


# Soho

Posted on Fri, 25 July 2025 by Christian and Nick

**Join us as we vada the reviews for the gay bars and clubs of London's Old Compton Street and beyond! 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. Check out our Gay Scene Guide to London Legends for information on Heaven in Charing Cross, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern in Vauxhall, The Two Brewers in Clapham and The White Swan in Limehouse.**

## Fun Facts about Soho

Originally an agricultural district, Soho developed into a suburban area in the 17th century, frequented by the aristocracy. The name Soho is thought to have been derived from a 16th hunting cry ‘so-hoe’.

However, by the beginning of the 19th Century, Soho had become quite run down until in the late 1880s, the West End Piccadilly Circus was expanded, and theatres and music halls sprung up around Shaftesbury Avenue.

## The Soho Gay Scene

During the 1895 trials of Oscar Wilde, it became clear that the writer frequented the area, kissing waiters at the Soho restaurant Kettner’s and hosting “parties” at the Savoy Hotel.

Just before the first world war, the Cave of the Golden Calf opened on Heddon Street. This cabaret club, described as ‘a place given up to gaiety’, was for all intents and purposes the first ‘gay bar’ as we would understand it today.

By the 1930s, Soho had a thriving club scene, the most famous venue being the Caravan Club which was raided by the police in 1934. The police report recorded that: ‘Men were dancing with men and women with women, and a number of couples were simply standing still’.

Noteworthy Soho venues also include the Windmill Theatre, the Raymond Revue Bar and Ronnie Scotts.

With all this entertainment came a rise in sex work in the district, and Soho nabbed itself the moniker ‘The Meat Rack’, and it wasn’t until the 1980s that Soho shook off this image and the gay village which we know today emerged, with Old Compton Street at its heart.

### Ku Bar

Ku Bar has been a scene staple in London for the past twenty years. After a spell in Ibiza during the 80s, Ku Bar’s owner, Gary Henshaw, was inspired by the now defunct Ku Club. Taking the name from the iconic Balearic nightspot (infamous for

hosting Bacchanalian parties), he hoped to sprinkle some of the same Ibiza fairy dust on London. After moving from Charing Cross Road to its current Lisle Street locale in 2007, it still retains, according to the official Chinatown website “its blissfully attitude-free, inclusive and welcoming spirit”. Open seven days a week, it’s a three-floor venue, with Ku Lounge upstairs, advertising cocktails and cabaret from 10pm, and Ku Klub downstairs, which hosts, among other events, Ruby Tuesday, a long running lesbian night with drag kings, DJs and burlesque performances.

Website: https://www.ku-bar.co.uk/

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

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

Address: 30 Lisle St, London WC2H 7BA

**G-A-Y Bar**

G-A-Y began life as a club night at the Astoria in the early 90s, established by Jeremy Joseph, and its huge popularity, aided by Saturday night performances from pop stars including Kylie, Madonna and Westlife, saw Joseph expand the brand, later opening G-A-Y Bar on Old Compton Street, as well as a branch on Manchester’s Canal Street. The Old Compton Street venue is a three-floor affair, famed for its cheap drinks and defiantly cheesy pop soundtrack.

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

Address: 30 Old Compton St, London W1D 4UR

**Halfway to Heaven**

Loved and cherished by the LGBTQIA+ community since 1991, Halfway to Heaven is the perfect pairing of local bar upstairs and intimate cabaret venue downstairs offering lots of fun and laughter!

Website: https://www.halfway2heaven.net/london

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

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

Address: 7 Duncannon St, London WC2N 4JF

**The Admiral Duncan**

Located on Old Compton Street, the venue has been trading since 1832 and, by the 1980s, had become well-known as a gay pub. In 1999, the pub was bombed by neo-Nazi David Copeland, resulting in three people being killed and eighty-three being injured. There is now a chandelier hanging from the ceiling of the Admiral Duncan, made out of shrapnel from the blast, which commemorates those who lost their lives in the tragedy. The pub is known for its rota of nightly drag acts (Sandra, Wilma Ballsdrop and Martha D'Arthur are all regulars) and for its warm, community spirit; it's a place with a lot of heart!

Website: https://www.admiral-duncan.co.uk/soho

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/1AdmiralDuncan

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

Address: 54 Old Compton St, London W1D 4UD

**Freedom**

One of Soho's only late-night venues, Freedom, located on Wardour Street, houses a recently renovated upstairs bar, with plush booths, polished wooden floors and an extensive cocktail menu, while downstairs there's more of a club atmosphere with a second bar, a cabaret stage and a dancefloor, replete with those legendary Freedom stripper poles. Regular theme nights include Monday's Kinky Cabaret, where West End performers belt out musical theatre classics, as well as the long-running Freedom House Party on a Friday.

Website: https://freedombarsoho.com/

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

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

Address: 60-66 Wardour St, London W1F 0TA

**Friendly Society**

A subterranean spot tucked away down an alley off Wardour Street, Friendly Society is a kitsch indie cocktail bar. The décor is eclectic, with distinctive blue lighting, cult movies projected onto the walls and Barbie Dolls hanging from the ceiling, whilst the music, often played by a live DJ, covers retro soul, 70s disco and 80s pop. It's a tiny but thriving venue which, alongside its cocktail menu, is famous for serving Babycham in authentic vintage glasses.

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Friendly-Society/136813716365787

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

Address: 79 Wardour St, London W1D 6QA

**King's Arms**

The King's Arms has a rich history, having transitioned from a 'gentlemen's bar' in the 1970s to a gay bar in 1981. It exudes an old-school, cozy charm that might remind you of a country pub and is particularly popular with a stocky, hairy, beardy crowd, embodying the true spirit of a bear den. Entertainment here is as varied as its patrons. From the legendary Bear-a-oke nights that have been a hit for over 20 years, to midweek quiz nights and cabaret shows, there's something for everyone.

Website: https://www.kingsarms-soho.co.uk/london

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/KingsArms.Soho/

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/KingsArms.soho

Address: 23 Poland St, Oxford St, London W1F 8QJ

**The Village**

The Village claims to be Soho's longest running LGBT venue offering something for everyone 'all under one roof'. Upstairs there's a cocktail lounge with booths, chandeliers and a view of all the action in Old Compton Street whilst in the basement there's more of clubby atmosphere. But for many the main attraction is to be found on the ground floor, where there's a dance floor and go-go boys

strutting their stuff on the bar top!

Website: https://www.villagesoho.co.uk/london-bar

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

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

Address: 81 Wardour St, London W1D 6QD

**The Duke of Wellington**

Previously called the Rat and Parrot, the Duke of Wellington went gay, so to speak, in September 2001. A fairly old school sort of place, The Welly is home to the Busy Lady Bingo, a weekly Drag Quiz and brands itself as a one-stop shop for bears, cubs and admirers.

Website: https://www.dukeofwellingtonsoho.co.uk/london

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Duke.Of.Welly/

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

Address: 77 Wardour St, London W1D 6QA

**Also check out:**

**Rupert Street**

Website: https://www.rupert-street.com/london

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

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

Address: 50 Rupert St, London W1D 6DR

**The Yard**

Website: https://yardbar.co.uk/

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

Address: 57 Rupert St, London W1D 7PL

**Visit www.theonetofiveguide.com for our Gay Scene Guides to: Newcastle, Brighton, Leeds, Soho, Cardiff, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Blackpool, Glasgow, Belfast, London, Liverpool and the Regions. 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!**