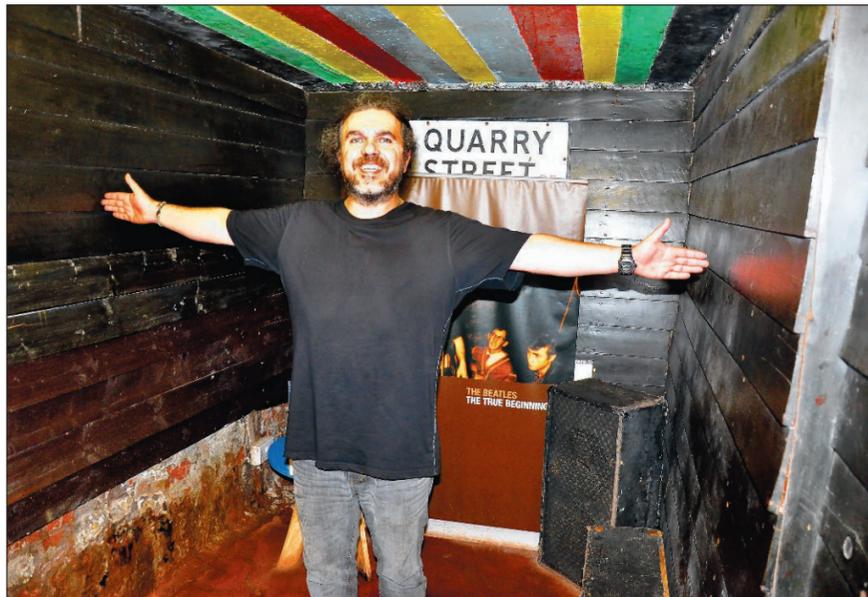


# Where it all began

A visit to Liverpool brings Beatles fans back to their roots



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Roag Best, younger brother of former Beatles drummer Pete Best, gives tours of the Casbah Coffee Club that his mother created in the basement of their home.

## Liverpool

**Getting there:** Liverpool is served by John Lennon Airport. Virgin Trains run from London's Euston station to Liverpool Lime Street station in a little more than two hours.

**Where to stay:** Hard Days Night Hotel, Central Building, 41 N. John St., 110-room Beatles-theme hotel just off Mathew Street, from \$150, [harddaysnighthotel.com](http://harddaysnighthotel.com)

**Where to eat:** Philharmonic Dining Rooms, 36 Hope St., pub in the style of a 19th-century gentlemen's club was a favorite of John Lennon, [nicholsonspubs.co.uk/thephilharmonicdiningrooms/liverpool/](http://nicholsonspubs.co.uk/thephilharmonicdiningrooms/liverpool/)

**Casbah Coffee Club:** 8 Haymans Green, West Derby Village, tours about \$25 to \$40, [petebest.com/casbah-coffee-club.aspx](http://petebest.com/casbah-coffee-club.aspx)

**Cavern Club:** 10 Mathew St., live performances on two stages, including "Saturday With the Cavern Club Beatles" about \$30, [cavernclub.org](http://cavernclub.org)

**Beatles Childhood Homes:** National Trust, nonmembers pay about \$37 adults, \$12 kids, [nationaltrust.org.uk/beatles-childhood-homes](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/beatles-childhood-homes)

**Magical Mystery Tour:** about \$28, [cavernclub.org](http://cavernclub.org)

**The Beatles Story:** Two locations: Albert Dock and Mersey Ferry Pier Head; admission packages range from \$5 to \$26, [beatlesstory.com](http://beatlesstory.com)

**Info:** [visittiverpool.com](http://visittiverpool.com) or [visitengland.com](http://visitengland.com)

By Kathy Rodeghier

Daily Herald Correspondent

LIVERPOOL, England — They were just another boy band, a gaggle of teenagers with too much energy. They'd meet in the basement of a friend's suburban home, horsing around and playing guitar. One mischievously began carving his name on a wood wall board — J-O-H — before being smacked in the head by the friend's mom. He'd finish later, adding the final "N."

Graffiti etched by John Lennon is but one of the curiosities you'll see on tours of the Casbah Coffee Club where the band that became the Beatles got its start in 1959. The friend was former Beatles drummer Pete Best and the mom their first manager, Mona Best, who opened the coffeehouse to give the boys a place to play.

Paul McCartney painted the ceiling of one room in a rainbow of colors using cans of leftover paint, says Roag Best, Pete's much younger brother and a Casbah tour guide. It was here, in a space so tiny you can extend your arms and touch both walls, that they set up their equipment.

They were the Quarrymen then, and they weren't very good.

But when the boys returned from Hamburg, Germany, where they played for hours night after night, the band had changed. Customers at the Casbah didn't

expect much, says Best. In fact, they were annoyed that such a mediocre band, now called the Beatles, had been booked. But they played their first song and the mood shifted. As word spread, crowds began pouring into the club's Spiderweb room where Lennon scratched more graffiti on its red ceiling: "John — I'm back."

## Casbah to the Cavern

The Beatles drew as many as 1,500 people to the Casbah, dangerously crowding the basement and spilling onto the lawn. Mona Best booked them into larger dance halls around Liverpool and finally convinced the owners of the

Cavern Club, who preferred jazz over the new rock sound, to give them a chance.

The Cavern was a teenage hangout in the basement of an old fruit warehouse. It was here that Brian Epstein first heard the Beatles and took over as their manager, putting them on the road to stardom.

From 1961 to 1963, the Beatles performed

The Magical Mystery Tour stops at Penny Lane for a photo op.

COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Graffiti covers the concrete pillars at the entrance to the former Strawberry Field children's home.



at the Cavern 292 times, earning just 5 British pounds (about \$8) at the beginning. Crowds generated so much heat in the humid basement, which had no air conditioning, that condensation ran down the walls, shorting out the equipment.

The Cavern Club was torn down and has since been rebuilt with the same bricks on part of its original site on Mathew Street, a walkway lined with bars and restaurants. The club has two stages. A Beatles tribute band plays most Saturday nights.

Outside, a Wall of Fame has bricks inscribed with more than 1,800 names of artists who have performed here, among them Jimi Hendrix, Elton John, The Who, Queen and Adele. A life-size statue of Lennon stands alongside. Figures of all four Beatles perch on the second-story edifice of the Beatles-themed Hard Days Night Hotel around the corner.

## Touring boyhood homes

What was it about these Liverpool boys that singled them out, sending them to the States and "The Ed Sullivan Show" 50 years ago? Visitors may get a hint on the National Trust Beatles Childhood Homes Tour that takes them inside Lennon's and McCartney's homes. Both are small, so tours often book up months in advance.

Lennon lived with his Aunt Mimi and Uncle George from age 5 to 23 in a duplex with a cozy garden. He cut the grass with a manual mower to earn pocket money, says tour guide Paula Fay. From his tree house John would peer over the garden wall to the Salvation Army children's home, Strawberry Field. He'd climb the wall to fool around with the kids and was scolded by Aunt Mimi, to which he'd reply: "They won't hang me for it."

The lyrics to "Strawberry Fields Forever" contain the phrases "in my tree" and "nothing to get hung about," reminds Fay. "John would have more than one meaning in a song lyric."

Inside the home, visitors step into John's bedroom where pictures of Elvis and Brigitte Bardot hang above a twin bed. They linger in the living room where he'd practice music with McCartney and George Harrison.

Aunt Mimi didn't care for either boy. Fay says Mimi also didn't like John spending so much time on music, telling him: "The guitar is all right as a hobby, John, but you'll never make a living at it."

At McCartney's house there was no domineering matriarch, so the boys practiced there more often. When Paul was 14 his mother, Mary, died of breast cancer and his father, Jim, took over raising him and his brother, Michael. "My dad was very good about letting us rehearse here," says McCartney on an audio that plays during tours of the home.

The family was always musical, says guide Sylvia Hall. Dad played piano by ear and the family sang in harmony, a talent Paul brought to the band.

"Love Me Do" and "When I'm 64" were written here, says Hall. When the boys were working on "She Loves



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Faces of the Fab Four appear at the entrance to one of the performance rooms inside the Cavern Club in Liverpool. A Beatles tribute band plays on Saturday nights.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

A young John Lennon lived in a modest home with his Aunt Mimi and Uncle George. In his bedroom, the teenager often wrote music and made drawings.

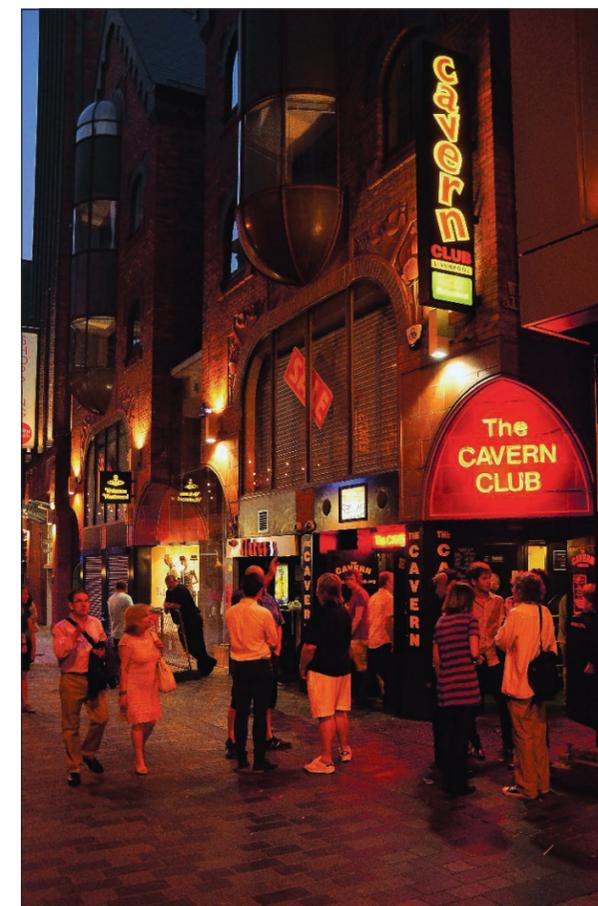
You," McCartney's dad suggested they change the lyrics from "Yes, yes, yes" to "Yeah, yeah, yeah." The 1963 single with its catchy refrain became a hit.

Though McCartney's dad was supportive of the band, he was strict. In the backyard, Hall points to a red drainpipe on the exterior of the house. When Paul missed curfew, dad would lock him out and he'd shimmy up the pipe and climb into a second-story window.

## Finding the Beatles' back story

The childhood homes of Harrison and Ringo Starr are not open to the public, but you'll pass them by bus if you book the Magical Mystery Tour of Liverpool's

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COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

The Cavern Club on pedestrian Mathew Street is most famous for the Beatles, but other notable performers have gone on-stage there, including Jimi Hendrix and Elton John.

Beatles sights.

En route, tour guide Neil Brannan says the musical collaboration that made rock history began in the summer of 1957 when a mutual friend introduced McCartney to Lennon, then nearly 17, at a church social where his Quarrymen were performing. John invited him to join the band, but Paul couldn't take him up on the offer until he returned from scout camp. Later, Paul asked John to allow George, then 14, to join.

The tour bus passes the Anglican cathedral where Paul auditioned for a spot in the choir at age 11 — and was rejected because he couldn't read music. It makes a stop at the red iron gates supported by graffiti-covered pillars outside the former grounds of Strawberry Field.

More details of the Beatles' rise are told at The Beatles Story, a museum and visitor attraction in two Liverpool locations, the historic Albert Dock and the pier for the ferry across the Mersey River. Exhibits explain how the Beatles' sound evolved from skiffle, a mix of folk, jazz



COURTESY OF NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/DENNIS GILBERT

**In the kitchen of his boyhood home, John Lennon's Aunt Mimi would cook him his favorite meal of egg and chips washed down with a cup of tea.**

and blues popular in America and adopted by British kids in the 1950s.

Other bits of trivia can be unearthed here. The Beatles adopted their mop hairstyle while in Hamburg. George was deported from Hamburg because he was too young to get a work permit and had entered Germany illegally. Ringo Starr replaced Pete Best as drummer, a move still shrouded in mystery. When the jet carrying the

Beatles landed in New York in 1964 on their first trip to America, the screams were so loud onlookers thought the sound was a malfunction in the jet's engines.

### **Bringing big bucks to Liverpool**

Liverpool remains a lively city. "People come here with low expectations and are surprised by the shopping, restaurants and attractions," says Phil Coppel, a Blue Badge tour guide and Beatles expert. It was always an important port city, but international tourism didn't pick up until the Beatles became famous. Interest kicked off after Lennon's death in 1980, he says.

Not everyone recognized the potential the Beatles brought to the city. In a debate about development in the 1970s, Coppel recalls a councilman saying, "What have the Beatles ever done for Liverpool?"

Arguably the most popular rock band in history, the Beatles now bring three million people a year to Liverpool.

• *Information for this article was gathered during a research trip sponsored by Visit Liverpool and Visit England.*