

London

Posted on Fri, 19 September 2025 by Christian and Nick

In our Legends of London episode, we flag down a black cab for a spin round London, as we vada the reviews for the capital's most legendary gay bars and clubs! We call in at Heaven, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, The Two Brewers and The White Swan. Along the way, we meet Lily Savage, a merry widow and a helpful pair of lavatory hands…

And don't forget to check out our two Soho episodes when we visit Old Compton Street and its environs! In series one, we visit Ku Bar, Comptons, G-A-Y Bar and Halfway to Heaven while in series two, we pop into The Admiral Duncan, Freedom, Friendly Society, The King's Arms, The Village and The Duke of Wellington. We have produced a handy Gay Scene Guide to Soho too!

Fun Facts about London

Our first stop is **Charing Cross** where Heaven – which opened in December 1979 – is to be found. Historically, the name Charing Cross was derived from the hamlet of Charing (which means a bend in the river) which occupied the area of this important road junction in the Middle Ages, together with the grand Eleanor Cross which once marked the site. Since the early 19th century, Charing Cross has been the notional "centre of London" and became the point from which distances from London are measured. A fun fact about Charing Cross is that it was the site of the first Punch and Judy show in England, performed by an Italian puppeteer in 1666.

Then we move on to **Vauxhall** to call in at The Royal Vauxhall Tavern, South London's oldest gay venue. Since as early as the 18th century, Vauxhall has been associated with gay culture being home to the Molly Houses which were underground meeting spots for gay men. Vauxhall is also closely connected to the first known drag queen in English history, Princess Seraphina, who was active in the early 18th century. Over recent decades Vauxhall has become synonymous with an alternative crowd with large clubs such as Fire and after-hours parties.

Our next stop is **Clapham** to visit The Two Brewers which has been a gay venue since the early 1980s. As a town, Clapham is actually over 1000 years old beginning life as an Anglo-Saxon village that was called Cloppham meaning 'an enclosure near a hill'. Clapham Common is a large triangular park covering over 220 acres with the largest bandstand in London and is known – how shall I put it? – as somewhere where men sometimes go to meet other men after dusk.

We then head to **Limehouse** in the East End to drop in to The White Swan which has been a gay venue for forty years. Limehouse is notable for being the location of London's first Chinatown, preceding the more well-known one in Soho. This early Chinatown emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to the influx of Chinese sailors and workers who found employment in the area's docks and shipping industries. Belfast, the capital city of Northern Ireland, is steeped in a rich tapestry of history, culture, and political transformation.

Heaven

Heaven. Located under the Charing Cross Station arches, Heaven was opened in 1979 by Jermey Norman and positioned as London's equivalent to Studio 54. The capital's original gay superclub, this sprawling two floor venue quickly made a name for itself with its crew of resident DJs, including Tony De Vit, Tallulah and Frankie Knuckles, who are credited with bringing hi-NRG and house music into the mainstream. In 2013, Heaven was acquired by G-A-Y founder Jeremy Joseph and now hosts the renowned G-A-Y club night which previously took place at the nearby Astoria. Regular theme nights include Popcorn on a Monday, a student night playing pop and funky house, Thursday night's Porn Idol, an amateur strip night, and Friday's Camp Attack.

Website: https://g-a-yandheaven.co.uk/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/HeavenLGBTClub

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/heavenlgbtclub/

Address: 9, The Arches, Villiers St, London WC2N 6NG

The Royal Vauxhall Tavern

South London's Grade II listed queer entertainment venue, the RVT was built in 1860 and by the end of WW2 had because known as the Palladium of Drag. Over the years, its tiny stage has played host to cabaret luminaries such as Hinge and Bracket, Regina Fong and, of course, Lily Savage who had an eight-year residency at the RVT. In 1987 the venue was famously raided by police officers wearing rubber gloves, fearful of contracting the HIV virus, causing Savage to quip that the officers had come to "help with the washing up". Legend has it that Princess Diana, accompanied by friends Freddie Mercury and Kenny Everett, attended the venue in the late 1980s, disguised in male drag. Since 2005, under the management of James Lindsay, the venue has continued to go from strength to strength, with regular theme nights Bar Wotever, Beefmince, Duckie and Sunday Social acquiring an international reputation.

Website: https://www.vauxhalltavern.com/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/TheRVT

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/rvtofficial

Address: 372 Kennington Ln, London SE11 5HY

The Two Brewers

Originally, the Two Brewers was a typical Edwardian-era pub serving the local working-class community, but in the 1980s, it transformed itself into a gay venue, with the legendary Lily Savage appearing on stage.

The Two Brewers has this to say about itself: Proudly serving the LGBTQIA+ community since 1981, the legendary Two Brewers has been at the heart of London's gay scene for 40 years. One of the capital's most famous drag cabaret venues, our iconic show bar and club hosts fabulous, glitter-filled cabaret extravaganzas – seven nights a week, 365 days a year.

Website: https://www.the2brewers.com/london

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/The2Brewers/

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/the2brewers

Address: 114 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UJ

The White Swan

Formerly known as BJ's White Swan (it was owned by Barry & Jimmy, in case you were wondering) The White Swan in Commercial Road in the East End has been around for close on 40 years. It used to pull in the Essex Crowd and notable figures, such as Michael Barrymore, Michael Cashman, Graham Norton and Sir Ian McKellen. In its heyday, it hosted drag shows, karaoke, cabaret, comedy, stripper nights and Sunday tea dances. About ten years ago, it had quite a make-over and changed hands and whilst these days numbers might be smaller, it still offers a variety of themed nights.

Website: https://www.thewhiteswan.bar/

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/TheWhiteSwanBar/

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/thewhiteswanbar

Address: 556 Commercial Rd, London E14 7JD

Visit www.theonetofiveguide.com for our Gay Scene Guides to: Newcastle, Brighton, Leeds, Soho, Cardiff, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Blackpool, Glasgow, Belfast, London and Liverpool. And finally, please remember that even if we are a little tongue in cheek in our podcast, we do love each and every venue on the scene, and we urge you all to get out there and support your local gay bars!