

TEXT CINDY-LOU DALE

LIVING IT UP IN MANCHESTER

BEYOND THE GLEAMING, HIGH-PROFILE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, UNCONVENTIONAL LEFT-FIELD MANCHESTER IS BOOMING.

A city of soul and swagger, heritage and high-living, football and Ferraris, Manchester merits its hype as the 'capital of the north'. Historically it's known for its industrialised past and is unparalleled when it comes to its sporting and musical legacy.

This page: The Old Wellington Inn is a one-of-a-kind pub on Shambles Square in Manchester city centre. It is the oldest building of its kind in the city.

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Above: The Whitworth Art Gallery contains about 55,000 items in its collection.
Below: Manchester has an illustrious musical history.



However, in recent years, Manchester has renewed and is defined by its innovative ideas, imaginative talent and international approach.

Many of the immense, single-storey factories and storehouses, which outline the inner-city landscape, have been transformed into enthralling spaces for art. As the creative arts scene is demonstrating, recent financial investment has boosted Manchester's city centre into a stylish neighbourhood bursting with lively restaurants and music venues.

The underground club scene is as wild as it's ever been; musically, there's an enormous

assortment of work – from the renowned techno label 'Modern Love' or Manc grime 'MC Bugzy Malone' to Liz Preston who uses her voice and a cello to create mysterious melodic tunes.

The same is true in other creative disciplines, like the attention-grabbing arts theatre developments of HOME, and the Whitworth Art Gallery, where numerous artist-run galleries and studio-event spaces are providing the arts scene with a newfound verve.

Then there are the city's railway arches that hold an extraordinary concentration of innovative restaurants – places where a hardcore group of trendy beards continue to defy the odds and serve incredible foods.

LET THERE BE MUSIC

The fun thing about Manchester is the whirl of decadence that lets you dine and dance yourself into a happy oblivion.

The once unconventional Northern Quarter is progressively plagued by hen-dos and boring identikit bars, but Soup Kitchen remains rebelliously left-field. Upstairs you may find anyone from electro-punk's Trash-O-Rama to Manchester techno outliers Space Afrika mixing music till dawn. Downstairs, in the gritty basement, where speakers hang from chains, there's anything from the psych weirdos to alternative pop star Jessy Lanza. Outside the dancehall and grime party scene, expect a line-up of the sharpest names in house and techno sounds.

Purpose-built clubs seem sterile and without character, whereas on the outskirts of the city, you'll find raw spaces such as Antwerp Mansion, a gloriously ramshackle Victorian villa in Rusholme; and Mantra Warehouse in Ancoats. Then there's

Hidden, a rough industrial space in an off-grid location. It draws self-selecting groups of dedicated clubbers to nights that might include a showcase by Manc bass collective, Levelz, or slots from Berlin-based techno titans like Levon Vincent.

Night & Day cafe may look like a traditional 1990s tea shop but after dark it turns into one of the few city-centre venues still supporting new local bands. It's a bold indie venue that, over the past 25 years, has served as a live stronghold for a hatful of now famous bands.

Islington Mill, where the city centre borders Salford, is a key complex of creative studios and gallery space. It's the mothership of Salford's mushrooming grassroots arts ecology and a late-night-into-next-day rave space, where things get seriously strange, both on- and off-stage. One week, you'll see intense experimental hip-hop like Dälek and the next hazy dub techno.

LET THEM PAINT

Open only on Saturdays is an unfailingly provocative space for art, PS Mirabel Studios. It is an artist-run studio/exhibition space whose themed shows, inspired by anything from concrete to the industrial north, are witty and warped with good fun. Do check out the creative wellness centre of Wonder Inn, or ad-hoc art space at The Penthouse; Three Minute Theatre, better known



Clockwise from top right: Statue of Manchester United players George Best, Denis Law, and Sir Bobby Charlton at the front of Old Trafford Stadium; Nazir market in Ancoats; Leaf at Portland street.



DON'T MISS...

FOOTBALL

Manchester is synonymous with football, it's written in the city's DNA. Take some time to visit the grounds of Manchester United and Manchester City, and discover the social history of the game at the National Football Museum.

SHOPPING

For vintage clothing, records, books and artisan food, hit the Northern Quarter, where the Manchester Craft and Design Centre is housed in a Victorian fish and poultry market at 17 Oak Street. Also, get completely lost in Afflecks at 52 Church Street with its 70 independent traders on four floors.

Go market crazy and enjoy the buzz and atmosphere alongside a whole range of delectable treats at an assortment of markets such as Church Street Market and Piccadilly Street Food Market. There are also specialist markets throughout the year such as the Summer Arts and Crafts Market, Independent Book Market and St Ann's Food Fair.

TEA TIME

For high tea with a difference, enjoy some downtime at Ziferblat, Manchester's first pay-per-minute cafe. For 8p a minute you can have as much tea, cake and coffee as you please while sitting on mismatched vintage furniture. The perfect way to get rid of your pennies after a busy weekend exploring.





Left: Flamboyant and dynamic artists leave their creative input on the streets.
Right: Grab a slice of Neapolitan-style pizza at Rudy's pizzeria.



as 3MT, is a DIY, independent 70-seat theatre and hothouse for original comedy, poetry and drama. Inner-city Ancoats warehouses are slowly being colonised by the arts crowd. Here Hope Mill is home to 120 artist-makers, as is pioneering commercial gallery Comme Ça Art and the new fringe Hope Mill Theatre.

LET THEM EAT CAKE

At Rudy's pizzeria, the dough is proved for 24 hours, dressed in finest pizza toppings, then blast-baked for 60 seconds in a clay oven – a process which produces lightly blistered and charred pizza bases. They've got a reputation, so expect a queue at peak times.

Composed, clear-cut and completed with finesse is how you'd describe Yuzu's Japanese food, as well as the cool bebop jazz soundtrack that accompanies it. The flavours are as intense as they are fresh in sashimi, tempura and noodle bowls and Yuzu's renowned 'kara-age' fried chicken. The sashimi is superbly prepared, but it's the superiority of the cooked rice that sets Yuzu apart.

Leaf on Portland Street is a unique and independent tea shop housed in a striking art

deco building. Their menu is fresh and local, and the entertainment distinctive, with an acoustic stage downstairs, and a live gig venue upstairs. Try their American-style pancakes with maple syrup, Greek yogurt and blueberry compote, then wash it down with a lose-leaf Peach and Goji Berry Oolong.

For the best Thai food outside Thailand, head to Siam Smiles. It's an upbeat, welcoming and super-simple Thai supermarket/cafe that serves the best Thai food in Manchester. Beware – their homemade chilli dipping sauce takes no prisoners.

Manchester's where it's happening, you'll feel the buzz in the air, whether it be an international festival, a Premiership football match, a high-profile music performances, or a new restaurant opening. And one of the best things about the city is its cultural diversity.

Locals, both native-born and imported, are convinced they live in the greatest city in the world. Once you've experienced it for yourself, I think you will agree. ■



Connect to Manchester with codeshare partners KLM from Amsterdam, and Air France from Paris. Jet Airways also operates daily flights to London; Manchester is four hours away.

QUICK FACTS

GETTING AROUND

The quickest way to get around wider Manchester is by tram – £5 for an adult.

ACCOMMODATION

The Lowry is Manchester's popular five-star hotel and is favoured by visiting football teams and pop stars. There are plenty of other options also available.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.visitmanchester.com