

London by Night

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Compared to twenty-four-hour cities such as New York and Berlin, London shuts up shop early. The reasons go back a long way. London has a history of mass commuting, many workers prefer to meet friends for happy hour drinks than party into the wee hours. Britain's old licensing laws meant that all drinking dens closed at around eleven pm. And the tube stops running shortly after midnight. Getting home late at night is expensive, or time-consuming. And for years, London's population was in steady decline. But times are changing. These days, nocturnal Londoners can go to a fancy restaurant, work out at the gym and even get a haircut, all through the night. Liberal licensing regulation arrived a decade ago, making it easier for people to indulge in late night drinking. Between 1999 and 2013, the number of night bus routes doubled, and the annual number of passengers more than tripled, and from next September, the London underground is said to run through the night at weekends. So why is this happening? Demography is a factor. Since 1991, the number of young people in London, those most likely to demand late-night options, has risen faster than any other group. Foreigners used to late-night merry-making make up a greater proportion of London residents and an increasing share of the workforce do night shifts. Half of all night bus passengers are traveling to or from work. The demand for a late night London is growing and the businesses and legislators are responding to it. With infrastructure plan to make a twenty-four-hour London possible, why would Londoners ever sleep?