

10 of the best free festivals in the UK

Music: Summer Solstice Asian Music festival, Leeds, West Yorkshire



📷 On this year's bill is santoor player Kaviraj Singh. Photograph: Dilrani Kaur

[Leeds 2023](#) is a year-long programme of cultural events. It includes this music festival: a triple celebration in the Corn Exchange to mark the longest day of summer, World Music Day and International Day of Yoga. The bill features the Shah-e-Mardan qawwali ensemble (playing Sufi devotional music); the American-Afghan musician Qais Essar, who plays the rabab; the Scotland-based sarangi player Sardar Satwinder Pal Singh; the santoor player Kaviraj Singh; and the singer Anamika Chowdhury.

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Marching on Together: Reboot of world famous Leeds United song set for release

Leeds United fans could soon stop singing Marching On Together and instead begin Marching On (Together) after a real-life school of rock created a new anthem to celebrate Leeds 2023 City of Culture. ...



Homebuyers feel the lure of Leeds, Yorkshire's unofficial 'city of culture'

A collaboration of the human spirit

Singer Corinne Bailey Rae and award-winning choreographer Sharon Watson have collaborated on a project for Leeds 2023. Duncan Seaman reports.

LEEDS 2023 has very much been a year for collaborations between artists and communities across the city. It's a spirit that's embodied in *Seeds, Dreams and Constellations*, a new work from singer-songwriter Corinne Bailey Rae and Sharon Watson, principal of the Northern School of Contemporary Dance.

Featuring a cast of 33 dancers drawn from three Leeds-based companies, Watson Dance Project, Verve and Mobius Dance, choreographed by Watson, with live music for choir and musicians composed by Bailey Rae, it's a contemporary dance piece that explores the "infinite potential of the human spirit".

Speaking to *The Yorkshire Post* via video shortly before preview night, Watson, the widely renowned former artistic director of Phoenix Dance Theatre, reports that rehearsals have been going well "considering the timescale is challenging, and there's a lot of bodies and ideas - it's just putting all of that together - but you wouldn't do it unless it was driving you and taxing you in a creative way, so it's exciting".

"For me it's been interesting to see how a work of this scale goes together," says Bailey Rae. "Sharon is unique in how she arranges these dancers, it seems to be in your head but also you're moulding, you're seeing them move and then you're realigning them into your dream to what they're doing, it seems to me. That's fascinating to see and that's really inspired me with how I work with the choir. I've written lots of original pieces and the choir are a mixture of people who are from the Leeds Conservatoire and also people who are emerging young artists from Leeds. Some of them have come through a connection with Christella Litras."



Watson cites composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham's experiments with improvisation. "You had a small number of rules at work so we didn't lose our focus, but the element of freedom is absolutely with the context of the concept, and that for us is exciting because it will never

be the same on any one night," she says. The piece questions our place in the cosmos and to what extent we can influence the future or reimagine the past. Watson says: "For me, the piece has got two parallel journeys going on. "When Corinne and I got together we had a real strong sense that our history, our place in the city, our careers, our journeys have been influential in how we are thinking in that moment in time. "There was a bit of research that we did on the journey, our cultural journey and

ability to build your own constellations, to build your own dreams, and to really think what that feels like, who do you have in your space and what do you leave behind. There's a lot of that for me within the journey that I've taken and I'm inspired by some of the conversations. It's a beautiful experience to have lived through."



ON A JOURNEY: *Seeds, Dreams and Constellations* is a contemporary dance piece by Corinne Bailey Rae and Sharon Watson, inset.

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Comment: Page 12.

Seeds, Dreams and Constellations runs at Riley Theatre, Leeds from Thursday, May 25 to Saturday, May 27.

Key track: Put Your Records On.

Leeds musicians hit a high note



Corinne Bailey Rae

Leeds native Corinne Bailey Rae took the world by storm with the release of *Put Your Records On* in 2006 and her blend of soul and jazz have been a big draw since. She remains a big fan of all things Leeds and performed during the opening of Leeds 2023.



A self-made celebration

UK | When its bid to be European Capital of Culture was thwarted by Brexit, Leeds decided to go ahead anyway. Andrew Martin finds a city in high spirits

where you don't need a car to get around". As I climbed to the Queen's Head, which had overlooked the square since the 1770s, I found that it had been made over during the pandemic closure. The lights to project and cover this before, an Art Deco aesthetic infused. I walked to Kirkgate Market, which still has the feeling, cold air of a Victorian railway station is good thing, in my mind you can still see pictures, steel girders and Victorian stonework but there are also new stalls labelled Vietnamese Street Food and Istanbul Kitchen. Over the road are the Victorian arcades, collectively called Victoria



Quarter. In the 1970s, the ceiling tiles depicting concepts and also symbols of plenty seemed out of step with the shops below – concrete, low-key affairs, seemingly too distant enough to operate in the open air. One arcade housed a doll's hospital, I remember. Today, the street is high-end. It has been growing increasingly so since 2006, when Harvey Nichols opened its first store outside London in the Victoria Quarter, prompting Leeds to be dubbed the "Empire of the North" in the national city at a time, aviation (particularly legal and financial) was reintegrating the fabric of industry.

I wandered over to Leeds Art Gallery, where the great achievement for me (I'm ashamed to admit) is the glittery Tiled Hall 006, opened in 2004 as a reading room and reinforcement of a Turkish bath. This is the gallery itself was given over to paintings by young local artists, part of Leeds 2023, and it was all very vibrant and challenging but some of my favourite depictions of 20th and 21st-century Leeds had to be made way, as I took a walk north to what I think of as Leeds' secret gallery, in the university.

I was following the signs for "art and the" shared because Leeds has (has, all bearing those student population statistics) but my target was the main

gateway of the main university, where campus is as big as a small town. The Parkhouse is home to the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, established through the renovation of that complex, Burton being the son of Postage Burton, founder of the following firm that made many of Britain's found cells.

Some of my favourite Yorkshire scenes were on the wall, including a painting by Warwick de Saussons, who taught at Leeds College of Art and spent his childhood in the city in the 1950s. It shows a classic Leeds pub called Whitebeck's three bar street, a sunny light filtering through bottles of drink. The "rainwater, poetic" composition, according to the captions, "shows the influence of Cézanne".

About a dozen later, I was that same carefully illuminated pub, made well-known by progress ceramics and stained glass. I was surrounded by students having what I think they call "pre-drinks", early evening drinks before more drinks later. Leeds – which is known on some – pub evenings, or vice versa, some city pubs try to give a hint by advertising "happy hour: pre-drinks". It had been occurring to me, as I walked through Leeds – passing the fireground behind the colossal Town Hall, and the other one in front of it – that while the city has been greatly re-imagined, it has not necessarily been reinvented. I had dropped in to Leeds City Museum on Cookridge Street, where the main gallery re-created to the sound of David Bowie's "The Jean Genie", in commemoration of a gig he played 30 years ago at the Leeds

the signs advertising Leeds 2023 proclaimed: "This town is living and you're the bottles".

Quitting Whitebeck's, I wandered south towards the river, which I never would have done in the 1970s. Back then, it was a mass of derelict warehouses on which the rest of the city seemed to have turned its back. Today, there is a south exit from the railway station, leading to the completion of the regenerated riverside, Granary Wharf. Here three towers have sprouted in a self-renewing version of standard Leeds and back one houses the DoubleTree by Hilton hotel, the other two apartments blocks, and there are bars and shops everywhere.

Here, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal meets the Aire, and there frequently self-renewing new sparkle like a water feature. Further east on the north bank are The Calls, the old docks. The early Victorian back-to-back seems to have been given a good scrub but not at the expense of its historic atmosphere.

Revisiting the renovation of the main town, I walked to the new yard, an industrial site and an art gallery, says, I ate an excellent meal involving something that would have been available in 1970s Leeds, grilled sea bass, accompanied by things that wouldn't have been available then, pasta, beetroot, yeast, and potatoes, my glass of red wine.

My walk tipped me off about a good place for a stopover, the Director's Club. When I had never heard of it, he said, "It's the whole point." The name, what my preference is that the Director's Club is a speaking, and there are several of these in Leeds, reflecting an American big city swagger, with its high rises, its love of cocktails and the business, among its wealthier and older men, for long double-breasted suits.

The next morning, I crossed the river again, to The Station, a contemporary art gallery housed in a building that was once the grand Hotel Tilly's Brewery. The spacey architecture and architecture is meant to be making a statement about the city's growth and its future.

Later, I walked a couple of miles south along the canal (meeting an error that there are four dog walkers along the way, all of whom, this being Yorkshire, said hello). My destination was the Leeds Industrial Museum, in what was once Anstley Mills, the world's largest wool mill. The museum is really a cluster of houses, from various eras and styles, some modern, some old, and some of the houses are still in use, and descriptions of how they were built and how they were used.

It is through the museum's website, I want to indulge in the re-creation of the past so familiar to northern towns. It is easier to visit in Leeds than most. In Leeds, it seems to me, the best there are the present ones.

Leeds' speakerises reflect an American big-city swagger, with its high rises and love of cocktails

Club is a speaking, and there are several of these in Leeds, reflecting an American big city swagger, with its high rises, its love of cocktails and the business, among its wealthier and older men, for long double-breasted suits.

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FT FINANCIAL TIMES

In an article entitled "Leeds: City of Contrasts", for the October 1933 edition of The Architectural Review, John Betjeman wrote: "Leeds does not attract tourists. There is not even a guide-book to the city." Leeds, after all, was a place with "little use for aesthetics", where "rain always seems to be falling".

Seventy years on, Leeds has found a use for aesthetics: for a bout of self-celebration. The city has been itching to have a party for a while. Britain was due to have a European Capital of Culture in 2023 and Leeds had its eye on the prize, but Brexit (which Leeds voted against) scuppered that. Leeds also made the shortlist for hosting the Eurovision Song Contest, only to be pipped by Liverpool.

So the city anointed itself, hence *Leeds 2023*, "a bold and imaginative Year of Culture packed with creativity. In partnership with world class creatives, homegrown talent, local communities and international arts organisations, together we're creating a celebration that's about Leeds, for Leeds, by Leeds."

So much for a lack of aesthetics, and we'll be coming to "does not attract tourists" in a minute. What about the constant rain? Perhaps Leeds is implicitly acknowledging that with a street art strand of Leeds 2023 called "A city less grey".

When I visited Leeds from my home city of York in the 1970s, it could have done with being less grey. The "city of a thousand trades", but principally wool, was losing out to foreign competition. It seemed characteristic that Leeds specialised in "heavy wool". I was once told that the dark river Aire in Leeds powered water wheels not by being a fast, sprightly thing, but by "sheer weight of water". And you went to Leeds for "heavy" reasons: to buy a suit for a job interview or (more likely) a funeral; to take out insurance or consult a lawyer.

Andrew Martin's latest book is 'Yorkshire Then and Now' (Dorset, £20). He was a guest of York's Leeds (with his usual) and the Queen's Head (the Leeds 2023)

In a reinvigorated Leeds, a summer of celebrations is just beginning

When its bid to be European Capital of Culture was thwarted by Brexit, the city decided to anoint itself and start partying anyway



Leeds perpetuated many of the aesthetic solecisms of the time. It had sold the air rights over its railway station. It was full of multistorey car parks and actually boasted of being "the motorway city". Sumptuous Victorian buildings were knocked down in the centre, especially in Park Row. Kirkgate Market ("the largest indoor market in the world") survived, but rain always did seem to be sliding over its glass roof, and it resembled a museum of

Yorkshireness even in the 1970s, seemingly full of glum, toothless pensioners dunking slices of Battenberg cake in stewed tea or eating Yorkshire pudding and gravy as a main course.

It was always a relief to get back to pretty, pedestrianised, tourist-endorsed York, which, in the most recent reliable (pre-Covid) rankings by Visit Britain of the top-20 most popular cities among foreign visitors for overnight stays, stands at number 14.

But Leeds stands at number 13, whereas in 1999, it was not in the top 20. York does better in the latest figures for domestic visitors, coming in at number seven; but Leeds is at number six. These latter figures do include business trips, and Leeds is a commercial and industrial centre in a way that York is not. Still, things have certainly changed since the days when, as a spokesperson for Visit Leeds told me, "you came here for a look around the shops, then went home for your tea".

Yorkshire's city of culture

UK property | Leeds is prized by
homebuyers for its arts, industry
and strong identity. By *Liz Rowlinson*

Last year, Elliot Rice and his wife Carla bought a four-bedroom former council house in the Leeds suburb of Meanwood for £29,000 over the asking price of £495,000.

"Houses don't come on the market very often so when on my daily dog walk I saw a 'for sale' sign suddenly appear on our dream home we put a letter through the door with an offer," says Elliot, who works in medical software. "We discussed moving away but we love Leeds and have built a life here."

As an alumnus of Leeds University, Rice is among the high number of graduates of the city's four universities who stay (it has a graduate retention rate of 39 per cent, fifth highest in the UK) or move back after working elsewhere.

Sometimes overshadowed by its northern England neighbours Manchester and Liverpool, Leeds is nevertheless an important hub: by employee numbers, it's the third-biggest city in the UK for legal services; and it has the third-highest number of start-ups. The health sector is a big employer too, with Leeds being home to NHS Digital and four out of five national NHS offices. It's prized for its easy access to the Yorkshire Dales and Peak District. And those working locally, like the Rices, are less affected by the government's decision to scrap the eastern leg of the HS2, the high-speed rail link that will connect London with the West Midlands and Manchester but now not with Sheffield and Leeds.

The suburbs – especially those north-west of the city – are popular with

upsizing professional buyers. They will often rent first in the centre, where build-to-rent schemes and purpose-built student accommodation are prevalent. Only 7 per cent of the properties sold in Leeds so far this year cost more than £500,000, according to Hamptons using Office for National Statistics data, yet houses in the most popular suburbs can still be the subject of bidding wars.

Prime suburbs include Headingley, Horsforth, Rawdon (especially its Cragg Wood conservation area), where detached houses have sold recently for more than £1mn, according to Simon Wright of Carter Jonas.

"The new [10-minute] train link from Apperley Bridge station into central Leeds, and the regeneration of Kirkstall Forge [an urban district on a former industrial site] have increased the appeal of this area," he says.

In other popular pockets, properties are selling for over the asking price. These include Bramhope, Far Headingley, Meanwood and Chapel Allerton. The latter two are in LS7, the Leeds postcode with the highest proportion of homes on the market sold subject to contract or under offer, at 61 per cent, according to data company PropCast.

(Above) Luxury waterfront properties at Leeds Dock; a two-bedroom converted gatehouse in Scarcroft, £360,000, through North Residential
Clare Louise Jackson / Shutterstock

Sales have slowed since last September's "mini" Budget, says Emma Winterhalder of agent Dacre Son & Hartley. But while more asking prices are being reduced, some homes are still going to best and final offers. "We just sold a five-bedroom house in Meanwood for £400,000 that was on sale at £365,000,

It's an exciting place to live. The countryside is within 10 minutes. There's a great underbelly of creativity'



and in Far Headingley a three-bedroom 1930s semi at £350,000 was agreed at £370,000," she says.

Proximity to Leeds Beckett University, Meanwood Park and schools helps explain Far Headingley's demand, while neighbouring Meanwood and Weetwood are near several parks.

Such was their desire to stay near the park and primary school that Amanda, who did not wish to give her last name, and her partner, both academics at Leeds University, paid £30,000 over the asking price for a four-bedroom 1930s semi-detached house in Weetwood in March. The couple, with two young children, upsized from a three-bedroom home in Meanwood. Their search had taken a year, she says. "There were 20 viewings and eight offers on it. Luckily our own home also sold within a week."

Further north, proximity to Leeds Grammar School, several golf courses, such as Moor Allerton, and the motorway network keeps Alwoodley sought after, along with Scarcroft, East Keswick, Wick and Collingham along the A58 corridor towards Wetherby. Family houses can sell for £1mn-£2mn, says James Wort of agent Strutt & Parker, adding: "Scarcroft's Ling Lane, 15 minutes out of Leeds, is popular for

AT A GLANCE

The fastest train journey from Leeds to London is just under 2 hours.

The average house in Leeds increased 4.9 per cent to £273,210 in 2022, according to Hamptons using Land Registry data; rents rose 16 per cent, according to JLL.

What you can buy ...

£360,000 A two-bedroom converted gatehouse in Scarcroft (North Residential).

£620,000 A four-bedroom house in Far Headingley (Dacre, Son & Hartley).

off-market sales." He says less than 30 per cent of buyers are from outside the area, and few are international.

With its shopping, music and arts scenes – Leeds is home to Opera North, Northern Ballet and Channel 4 television's regional centre – the city centre is still a big draw for some. Lawyers Will Swarbrick and partner Maya liked the Scandinavian design and energy efficiency of the new homes in the Climate Innovation District (CID). At the end of last year, the couple bought a four-bedroom house in the new mixed-use quarter of 955 timber-frame homes by the low-carbon developer Citu near Leeds Dock. Prices start at £480,000.

"We were living in Wakefield but working in Leeds, so losing the commute by moving into the city was a logical step," says Swarbrick, 28. "It will be great to walk to work."

Brexit thwarted Leeds' bid to be European Capital of Culture in 2023 so the city opted to call itself an "unofficial" city of culture instead. Says Kully Thirarai, chief executive and artistic director of the "Leeds 2023" programme: "We are not a city that shouts as loudly perhaps as some of our neighbours... As Yorkshire people we just get on and do things without too much fanfare."

Theatre director Alan Lyddiard, who divides his time between Jerez in southern Spain and Leeds' South Bank, loves both the Leeds Playhouse – where he's an associate artist – and the council's neighbourhood initiatives to support older residents. He owns a one-bedroom flat in Holbeck's Urban Village, a mixed-use creative quarter on the site of a former flax mill in the south-west of the city. "It's an exciting place to live. The shopping, restaurants, the countryside within 10 minutes," he says, adding: "There's a great underbelly of arts and creativity in Leeds."

| TRAVEL |

Why 2023 is the year to visit Leeds, Yorkshire's culture capital

Buoyed by a year-long festival of culture in 2023, Yorkshire's economic powerhouse has become a hive of creativity with shops, food and events that give a nod to the city's industrial past while looking to the future.