

4. the beatles' london

Though The Beatles were unquestionably a Liverpool band, London was their base from 1963 to 1970. John, Paul, George and Ringo relocated to the capital following the success of their first album *Please Please Me*, and became every bit as Metropolitan as they were Scouse. The band lived, worked and played in the districts around the Abbey Road studio where they recorded virtually all of their output. And, until their split, they were an integral part of London's legendary Swinging Sixties scene. This trip around The Beatles' capital haunts involves a couple of short walks in between bus journeys – the Soho and Mayfair streets that form much of their story are too narrow for double-deckers, and the Midas-like wealth the band accumulated meant they tended to reside in exclusive areas, well away from traffic.



Start point: St John's Wood tube

End point: Victoria tube

Duration: 3.5 hours

● Come out of **St John's Wood tube**, cross over the road, then turn left and walk down Wellington Road. At the hospital, turn right onto Circus Road then take the first left into **Cavendish Avenue**. Number seven, on the right, was Paul McCartney's home from 1966 onwards, and it was here that he wrote the songs *Yellow Submarine*, *Penny Lane* and *Hello Goodbye*, among others. He chose to live in this quiet road because of its proximity to The Beatles' recording studio, and you can recreate his walk to work by returning to Circus Road, turning left and then right up Grove End Road. After a few metres, this becomes **Abbey Road** – instantly recognisable from the zebra crossing over which the band strode on the cover of their penultimate album. EMI's **Abbey Road Studios**, in which The Beatles first auditioned for producer George Martin in 1962 and used to record almost all of their songs, is on the left.

● Walk up the opposite side of the road from the recording studio and catch the southbound **139** or **189** bus from the **Marlborough Place** stop. As the bus heads onto Baker Street, it passes the **former Apple Boutique** at number 94 on the left. A 'beautiful place for beautiful people to buy beautiful things' according to Paul McCartney, this ill-fated store – which is now a branch of Reed recruitment consultants, but was once covered in a lurid psychedelic mural – was opened by The Beatles in December 1967. It closed six months later after the band's laid-back approach to security led to widespread shoplifting and huge financial losses.

● Get off the bus at the **George Street** stop and catch the southbound **13**. As the bus leaves Baker Street

and enters Portman Square, look left down Fitzhardinge Street, which has a branch of Barclays Bank on the corner. The modern, pale-brown building on the edge of Manchester Square is built on the spot of **EMI's former headquarters**. It was on the staircase here that The Beatles' famous 'red' and 'blue' covers (the ones in which the band looks down from a balcony) were taken in 1962 and 1969.

● As the 13 bus turns into Regent Street, you can see the Art Deco façade of **Broadcasting House** on the left. The Beatles recorded more than 50 radio programmes for the BBC in this iconic building as they cemented their reputation as the most exciting band of the early 1960s. The neoclassical building that now houses the Believe It Or Not Museum – directly in front of you as the bus nears the bottom of Regent Street – was once the **London Pavilion cinema**. It was here that the films *A Hard Day's Night*, *Help!* and *Yellow Submarine* all premiered, drawing huge, traffic-stopping crowds, which filled Piccadilly Circus. Look left to see **The Prince of Wales Theatre** as the bus turns down Haymarket. This was where John Lennon infamously entreated the royal family to 'rattle your jewellery' during the 1963 Royal Variety Performance.

● Get off the bus at the **Haymarket** stop, cross the road and walk along Charles II Street. Go through St James's Square, onto King Street and turn right up Duke Street St James's. **Mason's Yard** – the entrance to which is tucked away on the right just before The Chequers pub – was the home of the Scotch of St James club, in which The Beatles would drink and socialise with fellow musicians and other 1960s scenesters. Mason's Yard is most famous, though, as the place in which John Lennon first met Yoko Ono at an exhibition of her work in November 1966. **The Indica Gallery**, which hosted the show, was at number six.

● Continue on foot up Duke Street St James's. At the top, turn right onto Piccadilly, cross the road and head up Sackville Street. Bear left at the end of the road and turn right into **Savile Row**. This is where Apple – the record company set up by The Beatles – had its offices at number three. It was on the rooftop here that the band played live together for the last time in 1969 – blasting out *Get Back* to a bemused crowd on the street below.

● Carry on walking up Savile Row, turn right into New Burlington Street and cross busy Regent Street. Go down narrow Tenison Court directly opposite and you will emerge in front of number nine **Kingly Street**, once home to the Bag O'Nails club – a favourite drinking den of The Beatles. As the blue plaque inside the doorframe states, this is where Paul McCartney – who had his own VIP table at the venue – first met wife-to-be Linda Eastman at a gig.

● Turn right here, then left onto Beak Street. Walk right to the end and turn left onto Lexington Street. Go right at **Broadwick Street** and walk towards The Blue Posts pub. The railings-surrounded public toilets on the left were used in a 1966 *Not Only... But Also* sketch in which John Lennon played a doorman guarding 'London's most fashionable lavatory' – and wore his trademark wire-framed glasses publicly for the first time.

● Continue along Broadwick Street, cross Wardour Street and bear left into needle-thin alleyway **St Anne's Court**. As well as being the scene of The Beatles' first London gig at the long-gone Blue Gardenia club – which may or may not have been at number 20 (no one seems to remember) – this tiny strip was also home to **Trident Studios**. Located at number 17, this then-state-of-the-art facility was where the band recorded the songs *Hey Jude*, *Martha My Dear* and *Dear Prudence*, among others, while they were waiting for EMI to upgrade the technology at Abbey Road.

● At the end of St Anne's Court, turn left and walk up Dean Street until you emerge on Oxford Street. Turn left, walk to the **Wardour Street** bus stop and catch the westbound **25**. Just before it reaches Oxford Circus tube, the bus passes across the top of Argyll Street. The entrance to **The London Palladium**, at which The Beatles performed for a live TV show in October 1963, can be seen on the left. The size of the crowd that filled Argyll Street that evening and the chaotic scenes that followed led to the first use of the term 'Beatlemania' in the morning newspapers.

● When the 25 bus terminates on **Holles Street**, walk onwards to Cavendish Square and bear left around it. Turn left at Wigmore Street and then right up **Wimpole Street**. Walk on for a few minutes and you will find yourself outside number 57, the house belonging to Paul McCartney's actress girlfriend Jane Asher that he moved into in 1964. *Yesterday* was written upstairs, while the basement is where McCartney and John Lennon worked on *I Want To Hold Your Hand*.

● Retrace your steps down Wimpole Street and turn right onto New Cavendish Street. Follow this to

Marylebone High Street, then bear left across the road and continue along George Street for around 10 minutes before turning right into **Montagu Square**. Number 34, in the far corner, is where John Lennon lived with Yoko Ono after the collapse of his first marriage. It was at this property, owned by Ringo Starr, that the couple were arrested for marijuana possession in 1968.

● Walk straight up Upper Montagu Street from John and Yoko's flat and cross busy Marylebone Road. Bear left towards **Marylebone Station**, walk up Great Central Street and catch the southbound **2** bus from outside the railway terminus. This takes you past the pillared façade of **Marylebone Registry Office**, where Paul McCartney married Linda Eastman in 1969, on the right. Stay on the bus till the **Marble Arch Station** stop.

● Continue on foot down Park Lane for a few seconds and turn left into **Green Street**. At the far end, on the right, is number 57 in which all four Beatles lived together when they moved to London in 1963. Though they soon went their separate ways – Paul McCartney to Wimpole Street with Jane Asher, John Lennon and his wife Cynthia to a now-demolished building in West London, George Harrison and Ringo Starr to Knightsbridge – this was the band's base while they first got to know the capital. Less than two years later, only Paul remained in London; the other three preferring the relative anonymity of the Surrey countryside.

● Return to the **Marble Arch Station** bus stop and catch the southbound **73** to **Victoria Station**, which takes you along the eastern edge of **Hyde Park** – where the autumnal cover of the *Beatles For Sale* album was shot. As the bus continues down Park Lane, it passes **The London Hilton on Park Lane** on the left. This hotel is where transcendental meditation guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi held a 1967 lecture that all four Beatles attended. Impressed by his vision, they later accompanied him to a meditation retreat in Rishikesh, India – an intensely creative period that saw the band write the majority of songs for *The Beatles*, the double LP more commonly known as the *White Album*.

● As the 73 rounds the arch at Duke of Wellington Place and heads along the edge of the gardens of **Buckingham Palace** – where The Beatles received their MBEs from the Queen in 1965 – look to the right for a glimpse of **Chapel Street**. This smart Belgravia enclave is where the band's manager Brian Epstein lived at number 24. Depressed and increasingly reliant on drugs (both prescription and recreational), he died here from an accidental overdose in August 1967, plunging The Beatles into an internal power struggle that led to their implosion a couple of years later.