



Fifty years after the Beatles released their first album, the Fab Four are still drawing crowds to their home town on the Mersey.

WORDS **AMY LAUGHINGHOUSE**

COME TOGETHER



Clockwise from top left: The Beatles Story exhibition; the Beatles onstage at the Cavern Club, 1963; outside the Cavern, 1966; Casbah Coffee Club





Clockwise from left: Beatles in Liverpool, 1963; Strawberry Field, a former Salvation Army children's home, inspiration for the song; Mathew Street; rehearsing at the Cavern, 1963

BEATLEMANIA IS EPIDEMIC IN LIVERPOOL, with fans splashing out nearly £400m (\$656m) every year in the band's home town, but it reaches fever pitch this month. That's when 50,000 Fab Four aficionados from around the world come together for the International Beatleweek Festival, which encompasses exhibitions, memorabilia sales, guest speakers and live music.

This year's event (August 21-27) may draw the biggest crowds ever as 2013 marks half a century since the Beatles' debut album, *Please Please Me*, hit UK record stores. Beatleweek also coincides with the new Liverpool International Music Festival (August 18-September 22), highlights of which will include Beatles cover bands and a tribute to George Harrison, who would have turned 70 in February.

Now in its 27th year, Beatleweek typically attracts fans from 40 nations and bands from 20 countries. "Their music has such global appeal," says Dave Jones of Cavern City Tours, which organises the event. "It's all about love and peace, and people can relate to those lyrics."

Beatleweek begins with a host of bands at the Cavern Club, a subterranean warren chock-a-block with rock-and-roll memorabilia. It's built on the site where Brian Epstein - the manager who "suited and booted" the Beatles - spotted them in 1961. The band played at the Cavern 292 times from February 1961 to August 1963, and Paul McCartney returned to perform in 1999. Other famous acts to take the stage include the Kinks, Queen and the Rolling Stones.

The Britannia Adelphi hotel serves as ground zero for Beatleweek, featuring live acts into the night from Friday to Monday. On the Sunday, it hosts a convention with 35 bands, a Beatles' memorabilia sale, films, art and photography exhibitions, and guest speakers.

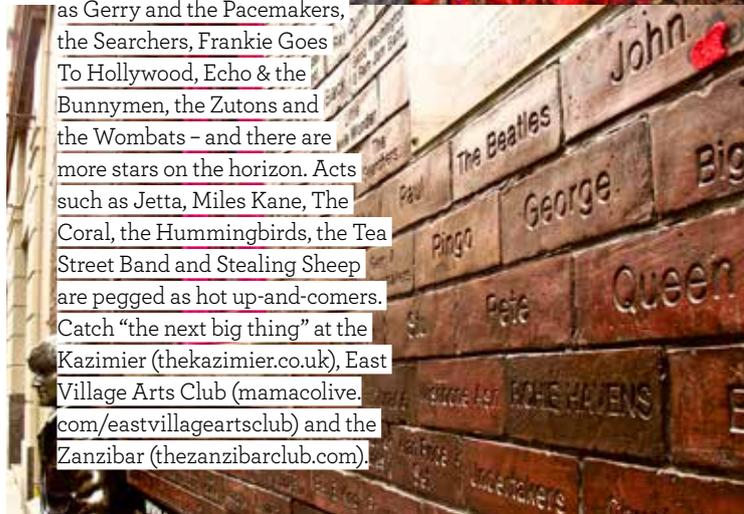
Music will also spill into other venues across the city. These include Pier Head, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, Echo Arena, O2 Academy and Alma De Cuba, a church converted into a hip bar and restaurant.

It's more than even the Beatles themselves could have imagined, admits Liverpool Blue Badge guide Paul Beesley. "John Lennon was once asked what the future holds," he recalls. "He said, 'We could be bigheaded and think people will still listen to our music in two or three years' time'. But former Beatles manager Brian Epstein [who died in August, 1967] said the children of the year 2000 will still be listening to the Beatles, and he was right." As Dave Jones sees it, "It's as if the Beatles have never broken up. The world is still smiling and enjoying their music. They changed the world of popular culture forever." ➤



MERSEY BEATS

The Beatles isn't the only legendary Liverpool band. The city also birthed groups such as Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Searchers, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Echo & the Bunnymen, the Zutons and the Wombats - and there are more stars on the horizon. Acts such as Jetta, Miles Kane, The Coral, the Hummingbirds, the Tea Street Band and Stealing Sheep are pegged as hot up-and-comers. Catch "the next big thing" at the Kazimier (thekazimier.co.uk), East Village Arts Club (mamacolive.com/eastvillageartsclub) and the Zanzibar (thezanzibarclub.com).



STRAWBERRY FIELD/BEATLES PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; FAMOUS NAMES: AMY LAUGHINGHOUSE

FAB LORE

Beatles attractions you can rock up to all year round.

CASBAH COFFEE CLUB

8 Haymans Green, West Derby Village. petebest.com/casbah-coffee-club.aspx

In 1960, Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, original drummer Pete Best and bass guitarist Chas Newby performed here as the Beatles for the first time in Liverpool. The band played about 90 shows here, and also helped decorate the club in the basement of Best's mother's house. Fans can arrange visits with one of the Best family, usually Pete's youngest brother, Roag, leading the tour.

THE BEATLES STORY

Britannia Vaults, Albert Dock. beatlesstory.com

This exhibition follows the band's meteoric rise. Rooms are staged like sets representing key points in their career and are packed with memorabilia such as McCartney's first guitars and Lennon's glasses.

CHILDHOOD HOMES TOUR

nationaltrust.org.uk/beatles

The most intimate experience for Beatles fans takes you into the childhood homes of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Lennon was raised by his Aunt Mimi and Uncle George at 251 Menlove Avenue, and the house is filled with old photos, drawings and copies of Lennon's report cards. "He has too many of the wrong ambitions and his energy is too often mislaid," one teacher wrote. At 20 Forthlin Road, McCartney's old digs, he and Lennon wrote about 100 of the Beatles' early tunes. Photos taken by McCartney's brother, Michael, provide a personal glimpse of the budding musicians.

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR

cavernclub.org/the-magical-mystery-tour

Get your ticket to ride for a two-hour bus excursion covering Liverpool's most important Beatles landmarks, with photo stops at Penny Lane, Strawberry Field and the boyhood homes of McCartney and Harrison.



THE CAVERN CLUB

10 Mathew Street. cavernclub.org

The original Cavern was knocked down in the 1970s, but a near-replica opened on the same spot in 1984. The Cavern Club Beatles perform Thursdays and Saturdays. Open daily from 10.30am.

✦ *The Beatles In Australia* exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, from Sep 26. powerhousemuseum.com



Hard Days Night Hotel; memorabilia at the Cavern Club (below left); John Lennon's glasses at The Beatles Story exhibition (below)

STAY

BRITANNIA

ADELPHI HOTEL

Ranelagh Place. (0871) 222 0029. adelphi-hotel.co.uk

Headquarters for the International Beatleweek Festival. From £46 (\$76).

HARD DAYS NIGHT HOTEL

Central Buildings, North John Street. (0151) 236 1964. harddaysnighthotel.com

A Beatles-themed property around the corner from the Cavern Club. From £95 (\$156).

THISTLE

Liverpool City Centre, Atlantic Tower, Chapel Street. (0871) 376 9025. thistle.com

Waterfront views, within walking distance of The Beatles Story exhibition. From £69 (\$113). 

✦ For afares and Liverpool holiday packages call Qantas Holidays on 1300 735 542 or visit qantas.com/holidaysaustralianway

