



BRIGHTON: QUEER EVERY DAY

HEAD TO THIS SEASIDE LOCALE
FOR BEACHES, BOARDWALKS
AND BEAUTIFUL BRITISH BIRDS.

By Stephanie Schroeder

THE FIRST THING you should know about Brighton, England, is that it's super queer—in the broadest sense of the term. This coastal gem is inhabited mostly by people who came to visit, loved it and stayed. Everyone, it seems, is from somewhere else: Vienna, Paris, London. The second thing you should know is that Brighton is only a 45-minute train ride from London's Paddington Station. Really just a hop, skip and a jump.

Brighton Beach is famous (or infamous) as the battleground of the Mods and Rockers in the 1979 psychedelic rock movie *Quadrophenia* (and more recently it's the setting of the hit lesbian series *Sugar Rush*). Brighton Pier is a traditional boardwalk with carnival rides, food stands and various other tourist attractions. The pebble beach is unique and luxurious, while the kippers for breakfast, Mummy dear, Mummy dear, are actually imported from Sussex. The local fishing industry, viable in earlier years, has died a slow death more recently.

The lesbian scene is definitely happening, but the beauty part is Brighton is all gay, all the time. No one even looks sideways at queer folks, whether they're bare-chested gay guys holding hands on the street or groups of lesbians sunbathing in the park in their bras and panties.

Not-to-be-missed is the looming Royal Pavilion, architect

John Nash's extraordinary Oriental fantasy in honor of King George IV. With an Indian exterior and colorful Chinese interior, the monument is now a museum. Totally gaudy, gauche and over-the-top, it's still an amazing sight to behold and worth the time it takes for a proper tour (royalpavilion.org).

There are no exclusively lesbian bars or clubs in Brighton—all gay establishments cater to a mixed queer crowd and the proportion of gays to lesbians is the usual 10 to 1. Thursday nights at Club Revenge (revenge.co.uk) is women on top, men on the bottom. Floors, that is.

Frockabilly (frockabilly.co.uk), a lesbian-operated, straight-friendly tribute to the 1950s, is happening the first Friday of every month and is a guaranteed good time. Most of the gals there were dressed in James Dean–Buddy Holly– and Marilyn Monroe–inspired styles—or somewhere in between. There were some quite good steppers who energetically participated in line dancing, did the jitterbug and swung and twirled to classic '50s tunes as DJ Lonesome M spun blast-from-the-past classics from real vinyl.

Dining Dykes (diningdykes.com) is a social network of lesbians who, well, dine together. The group alternates its destination dinners and other events between London and Brighton since the route between the two is so easy. Dyke Modern (dykemodern.co.uk) is a local collective of Sapphic artists and writers who bring together lesbians for workshops and events that promote and encourage creativity and empowerment.

As far as neighborhood exploration goes, one could spend her entire time shopping and grazing in North Laine, a hub of boutiques selling everything from modern streetwear brands and vintage clothing to new and used books, records and random hip and kitsch. North Laine is dotted with cafés and, in particular, vegetarian outposts

such as Infinity Café, an offshoot of a workers' cooperative that's been in existence since 1971, and Red Veg, a joint with an iconic communist theme, where you can find everything vegan and vegetarian, except tofu. I picked up a pair of bright-purple Airseal Para boots, the ultimate cruelty-free shoes, at the original Vegetarian Shoes boutique. The company uses the finest water-resistant, non-leather components in all its footwear. I put on my extraordinarily comfortable boots immediately and wore them for the rest of my stay! (vegetarian-shoes.co.uk)

Major eats in Brighton run the gamut from gourmet vegetarian (terre à terre is popular enough to have its own successful cookbook) to the hip, new "gastronomics," including Sawadee, an intimate Thai joint with fresh ingredients and a warm atmosphere. I also hit Due South, a classy restaurant along Brighton's beachfront where 80 percent of the food

comes from within a 35-mile radius of the establishment. It was a pleasure to linger at Due South on a breezy night with a few new friends—the beachfront was alight with lanterns.

Cream tea is famous throughout the U.K. and I recommend a cute little place called, aptly enough, Cream Tea. It serves a variety of locally grown and produced fare, including black teas and more exotic blends made by Tea Pigs. The shop's coffee is from Small Batch, roasted in Hove. I had a delectable Sussex Charmer: a cheese scone filled with scallion cream cheese and watercress, accompanied by a reliable English breakfast tea.

What about Pride? you ask: Brighton Pride is the biggest free Pride festival in the U.K. The party includes a week of events in the winter and the summer. Plus, the big parade through the city and the party in Preston Park at the beginning of August, which attracts over 150,000 people. (brightonpride.org) ■

HOW TO GET THERE

Although I consider Brighton a destination in itself, this seaside city should definitely be at the top of your list as side trip or getaway while in London. Fly into London on American Airlines, which has special packages for LGBT customers (aa.com/rainbow), and then jump on British Rail (BritRail.com) and ride in comfort to a long weekend in a cool beach town, where you'll relax in a supremely beautiful spot with a totally queer attitude and style.

ACCOMMODATIONS:

ONE BROAD STREET is a lesbian-owned, simply decorated, 4-star period guesthouse situated 30 seconds from the beach, and has a reputation for high standards of cleanliness and service. (onebroadstreet.com)

MYHOTEL BRIGHTON is a very queer-friendly ultra-mod hotel designed by Andy Thrasyvoulou and Karim Rashid. It has been described as "a hotel where Freddie Mercury might have met the Maharishi." (myhotels.com)

THE NEW STEINE is an elegant and fashionable five-story Georgian townhouse in central Brighton. Gay-owned and lesbian-friendly, the New Steine hotel/B&B has a contemporary design, with a hint of French influence. (newsteinehotel.com)

RESOURCES:

VISITBRIGHTON.COM has all the information on Brighton and Hove, and GScene, a monthly gay magazine, offers all the latest pub and club listings. (gscene.com) And visit brightonourstory.co.uk for an online archive giving voice to Brighton's LGBT history.

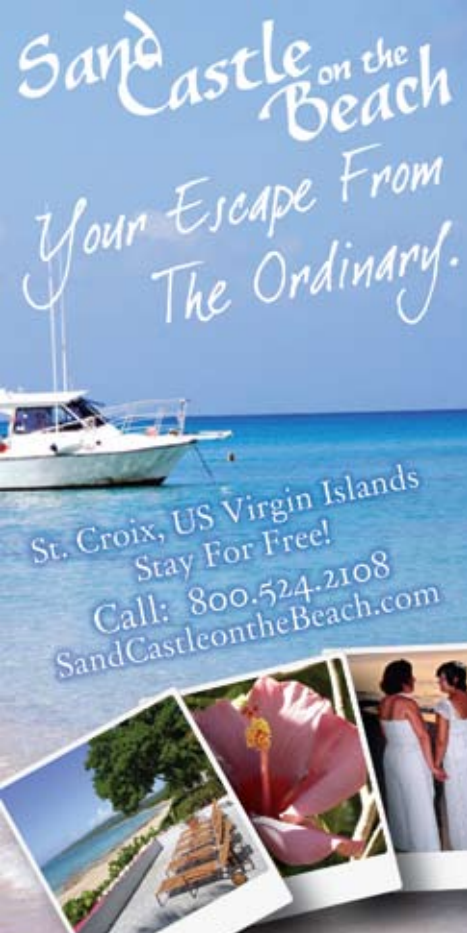


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