



Liverpool and Stavanger – European Capitals of Culture 2008

Liverpool and Stavanger, although over 800 km apart, will make their mark on the cultural map of Europe this year as they celebrate being the official 2008 European capitals of culture. Plays, concerts and exhibitions are among the events both cities plan as thousands of people visit the two port cities over the course of the year.

Each city is under the international spotlight for one year, giving them the chance to showcase their cultural life, raise their profile and transform their cultural image.

Since the launch of the capitals of culture programme in 1985, the European Parliament has played a role in deciding on the cities, giving its opinion on the merits of each application. MEPs on Parliament's Education and Culture Committee consider every application based on what the city can offer. As well debating the merits of individual bids, the committee can also hold public hearings.

Liverpool 08

Being crowned as the 2008 capital of culture is a recognition of the economic and cultural renaissance the city has undergone since the decline of traditional industries.

Liverpool's year as city of culture opened on 11 January when thousands gathered for a performance of "Liverpool the musical" featuring former Beatle Ringo Starr and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Over the next 12 months a series of events will celebrate the creativity of Liverpool and her people. February will see a series of lectures on Liverpool and a concert of Sir John Tavener's new Requiem in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral at the end of the month. The piece attempts to reconcile the world's warring religions through music.

The centrepiece of the theatre, dance and music events will be a concert at Anfield (home of Liverpool football club) on 1 June. The year also features book festivals, poetry readings and photography exhibits of the people of Liverpool.

The Beatles, UNESCO status

In 2004 the seafront at Liverpool was awarded World Heritage Status by the UN based on the city's history as a Maritime Mercantile city. Over the centuries the vast numbers of migrants - mainly Irish - and sailors who passed through the city have made it a religiously diverse city. It has also left a multicultural legacy with an estimated 60 different languages spoken by its 447,500 people. The city is also famous for the Beatles and two of Britain's most popular and successful football clubs Liverpool and Everton.

Stavanger – an open port

Norway – "the land of the midnight sun", fjords, glaciers, waterfalls and a perfect place to live coming first in the Global Peace Index and ranked second in the human development index. Stavanger has an unemployment rate of just 1% and is a wealthy town, having profited from the oil industry, shipping, fishing and timber.

Events in Stavanger centre around the concept of the "open port" with a free port of art and freedom of expression and new ideas. There will be workshops encouraging locals to create their own art and international artists will work with local artists. There will be events around architecture, literature, music and visual arts.

There will be a variety of artists from a range of countries including the South African Handspring Puppet Company, the Israeli dance company, the Belgian Muziektheater Transparant and the, Lithuanian Oskaras Koršunovas Theatre.

Visitors to Stavanger will also have the chance to enjoy:

- Fjords - the "world's best scenery"
- the windy wooden house of Norway
- its famous symphony orchestra
- the sardine canning museum and the oil museum