



Mini eGuide to Soho

London is widely recognised as one of the gay capitals of the world and Soho is at its very heart. Old Compton Street is the main thoroughfare of gay Soho and visitors and many Londoners tend to congregate there. In the surrounding streets off Old Compton Street, away from the main tourist spots, you can find some wonderful cafes, bars, galleries and restaurants.

In this mini eGuide we share some of our favourite places in Soho.

A brief background of Soho

The area which is now Soho was grazing farmland until 1536, when it was taken by Henry VIII as a royal park for the Palace of Whitehall. The name 'Soho' first appears in the 17th century. Most authorities believe that the name derives from a former hunting cry 'So-ho'.

Soho has an area of approximately one square mile and may be thought of as bounded by Oxford Street to the north, Regent Street to the west, Leicester Square to the south and Charing Cross Road to the east.

Gay Bars

Friendly Society

This is one of Soho's gems and a place not to be missed off your list of Soho bars to visit. As the name suggests, the staff and clientele tend to be quite friendly. Conversation is never hard here as there are so many talking points – eccentric wallpaper, hanging troll dolls, naked Barbies (or could be Cindy), gold fish.

Most nights see one of the bar's resident DJs take to the decks in the main room, pumping out an eclectic mix of camp classics and one hit wonders.

Review

View London

"The Friendly Society is one of those rare places that make you feel you've wandered totally off the beaten track while still being right in the thick of things."

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

The Green Carnation

The Green Carnation is certainly one of Soho's classier drinking venues. The upstairs bar is dedicated to the spirit of Oscar Wilde, whose quotes adorn the green and gold lacquered walls. Against this decadent back drop you'll find pianists and singers.

Website: www.greencarnationsoho.co.uk

Reviews

View London

"Bringing a touch of class to Soho, the Green Carnation has something for everyone from the opulent feel of the upstairs lounge bar to retro flashing walls that light up and the disco vibe downstairs."

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

All in London

"The barmen are impossibly handsome, and wonderfully attentive. There is plenty to choose from the cocktail list, from Raspberry Caipirinhas to more traditional martini's, which are delicious."

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

KU Bar

When you walk into KU bar you feel like you have entered an Abercrombie and Fitch store. The bar staff are simply beautiful. The bars (one off Old Compton Street and the other in China Town) are elegantly decorated, play great music and should be part of your night out in Soho.

Website: www.ku-bar.co.uk

Restaurants

Andrew Edmunds

Overview

Andrew Edmunds is located on the very quaint Lexington Street, which has a number of pretty eateries. Andrew Edmunds shines out amongst them and is a lovely, intimate restaurant; perfect for a romantic date. It really does feel like you are dining in a charming country cottage.

Cuisine: Modern Eclectic

Location: 46 Lexington Street, Soho, London, W1F 0LW

Reviews

Tatler

“They certainly don’t make restaurants quite like this one any more: dark, clubby, cliquy yet unpretentious, and frequented by an eclectic mix of intellectuals, locals, thinkers and reprobates. The food here is simple and simply delicious.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

Square Meal

“Some restaurants wear their popularity with such quiet pride that you know you’re in the presence of the real deal. One such is Andrew Edmunds, a romantic little Soho stalwart that’s been doing its own thing in a discreet but successful manner for nearly 25 years. Terrific, knowledgeable service & a gem of a wine list add to the allure, & the booking policy (one week in advance only) ensures that everyone gets a fair chance of bagging a table.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

Artubus

Overview

Arbutus opened in May 2006. It is the brainchild of Antony Demetre and Will Smith who have worked together since 1998 firstly at L’Odeon in Piccadilly then at Putney Bridge Restaurant where Anthony achieved a Michelin Star. On the whole, the restaurant receives some really good reviews and it’s definitely one to try. It’s also a good excuse to get slightly dressed up.

Cuisine: Modern European

Location: 63-64 Frith Street, W1D 3JW

Website: www.arbutusrestaurant.co.uk

Reviews

Square Meal

“Arbutus hit the ground running when it opened in 2006, & has become a byword for smart-casual dining in Soho. From day one it bucked the trend for seemingly endless culinary complexity; instead, the focus is on modern European cooking, straight & true – ‘the sort of food I could eat every day’, enthused one fan.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

Tatler

“Plaudits continue to pour in for Anthony Demetre and Will Smith’s unpretentious Soho modern Brit. The slightly awkward U-shaped space makes great use of natural materials and light floods the dining room, which is always mobbed at lunchtime. Demetre’s satisfying, inexpensive menu is a joy.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

Barrafina

Overview

Barrifina is a wonderfully stylish tapas restaurant and bar. If you like tapas and enjoy a buzzing atmosphere, then this is the place to go. The eating space is an L-shaped marble top, complete with 23 red stools overlooking the stoves and bar. It is very popular, but has a no booking policy. So we recommend that you get there before 6 or go on a Sunday.

Cuisine: Spanish Tapas

Location: 54 Frith Street, Soho, W1D 4SL

Website: www.barrafina.co.uk

Reviews

London Town

“Barrafina takes the tapas concept and does absolutely nothing new with it: the whole place could conceivably have been lifted lock, stock and two smoking hot plates, straight from a Barcelona street corner. Forget unimaginative Riojas; the wine list here

has some far more exciting Hispanic wines to accompany your meal, not forgetting the superb selection of sherries. An island of Spain in London.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

TimeOut

“The quality of ingredients, many of them on display, is impeccable.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

Square Meal

“According to its many fans, it delivers ‘the best tapas outside Spain’.”

Website: Read the full review [here](#).

Yalla Yalla

Overview

Yalla Yalla (Yalla means “hurry up” or “come on” in Arabic) is a new restaurant that was reviewed by the Financial Times in May 2009. The café offers a wonderful array of Lebanese and Middle Eastern cuisine; perfect for a delicious snack or a more substantial meal.

The food can be taken away (so you could enjoy the summer weather in Soho Square) or eaten there in the pint-sized dining area and can be as little as £5 for a chicken wrap. This is one of Soho’s hidden gems and is a place not to be missed.

Cuisine: Lebanese

Location: 1 Green’s Court, Soho, London, W1F 0HA

Reviews

Financial Times

“Youssef and his assistant make a delicious array of food fresh every day. There is a range of pitta wraps filled with falafel; spicy Lebanese sausages with yoghurt; thin slices of marinated lamb with pickled turnips; and chicken with a garlic sauce. There are pastries filled with halloumi cheese, sesame seeds and suma, spinach and spring onions. To drink, there are fresh juices and mint tea.”

Website: Read the full report [here](#).

Top Table

“It’s popular with a savvy Soho crowd who adore signature dishes such as the sautéed chicken liver with garlic and pomegranate molasses. Yalla Yalla serves Lebanese beer and wine, and is perfect for pre-theatre bites, post-sightseeing pit-stops or as a meeting place for a night out with friends.”

Website: Read the full report [here](#).

View London

A fantastic new addition to Soho's great restaurant scene. Authentic and incredibly delicious homemade food, all served with a smile.

Website: Read the full report [here](#).

Breakfast

Soho Hotel

Overview

If you are looking for a glamorous start to the day, then try breakfast at the very chic Soho Hotel. Even though you are in the heart of Soho it feels like you are in a grand country estate. It's a great place to take a group of friends.

Website: Read the full breakfast menu [here](#).

BKB

Overview

The Boheme Kitchen and Bar opened in 1999 as a contemporary bar and restaurant offering English and American modern cuisine and fresh seafood. It's a great place to take friends for Sunday brunch to discuss the escapades of the night before. The window seats are a great place to watch as tourists and Londoners stroll along Old Compton Street.

Brunch is available on Saturday and Sunday from 12 to 5pm

Cuisine: American / British

Location: 19 Old Compton Street, Soho, W1D 5JJ

Website: www.bohemekitchen.co.uk