☹ 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) 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.

Garlands (☎ 236 2307; www.garlandsonline.co.uk; 8-10 Eberle St; admission £6-10; ☹ Fri-Sun) House in all sounds and guises rules the roost at this banging club, whose punters were extolled by *Mixmag* magazine as one of the best crowds in England.

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

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

Cavern Club (☎ 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.

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. The **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, the **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. Also worth checking out are the gay nights at Garlands (see above). For online listings, check out www.realliverpool.com.

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 appositely named Lottery – Britain has taken the race to heart and there's hardly a household that doesn't tune in, betting slips nervously in hand.

You can book **tickets** (☎ 522 2929; www.aintree.co.uk) for the Grand National, or visit the **Grand National Experience** (☎ 523 2600; adult/child with tour £7/4, without tour £3/2), 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.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

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

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** (☎ 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 in 2005 they became European champions for the fifth time and followed it with an FA Cup in 2006. Led by Spanish manager Rafa Benitez and captained by local boy and legend Steven Gerrard, things are looking seriously good once more for the Reds.

The club's home is the marvellous Anfield, but plans are afoot to relocate to a new 60,000-capacity stadium a stone's throw away in Stanley Park before 2010. 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** (☎ 260 6677; with museum adult/child £9/5.50; ☹ every couple of hours except match days) that includes the home dressing room, a walk down the famous tunnel and a seat in the dugout, or simply a visit to the **museum** (admission £5), which features plenty of memorabilia – as well as those five European Cups.

EVERTON FC

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

Tours (☎ 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.

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 300m north of Lime St station. There are services to/from most major towns, including Manchester (£5.80, 1¼ hours, hourly), Birmingham (£10.20, 2¾ hours, five daily), Newcastle (£18.40, 6½ hours, three daily) and London (£22, five to six hours, seven daily).

Train

Liverpool's main station is Lime St. It has hourly services to almost everywhere, including Chester (£4, 40 minutes), London (£56.50, three hours), Manchester (£8.30, 45 minutes) and Wigan (£4.15, 50 minutes).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

The airport is 8 miles south of the centre. **Arriva Airlink** (£1.50; ☎ 6am-11pm) buses 80A and 180 depart from Paradise St station and **Airportexpress 500** (£2; ☎ 5.15am-12.15am) buses from outside Lime St station. Buses from both stations take half an hour and run every 20 minutes. A taxi to the centre should cost no more than £14.

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 Liver Building to the north of Albert Dock.

Car

You won't have much use for a car in Liverpool, and it'll end up costing you plenty in car-park fees. If you must drive, there are parking meters around the city and a number of open and sheltered car parks. Car breaks are a major problem, so leave absolutely nothing of value in the car.

Public Transport

Local public transport is coordinated by **Merseytravel** (☎ 236 7676; www.merseytravel.gov.uk). Highly recommended is the Saveaway ticket (adult/child £3.70/1.90), which allows 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 (☎ 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 Western Approaches Museum).

Taxi

Mersey Cabs (☎ 298 2222) operates tourist taxi services and has some cabs adapted for disabled visitors.

AROUND LIVERPOOL

PORT SUNLIGHT

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

SPEKE

A marvellous example of a black-and-white half-timbered hall can be visited at **Speke Hall** (NT; ☎ 0151-427 7231; www.spekehall.org.uk; admission £6.50; ☎ 1-5.30pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 1-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), 6 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-run, 1½-hour **tour** (☎ 486 4006; with Speke Hall adult/child £12/free) to the childhood homes of both Lennon and McCartney (see the boxed text, p578) – you can book at Speke Hall or at the tourist offices in Liverpool.

LANCASHIRE

Industrious, isolated Lancashire has a touch of everything, from mighty Manchester in the south – so big that it's administered separately (and given its own section in this chapter) – to the Ribble Valley in the north, a gentle and beautiful warm-up for the Lake District beyond its northern border. Just north of the Ribble Valley is the handsome Georgian county town of Lancaster and, to the west, the ever-popular Blackpool, empress of the tacky, traditional English seaside resorts.

BLACKPOOL

☎ 01253 / pop 142,290

The queen bee of England's fun-by-the-sea-type resorts is unquestionably Blackpool. It's unashamedly 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 people don't either.

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

The town is famous for its tower; its three piers; its Pleasure Beach; and its Illuminations, 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); Central Promenade (☎ 403223; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10.15am-4.15pm Sun Apr-Sep); Clifton St (☎ 478222; 1 Clifton St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Sights

PLEASURE BEACH

The main reason for Blackpool's immense popularity is the simply fantastic **Pleasure Beach** (☎ 0870 444 5566; www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com; admission free; ☎ from 10am Apr-early Nov), a 16-hectare collection of more than 145 different rides that attracts some 7 million visitors annually. 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 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, new in 2004, Bling, where riders are brought 40m into the air and then spun 360 degrees at 60mph – it's the perfect way to shift the contents of your stomach.

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 you can buy tickets for individual categories or for a mixture of them all. An unlimited ticket to all rides costs £29 for one day, £43 for two.

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

OTHER SIGHTS

Blackpool's most recognisable landmark is the 150m-high **Blackpool Tower** (☎ 622242; www.theblackpooltower.co.uk; adult/child £12.95/8.95; ☎ 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 Waterworld** (☎ 343602; adult/child £10.50/8.50; ☎ from 10am daily May-Oct, Sat & Sun only Nov-Feb), an indoor water complex complete with its own rides. 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 opened a year later charging a penny 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** (☎ 622445; New Bonny St; adult/child £8.95/6; ☎ 10am-8pm), which features 2.5m-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. Even so, it is worth booking ahead 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.

Big Blue Hotel (☎ 0845 367 3333; www.bigbluehotel.uk.com; Blackpool Pleasure Beach; s/d/ste from £65/75/149; (P)) 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.

Number One (☎ 343901; www.numberoneblackpool.com; 1 St Lukes Rd; s/d from £70/120; (P)) 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 set just back from the South Promenade near Pleasure Beach.

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 a head.

There are a few restaurants around Talbot Sq (near the tourist office) on Queen St, Talbot Rd and Clifton St. The most interesting possibility is the Afro-Caribbean **Lagoonda** (☎ 293837; 37 Queen St; mains £8-10), a friendly, no-nonsense eatery that serves up colourful (and often spicy) dishes with a tropical flavour.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The central coach station is on Talbot Rd, near the town centre. Destinations include Liverpool (£7.80, 1½ hours, one daily), London (£25, 6½ hours, five daily) and Manchester (£6.20, 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 (£11.75, 1¼ hours, half-hourly) and Liverpool (£12.60, 1½ hours, seven daily), but most other arrivals change in Preston (£5.65, 30 minutes, half-hourly).

Getting Around

A host of travel-card options for trams and buses ranging from one day to a week are avail-

able at the tourist offices and most newsagents. With more than 14,000 car-parking spaces in Blackpool, you'll have no problem parking.

LANCASTER

☎ 01524 / pop 45,960

Lined with handsome Georgian buildings, Lancaster does a good job of representing Lancashire as its county seat and, for our purposes, as a decent stopover on the way to the Ribbles Valley. Folks have done business here since Roman times, none more successfully than during the 18th century, when Lancaster was an important port in the slave trade.

Information

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

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

Sights

LANCASTER CASTLE & PRIORY

Lancaster's imposing **castle** (☎ 64998; www.lancastercastle.com; admission £5; ☎ 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, and the impressive twin-towered **gatehouse** – both of which were added in the 14th century. Most of what you see today, however, 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** (☎ 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** (☎ 32808; admission £3; ☎ 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) and a Mu-

seum of Childhood, which has memorabilia from the turn of the 20th century.

A couple of other museums complete the picture: the **Maritime Museum** (☎ 64637; St George's Quay; admission £3; ☎ 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; and the **City Museum** (☎ 64637; Market Sq; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), which 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, 11-4pm 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 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 £4.25/2.75; ☎ same hours as park), full of exotic and stunning species. Take bus 25 or 25A from the station, or else it's a steep three-quarter-mile walk up Moor Lane.

Sleeping & Eating

Sun Hotel & Bar (☎ 66006; www.thesunhotelandbar.co.uk; 63 Church St; s/d from £40/60; (P)) 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 eight pretty snazzy sleeping quarters. The pub downstairs is one of the best in town and a top spot for a bit of grub; there are three different menus to choose from, with meals from £8 to £15.

Royal King's Arms Hotel (☎ 32451; www.swallow-hotels.com; Market St; s/d from £55/80; (P)) 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 (mains around £11).

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

Getting There & Away

Lancaster is on the main west-coast railway line and on the Cumbrian coast line. Destinations include Carlisle (£21, one hour, hourly), Manchester (£12.20, one hour, hourly) and Morecambe (15 minutes, half-hourly).

ISLE OF MAN

Mainlanders have long suspected the Isle of Man (Ellan Vannin in Manx) of being an odd place, full of weird island folk and their quirky ways. As 'evidence' they'll point to the island's reputation as a tax haven for wealthy Brits and its summer season of Tourist Trophy (TT) motorbike racing, which every May and June attracts around 50,000 petrol heads. Hardly case closed.

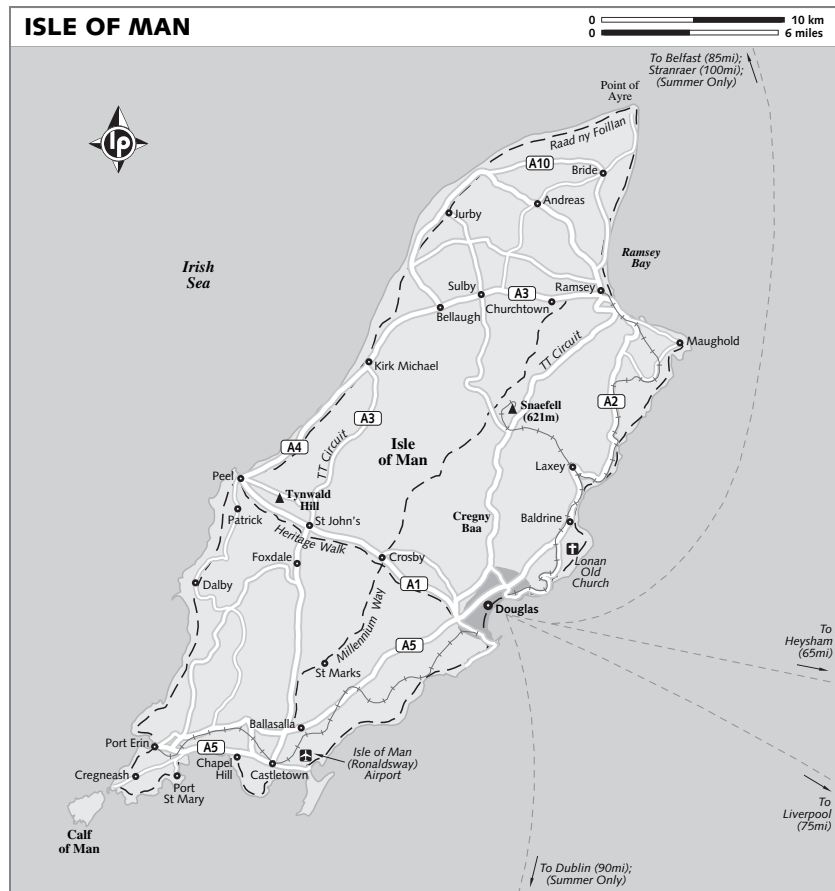
Chances are that those same mainlanders have never actually seen the lush valleys, barren hills and rugged coastlines of what is a surprisingly beautiful island. Perfect for walking, cycling, driving or just relaxing, this is a place that doggedly refuses to sell itself down the river of crass commercialism and mass tourism. Needless to say, if you want a slice of silence, be sure to avoid the TT races, which turn the place into a high-rev bike fest.

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 to 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, Easter to October. The Manx Heritage 4 Site Pass (adult/child £10/5) grants you entry into four of the island's heritage attractions; pick it up at any of the tourist offices.

Walking & Cycling

There are plenty of walking trails. Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger Map 95 (£6.49) 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. It only kicked off in 2004,



but it has already proven a favourite with walkers from all over Britain.

There are six designated off-road cycling tracks on the island, each with varying ranges of difficulty.

The island is also home to the **International Cycling Week Festival**, which takes place in mid-July. It's a pretty serious affair, attracting top cyclists from around the world as well as enthusiastic Sunday racers. Check with the tourist office in Douglas for details.

Getting There & Away

AIR

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

Douglas every 30 minutes between 7am and 11pm; a taxi should cost you no more than £18. Airline contacts:

Aer Arann (☎ 0800 587 23 24; www.aerarann.com) From London Luton and Dublin.

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) From London Gatwick, Luton and Manchester.

British Northwest Airlines (☎ 0800 083 7783; www.flybnwa.co.uk) From Blackpool.

Eastern Airways (☎ 01652-681099; www.easternairways.com) From Leeds-Bradford, Bristol, Birmingham and East Midlands.

Emerald Airways (☎ 0870 850 5400; www.flyjem.com) From Liverpool.

EuroManx Airlines (☎ 0870 787 7879; www.euromanx.com) From Belfast, Liverpool, London City and Manchester.

Flybe (☎ 0871 700 0535; www.flybe.com) From Birmingham.

Loganair (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.loganair.com) From Glasgow Prestwick; linked with British Airways.

BOAT

Isle of Man Steam Packet (☎ 0870 552 3523; www.steam-packet.com; foot passenger single/return £15/30, car & 2 passengers return £138) is a car ferry and high-speed catamaran service from Liverpool and Heysham to Douglas. There is also a summer service to Dublin (three hours, mid-April to mid-September).

Getting Around

The island has a comprehensive bus service; the tourist office in Douglas has timetables and sells tickets. It also sells the **Island Explorer** (adult/child 1-day £10/5, 3-day £20/10), which gives you free transport for the apposite period on all public transport, including the tram to Snafell and Douglas' horse-trams.

Bikes can be hired from **Eurocycles** (☎ 01624-624909; 8a Victoria Rd; per day £14-18; ☎ 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 £30 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** (£8.40 return)

Douglas–Laxey–Ramsey Electric Tramway (£5.20 return)

Laxey–Summit Snafell Mountain Railway (£7.40 return)

DOUGLAS

☎ 01624 / pop 22,200

All roads lead to Douglas, which is a bit of a shame, as the town isn't all that endearing. Still, it has the best of the island's hotels and restaurants – as well as the bulk of the finance houses frequented so regularly by tax-allergic Brits. The **tourist office** (☎ 686766; www.visitisleafman.com; Sea Terminal Bldg; ☎ 9.15am-7pm daily May-Sep, 9am-5pm daily 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 & Eating

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 each side of it. The tourist office's camping information sheet lists sites all around the island.

Admiral House (☎ 629551; www.admiralhouse.com; Loch Promenade; s/d £50/80; Ⓟ) Newly refurbished to a high standard of comfort, this elegant guesthouse 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.

Sefton Hotel (☎ 645500; www.seftonhotel.co.uk; Harris Promenade; s/d from £80/90; Ⓟ) 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'll save up to 10% if you book online.

Claremont (☎ 698800; www.sleepwellhotels.com; 18-19 Loch Promenade; d/ste £105/140; Ⓟ) The last word in contemporary business style in Douglas, the Claremont has very bright, airy rooms with all the latest gizmos – DVD players, internet connections and fancy TVs – as well as beautiful limestone bathrooms. The executive rooms have terrific harbour views.

Spill the Beans (☎ 614167; 1 Market Hill; snacks £2-4; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) The most pleasant coffee shop in Douglas delivers proper caffeine kicks as well as cakes, buns and other sweet snacks.

Tanroagan (☎ 472411; 9 Ridgeway St; mains £9-15; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner only Sat) The place for all things from the sea, this elegant eatery is the trendiest place in Douglas, serving fresh fish straight off the boats, given the merest of Continental twists or just a spell on the hot grill. Reservations are recommended.

Drinking

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

AROUND DOUGLAS

You can follow the TT course 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 take the electric tram from Laxey on the coast.

On the edge of Ramsey is the **Grove Rural Life Museum** (MH; admission £3; ☎ 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), 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. Named after the wife of the then lieutenant-governor, it's the largest wheel of its kind in the world. The wheel-headed cross at **Lonan Old Church** 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 £4.25). The flag tower affords fine views of the town and coast. There's also a small **Nautical Museum** (MH; admission £3) 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 sanc-

tuary. **Calf Island Cruises** (☎ 01624-832339; adult/child £10/5; ☎ 10.15am, 11.30am & 1.30pm Apr-Oct weather permitting) runs between Port Erin and the island.

Port Erin, another Victorian seaside resort, plays host to the small **Railway Museum** (admission £1; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm daily Apr-Oct) depicting 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.

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

The excellent **House of Manannan** (MH; admission £5; ☎ 10am-5pm year-round) museum uses interactive displays to explain Manx history and its seafaring traditions. A combined ticket for both the castle and museum costs £7.

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 **Fernleigh Hotel** (☎ 01624-842435; www.isleofman.com/accommodation/fernleigh; Marine Pde; r per person from £21; ☎ Feb-Nov), which has 12 decent bedrooms; prices include breakfast. 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 £35.

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