



# A mighty northern port

Eurovision might be turning the international spotlight on Liverpool in 2023, but this waterfront city has for centuries had a global outlook. **YORK MEMBERY** explores its maritime history and musical heritage

As soon as you alight at Liverpool's Lime Street station, step outside and hear the seagulls squawking, you know you're near the sea – a reminder that for all its footballing and musical links, this is a port city. And it's the waterfront where you should head first on your visit – for it was the explosion in maritime trade from the 18th century onwards that turned this once insignificant spot on the river Mersey into a mighty northern city.

The city's Maritime Museum is at the Royal Albert Dock, which dates back to the mid-19th century, but is now home to restaurants, bars and other attractions. The museum tells how – in its heyday as a port – Liverpool boasted a huge, inter-connected 7.5 mile dock system which, it is said, handled 40 per cent of the world's trade in the early 19th century. The city's pivotal role in the slave trade – a dark chapter in British history – is explored in the adjoining International Slavery Museum.

The Maritime Museum also has good displays on the *Lusitania* – an unarmed passenger ship torpedoed by a German U-boat off Ireland during the First World War while en route from New York to Liverpool – and the battle of the Atlantic. This epic

struggle for control of the seas during the Second World War cost the lives of more than 70,000 Allied sailors and merchant seamen, and resulted in the sinking of 3,500 merchant vessels. Liverpool was Britain's main Second World War convoy port and home to Western Approaches Command, responsible for the safe arrival of convoys – hence the repeated Luftwaffe bombing raids on the city.

On a lighter note, the museum has a section explaining naval tattoos – an anchor symbolised a seafarer's first Atlantic crossing – and reveals the maritime derivation of phrases such as "square meal".

Another waterfront must is doing the Royal Liver Building 360 Tour, which allows you to go up the clock tower, get up close to the building's iconic Liver Bird statues and enjoy breathtaking views of the Mersey.

The city is also rightly proud of its two cathedrals: one Anglican, the other Catholic. The neo-Gothic Liverpool Cathedral, based on a design by Giles Gilbert Scott, is the longest cathedral in the world – and be sure to make time to do its Tower Experience when you visit. "On a clear day you can see Mount Snowdon and Blackpool Tower," a cathedral guide tells me. Half a mile down Hope Street is the equally impressive 1960s Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral, a modern circular building which bears a striking similarity to Oscar Niemeyer's cathedral in Brasilia.

Last but not least, you can't go to Liverpool without hitting the Beatles trail. The Beatles Story museum charts the band's rise to stardom in the 1960s, via the nightclubs of Hamburg, and covers other key moments in their career. A trip on the Magical Mystery Tour bus allows you to see Liverpool landmarks like Penny Lane that have been immortalised in the quartet's songs. In short, Liverpool might be a comparatively modern city, but it has plenty on offer to keep the history fan happy. **IT**

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Liverpool's Royal Albert Dock, now home to the city's Maritime Museum, as well as the Tate Liverpool and other cultural attractions



The *Lusitania* moored up in Liverpool in the 1910s, shortly before it was sunk by a U-boat



The statue of the Beatles on the waterfront in Liverpool was sculpted by Andrew Edwards and donated by the Cavern Club in December 2015



Liverpool Cathedral is the largest in Britain, built in red sandstone to a Giles Gilbert Scott design



On top of the Royal Liver Building sits a Liver Bird, a mythical creature that symbolises the city of Liverpool



You can watch the **Eurovision Song Contest 2023** on BBC One



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