



WHY GO?

Innovative, entrepreneurial, exciting – the city that was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution is still pushing boundaries today. Award-winning museums and entertainment venues are in abundance, and if you're after some retail therapy you won't be disappointed – Manchester is the ultimate shopping destination.

GETTING THERE

The majority of visitors to Manchester will arrive by car, bus or train, although the city is served by an airport, approximately 10 miles from the city centre. UK domestic flights are available from Aberdeen, Belfast City, Belfast International, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow International, Inverness, London Gatwick, London Heathrow, Newquay, Norwich, Plymouth and Southampton. For details on how to get from the airport to the city centre, see <http://www.manchesterairport.co.uk/manweb.nsf/Content/ToAndFromAirport>.

Most major cities in the UK have direct train services into Manchester. Virgin Trains operate trains from London (journey time just over two hours). First TransPennine Express operates direct train services into Manchester from the north of England, as well as to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

GETTING AROUND

Much of the action happens right in the city centre, and as there's plenty of good signposting pointing out the main landmarks and places of

Manchester

Whether you're into art, culture, music, science, shopping or sport – there's something for everyone in this vibrant city

interest, you shouldn't get lost. However, if you don't want to walk, make the most of the Metroshuttle, a free bus service that connects all the main train stations, central shopping areas and museums.

Manchester's tram system, Metrolink, runs through the city centre connecting railway stations and attractions. See www.metrolink.co.uk/. For bus info, log on to www.gmppte.com/.

WHAT TO SEE AND DO

■ The Trafford Centre

☎ 0161 749 1717

www.traffordcentre.co.uk

If you feel the need for some retail therapy, you'll be spoilt for choice in Manchester. High on any shopping fan's agenda should be a trip to the Trafford Centre, home to over 230 stores – and it's open every weekday until 10pm. Only down point is that it's a bit of a trek from the city centre (we found the easiest option was the 250 bus service). In the middle of town you'll find Selfridges and Harvey Nichols, as well as plenty of familiar high-street shops.

TIP Looking a gift that's a little bit different? Visit the Craft and Design Centre in the city's Northern Quarter. A former Victorian fish market, here you'll find two floors of studios selling jewellery, paintings, textiles and ceramics.

■ Manchester Cathedral

www.manchestercathedral.org/

There are plenty of interesting buildings around the city centre, all worth popping into. Manchester Cathedral and its Visitor Centre are close to the main hub of shops, so a good place to escape the crowds. Make sure you look out for the Angel Stone, next to the choir space – it's believed to be a fragment from a Saxon church. **TIP** Even if you've no plans to go to the theatre, look inside the Royal Exchange and admire its grand Great Hall (www.royalexchangetheatre.org.uk/page.aspx).

■ The Lowry

☎ 0870 787 5780

www.thelowry.com

An impressive collection of paintings and drawings by artist LS Lowry are on display in the Lowry Galleries, situated in The Lowry at Salford Quays (travel 15 mins by Metrolink then a 10-min walk, or a £9 taxi journey from the city centre). Admission is free, but a £3 donation is requested. **TIP** Nearby is the Lowry Outlet Mall, where you can enjoy discounts of up to 50% off high street prices. The Mall also has a seven-screen cinema.

■ Imperial War Museum North

☎ 0161 836 4000

<http://north.iwm.org.uk/>

While at The Lowry, pop over the bridge to the excellent war museum. Through interactive and well-planned displays, you'll see how people's lives have been affected by war and conflict. An additional Prisoners of War exhibition is on until 3 January 2010. Admission is free.

TIP Car parking at the museum is £4. If you are travelling by car, park at the Lowry Outlet Mall, where customers get four hours free parking.

■ Chill Factor

☎ 0161 749 2222

www.chillfactore.com

You can ski and snowboard all-year round in Manchester. And thrill-seekers can get an adrenaline rush careering along the icy luge slide or taking a trip down the tube track. Whatever takes your fancy, wrap up warm. Save money by visiting on weekdays before 6pm.

TIP Football fans may also be interested in the Manchester United Museum and Tour – check out www.visitmanchester.com. We found an offer for a half-price entry with every full paying adult.

■ Museum of Science and Industry

☎ 0161 832 2244

www.mosi.org.uk

Located on the site of the world's oldest surviving

passenger railway station in Castlefield, this museum will appeal to visitors of all ages. With five buildings to explore, you'll learn much about Manchester's industrial and scientific past. If time is tight, look at the replica of 'Baby', the world's first stored-program computer, in the Main Building, then head off to the Air and Space Hall to see a Spitfire, Belvedere Helicopter and a 1954 Avro Shackleton.

■ Victoria Baths

www.victoriabaths.org.uk

If you watched BBC's *Restoration* programme back in 2003, you may recall seeing Manchester's Victoria Baths, a Grade II listed building in dire need of some tender loving care. Some £3.5million later, it's slowly being restored to its impressive original self, and now it's open to the public on the first Sunday of each month (until November). Adult £2.

■ The John Rylands Library

☎ 0161 306 0555

www.manchester.ac.uk/library

Built in the 1890s by Mrs Enriqueta Augustina Rylands in memory of her husband John, this library in Deansgate has the 'wow' factor both outside and in. An outstanding example of neo-Gothic architecture, the library houses one of the UK's greatest collections of printed books, manuscripts and archives – its treasures include the St John Fragment, the earliest known

piece of the New Testament in existence. Don't miss the historic Reading Room, which remains a place for study and research.

TIP The library is open daily to the public from 10am until 5pm, except Monday and Sunday when it opens at 12noon. Online – we paid €246 (£218).

GOOD PLACES TO EAT

■ The French at the Midland Hotel

☎ 0161 236 3333

www.qhotels.co.uk

If you yearn for old-fashioned glamour signalled by polished glassware and endless silver, you'll find it in the Midland's discreet belle époque dining room. Service is formal and very attentive (you'll be thanked repeatedly whether you enjoy it or not!), but you'll be treated to what could be described a royal feast. Dinner for two with wine £46.

■ Michael Caines at ABode

☎ 0161 200 5678

www.michaelcaines.com

This fine-dining restaurant in a low-lit basement offers real value for money at lunchtime. When we visited, a three-course grazing menu was available Mon-Sat, 12noon-2pm, for just £12.

TIP Visit the restaurant early evening and enjoy a two-course meal, between 6pm-7pm, for £14.95.

■ Gabriel's Kitchen

☎ 0161 276 0911

www.themoderncaterer.co.uk

Although a little bit out of the way, you'll enjoy good food at Peter Booth's university-district café, and also at his café at the nearby Whitworth Art Gallery. Kids get an inviting £5 meal, finishing with fruit salad or a nutty brownie. The latter will be devoured by adults too.

■ The Modern, Urbis

☎ 0161 605 8282

www.themodernmcr.co.uk

At the top of Manchester's museum of urban life, The Modern offers verve, cocktails and cooking with intent. Drinks in the upstairs bar are some of the finest in the city, and a menu dedicated to good local produce has serious appeal. The place has a nice buzz, so you shouldn't feel out of place on your own. Main courses between £10-£23 (food can also be served at the bar).

USEFUL WEBSITE

Find out more at www.visitmanchester.com, where you'll also find some special offers, including money off visitor attractions, shopping and meals out.



GOOD PLACES TO STAY

■ The Lowry Hotel

☎ 0161 827 4000

www.thelowryhotel.com/

The first five-star hotel in Manchester, this luxurious accommodation is located beside the River Irwell in the recently developed Chapel Wharf area and has easy access into the city centre. Locals assure us that the hotel is favoured by pop stars and celebs (we didn't see any), but everyone will feel like a star after a night in the modern, spacious rooms, tastefully decorated with neutral tones. Booking two months in advance for a Saturday in October, we found an online Leisure Package deal for £150, which includes breakfast, chocolate dipped strawberries in your room on arrival and complimentary use of the fitness suite, saunas and relaxation rooms.

■ Blue Rainbow Apartments

☎ 0161 236 6439

www.bluerainbowapartments.com

These serviced apartments are stylish,

luxurious - and refreshingly affordable. With their own fully-fitted Poggen Pohl kitchen, complete with fridge/freezer, dishwasher and washer/dryer, if you're watching your budget, then it's perfect for a self-catering break.

There's a decent sized living area too, with 42" TV and DVD player. We found Saver two-bedroom apartments available online for £84 per night, perfect for two couples who are happy to share facilities (all rooms have double beds).

TIP Don't worry about visiting the supermarket before you arrive – guests receive a welcome breakfast basket of bread, milk, jams and a selection of tea and coffee.

■ Premier Inn

www.premierinn.com

When *Which? Holiday* investigated budget chain hotels for our January 09 issue, the Premier Inns situated in Lower Mosley Street, Portland Street and Victoria Bridge Street were all found to be spotless. With offers regularly appearing on their website – booking two months ahead, we found family rooms for a

Saturday in October for £62 – this represents good value for money.

■ Old Trafford Lodge

☎ 0161 874 3333

www.oldtraffordlodgehotel.co.uk

If you're a cricket fan, you'll love a stay here – at a purpose-built, functional hotel beside Lancashire's test match ground. Book an Executive room (weekend rates are £59 per person per night, only £5 more expensive than a Standard room) and you'll get a balcony with a view over the pitch, perfect for watching all the cricketing action. Price includes continental breakfast and free car parking in the grounds.

TIP It's less than a 10-minute walk to Old Trafford football ground, so ideal if you're off to watch Manchester United too. However, on football weekends, you need to book a two-night stay.



For the full magazine report on Manchester, see p38 of the September 2009 issue of *Which? Holiday*