

LAP OF THE 'POOL

With events to mark Liverpool's European Capital of Culture 2008 status in full swing, there's never been a better time for culture vultures to visit the city. Stephen Morris guides us on a walking tour that takes in this summer's best exhibitions, shows and attractions.



Take a ferry 'cross the Mersey for the best view of the 'Three Graces'.



When the US beat poet Allen Ginsberg arrived in Liverpool in 1965 - at the height of Beatlemania - he declared the city to be "at the present moment, the centre of consciousness of the human universe". A slight exaggeration perhaps, but this year it returns to the cultural spotlight as European Capital of Culture 2008 (together with Stavanger in Norway) and is fizzing with events, shows and exhibitions - most

of them free. Couple that with the UNESCO World Heritage Site that is Liverpool's dockland waterfront and you've got yourself a truly great place to explore on foot.

1 Approaching Lime Street by train, look out for the station at Edge Hill. It was here that George Stephenson introduced his Rocket to the world and where William Huskisson MP became the railway's first victim in September 1830, suffering fatal injuries when he fell under the locomotive. Leave Lime Street by the front entrance for a view of St George's Hall, its foundation stone laid in 1838. Built for a music festival, it is one of the world's great neo-classical buildings. It's open to the public from Tuesday to Sunday. Inside, the Victorian courtrooms and cells are no longer used but you'll see them in lots of films. Behind is St John's Gardens where, from 1-10 August, Imagine will offer creative activities and performances for young people and, from 6-10 August, Sensazione will perform their mix of theatre and circus.



The famous liver bird - one of two. Legend says if they flew away the city would cease to exist.



See the definitive Gustav Klimt exhibition at Tate Liverpool.



2 From St George's Hall, go right to William Brown Street and the Walker Art Gallery. Call in to the Walker to see Art in the Age of Steam, the summer show by Frith, Manet, Van Gogh and Hopper. Also look for Ben Johnson's enormous new painting, *Liverpool Cityscape*, shown alongside his work from other cities worldwide. Next door, Liverpool Central Library has a palatial circular reading room with amazing acoustics and displays from the Hornby Collection of books and prints, including *Audubon's Birds of America* - one of the world's most beautiful and valuable tomes. Book ahead for a free tour of the whole collection. Next door again is the World Museum.

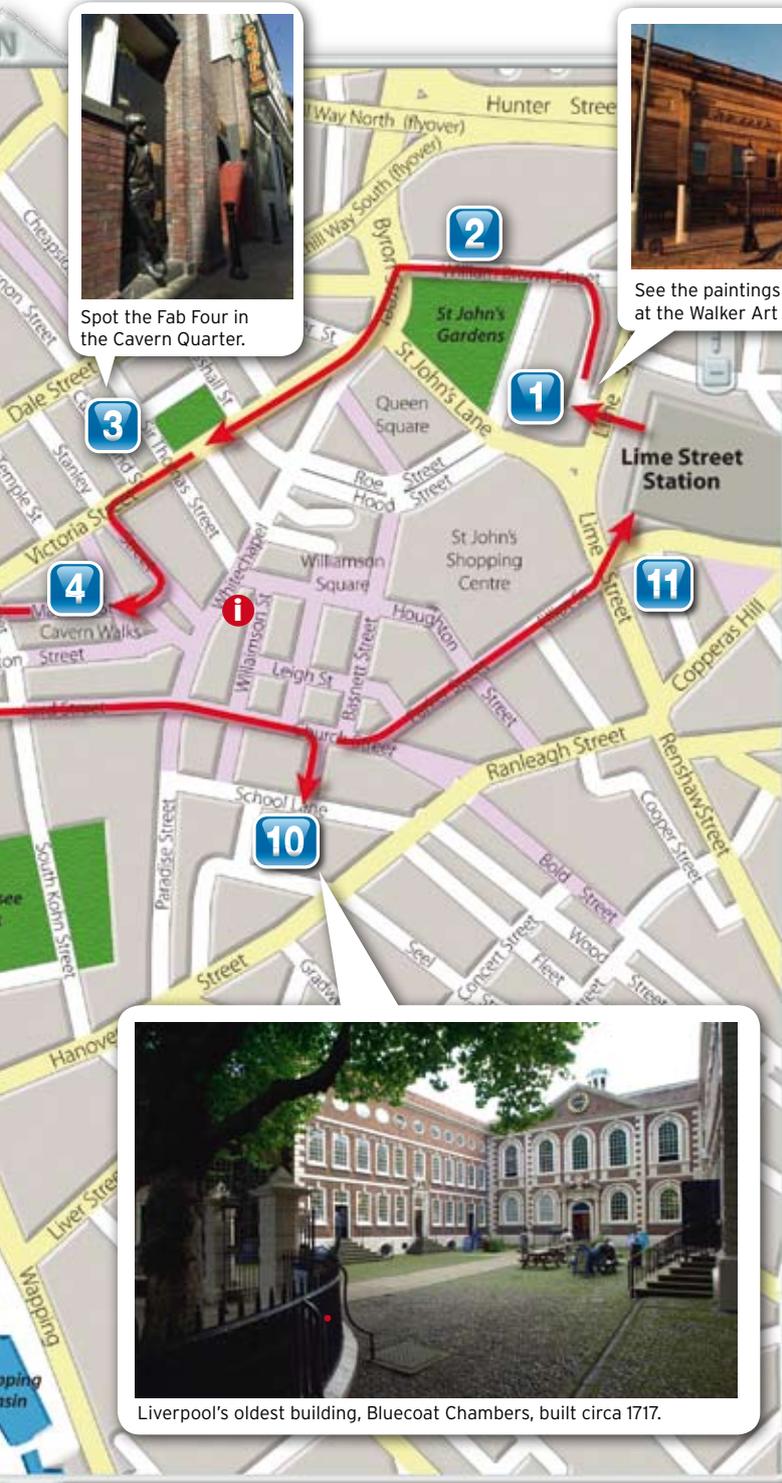
3 & 4 Now head past the first Mersey tunnel, Kingsway, and head down Victoria Street. Turn left on



Spot the Fab Four in the Cavern Quarter.



See the paintings of Frith, Manet and Van Gogh at the Walker Art Gallery.



When King John granted a charter to the town in 1207 he sought a rich diversity of businesses in a small space and the narrow plots remain. The superb Grade II-listed Adelphi Bank on the corner of Brunswick Street is worth a pause as you pass.

6 At the end of Castle Street is the town hall, designed by John Wood of Bath in the 1750s. The opulent public areas contrast strikingly with the business-like council chamber. It's open daily between 11-23 August. Behind the town hall is Exchange Flags, where cotton traders once made and lost fortunes and where, on a hot day, the sun is said to be 'cracking the flags'. The Nelson monument is by John Rossi, who had 16 children - three of whom became sculptors. In the left corner of Exchange Flags, beneath your feet, is a once-secret labyrinth of 100 bomb-proof rooms. From 1941 to 1945 these rooms played out the Battle of the Atlantic as, day and night, teams of female naval workers plotted and pursued packs of U-boats. Now the rooms are recreated as the Liverpool War Museum and open through the summer (except Fridays and Sundays).

7 Retrace your steps to the town hall and head down Water Street, pausing to admire the inside of India Buildings, and carry on to Pier Head. Here you'll find the city's most iconic buildings, known as the 'Three Graces'. From left to right they are: the Liver Building (with its tower-topping liver birds), the Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building. Behind is the amazing pseudo-Egyptian ventilation shaft for the Kingsway Tunnel.

8 In any weather the Mersey is breathtaking. Take the ferry for the best view of the city - a view once shared by more than a million Irish fleeing the 1846 famine. Today Pier Head is quiet because most ships (and 25 per cent of all UK-USA traffic) use the freeport down river, but it is still dramatic.

9 Walk left along the river to Albert Dock. Here you'll find the definitive Gustav Klimt exhibition at Tate Liverpool from 30 May to the end of August. There's also the Maritime Museum and the Beatles' Story visitor attraction and, beyond, the new 10,000-seater Echo Arena Liverpool which will stage this year's Summer Pops. Paul Simon plays here on 6 July.

10 & 11 From the Albert Dock, walk past Salthouse Dock and along the Strand, turn right up James Street and straight on for Lord Street and Church Street. On Church Street, a short detour along School Lane brings you to Bluecoat Chambers, the oldest building in the city and now a stunning arts centre. From here retrace your steps, turn right on Church Street and fork left for Lime Street station.



Liverpool's oldest building, Bluecoat Chambers, built circa 1717.

Stanley Street for the Cavern Quarter. The original Cavern was demolished years ago, but at weekends the narrow streets still jump with energy, and over August Bank Holiday the Mathew Street Festival will bring free live music. By day the shopping is original and expensive and there is lots of Beatles' iconography to look for - the best is *Eleanor Rigby* in Stanley Street, sculpted by Tommy Steele (reputedly for half a sixpence).

5 From the end of Mathew Street turn right on to North John Street, left on to Cook Street and walk up to Castle Street - the heart of the city. The castle is long gone but the slope of the streets running down to the river hints at how this high ground was once a safe refuge from the Mersey and a strong, defensible position.

WALK IT!

TIME: Allow 1.5 hours for the walk, and another 4-5 hours for attractions.

GETTING THERE: Frequent, direct trains run nationally to Lime Street. National Express coaches terminate at London Road station nearby.

INFORMATION: TICs are in the '08 Place on Whitechapel and at Albert Dock.