London’s Burning

Hot! Hot! Hot!

November 1, 1997 By Michael Adams

“A lintel bit of all right” is how Sir Noel Coward described London in a long-forgotten ditty. But even the redoubtable Coward might be surprised at just how “all right” London looms of late. With a popular new prime minister, Tony Blair, and an upbeat Labor party sweeping away the cobwebs of the Thatcher-Major era, the country glitters and gloats as it hasn’t since the Swinging ’60s. A booming economy has brought explosions in culture, fashion, nightlife and (yes, believe it) food. Now the sleepy-eyed city of yesteryear may well be, as Newsweek recently yapped, “the most happening place on Earth.”

And a favored destination for travelers with HIV. Few cities can match London’s bounty of HIV-related services, support groups, counseling, hot lines and state-of-the-art-safe-sex-ads. (Thanks to Rubberstuffers for the condom/lube packs generously adorning clubs and pubs.)

Getting There

London’s two big airports, Heathrow and Gatwick, are linked to all the major cities around the world. For U.S. citizens, no visa is necessary, and there are no restrictions for HIV positive visitors—don’t bother hiding the meds!

Where to Stay

London has a glorious glut of hotels. For those who prefer their digs stately (and pricey), such dowagers as the Connaught, Claridge’s and the Dorchester are as grand as ever as are their younger cousins, the Lanesborough and Langham Hilton. Hipsters, particularly in the fashion game, head for boutique hotels, such as designer Anouska Hempel’s self-named Hempel’s, the minimalist sibling of her wildly popular and outlandishly decorated Blake’s.

If you’re gay, look to a wide variety of gay-owned or -friendly establishments, such as the New York Hotel, Hazlitt’s, the Philbeach Hotel and the Reeves Hotel for Women. For help with accommodations: The Lesbian and Gay Accommodations Outlet, 171.287.4244, fax 171.287.4247 or e-mail, home@outlet.co.uk.

What to Do

If you have to ask, you’re better off staying in bed with the blinds closed. London is History. Its museums, landmarks and parks, walking tours and day trips fill volumes. Its theater is

sophisticated, audacious and very not Broadway. Where else would a play named Shopping and Fucking become a big draw? Address all questions (no matter how stupid, as in “Where’s Big Ben?”) to the London Tourist Board, 0800.600.900, with its 24-hour “talking pages” phone line.

As for dining, a revolution of sorts if rumbling. Not only are there British versions of U.S. classics (Nobu, Vong), but home-grown winners as well, including Ivy, Aubergine, Bibendum, La Tante Claire and Le Caprice.

For the gay traveler, gay restaurants and clubs are known for scene than scone, but among today’s faves are Balan’s, Kudos, First Out and the Edge. Nightlife in London is truly alive. But be warned: Some spots cater to “special interests” on specific nights, so Sunday’s decidedly het crowd many morph into ripped and shirtless gym rats on Monday. The haunts with homo tendencies include clubs such as Heaven and the more infamous Trade and DTPM. For more info, check out the popular gayzines via their Internet counterparts: Boyz, www.boyz.co.uk; Gay Times, www.gaytimes.co.uk; QX, www.qxmag.co.uk; or Gay to Z, a phone directory, www.freedom.co.uk/gaytoz.

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