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LIVERPOOL echo

Liverpool will become a cultural beacon of the world' predicted the then Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell back in June 2003, when the city was named European Capital of Culture 2008. But for the majestic port currently celebrating its 800th birthday, its light shone brightly on the world's stage long before this latest accolade was bestowed.

The city, already well known around the globe for its outstanding architecture, maritime heritage, music, literature, arts and sport, is expecting two million visitors to descend upon its historic streets to attend the world-class festivals and events that will take place throughout 2008.

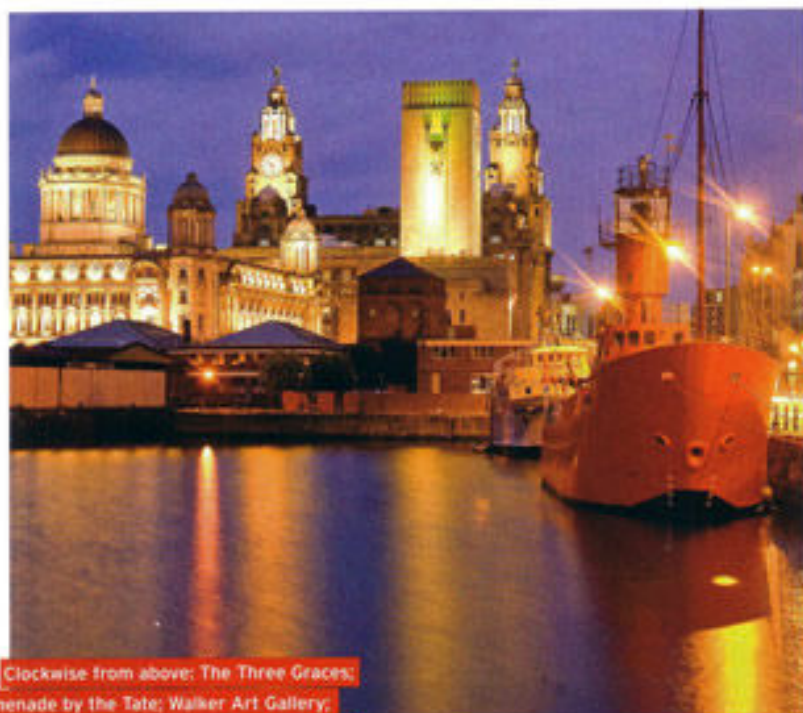
On one of the most beautiful and dramatic waterfronts, the magnificent Royal Liver, Cunard and Port of Liverpool buildings, otherwise known as The Three Graces, have become beloved symbols of the city which sit proudly on the River Mersey.

A trip to the Maritime Museum, now recognised as a UNESCO world heritage site, is a must. Here, visitors will be able to relive the experience of the nine million people from every corner of Europe who emigrated through Liverpool. Fittingly, a maritime festival will be one of the highlights of the Capital of Culture year. The city will host the homecoming of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race plus the start of The Tall Ships race.

The Tate museum, with its magnificent views across the River Mersey, will award the Turner Prize, the first time the glittering ceremony has been held outside London since its inception in 1984. The fifth Liverpool Biennial International Festival will maintain the city's elevated position in the art world calendar, attracting serious collectors. It is the only event of its kind in the UK to host an international contemporary art biennial along with its global counterparts: Venice, Sydney and Sao Paulo.

Liverpool's renaissance is on show in designer boutique hotels, such as the sleek **Hope Street Hotel**, offering a memorable experience for any lover of über chic. Built in 1860 in the style of a Venetian palazzo, the hotel enjoys a magical setting between Liverpool's two majestic cathedrals. Admire its cool, contemporary design and indulge in the luxurious Ren products available in abundance.

Next door, **The London Carriage Works** has garnered rave reviews in the *Harden's* and *Good Food Guide* since its opening in 2003. Formerly the home of a coach and carriage builders, the restaurant offers modern international cuisine in an historic ambience. A stone's throw away, **60 Hope Street** has established itself as one of the city's best restaurants. Spread over three stylishly appointed floors of an ex-gentleman's residence, its beautiful Georgian entrance



Clockwise from above: The Three Graces; promenade by The Tate; Walker Art Gallery; Anglican cathedral; Beatles Story Museum



welcomes you into a relaxing, contemporary atmosphere. Its expertly crafted menu blends traditional and modern, employing influences from around the world. The restaurant walls often act as a gallery space with previous exhibitions from artists such as Damien Hirst and Lucian Freud.

62 Castle St is a stunning hotel in the city's business district. The impressive Victorian architecture could mislead you into thinking this is a conventional hotel, but once inside, the highly contemporary interior - think chilled out, chic combined with cool classics and abstract designs - turns this notion on its head.

For some eclectic retail therapy, head to Cavern Walks where you'll find designer stores such as Vivienne Westwood as well as Cricket, Liverpool's number one fashion boutique. The Met Quarter is home to Prada, Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana. It's a fantastic place to relax, have a coffee and view the wonderful art which adorns the walls.

As the city gears up for Capital of Culture year, one thing's for sure; Liverpool is set to glow throughout 2008 and beyond.

JULIE EAGLETON



Address book;

HOTELS

HOPE STREET HOTEL

This luxury hotel in Liverpool's Georgian quarter has 48 individually designed hotel rooms. To find it, just locate one cathedral, and walk to the other one. You can't go wrong. Rates from £110 including breakfast; +44 151 709 3000; hopestreethotel.co.uk.

62 CASTLE STREET

Marble and mahogany are key features of this stunning Victorian building in the business district. Rates from £115 including breakfast; +44 151 702 7898; 62castlestreet.com.

RESTAURANTS

THE LONDON CARRIAGE WORKS

Last year's *The Good Food Guide* awarded the restaurant Liverpool's highest score; +44 151 705 2222; hopestreethotel.co.uk.

60 HOPE STREET

The restaurant and bistro offer a blend of traditional and contemporary cuisine. +44 151 707 6060; 60hopestreet.com.