



Driving

Night Flights

Nighttime is many things to many people, but most would agree it has a magic all its own. Cities, especially, assume a mysterious allure at night that has served as an inspiration for countless artists. Author Vladimir Nabokov once compared the flickering of neon lights to a heartbeat. The city's heart *does* seem to beat differently at night. Join us in a Boxster for a nighttime cruise through city streets.

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Ask people what they associate with the word “night” and the answer you’ll probably get most often is “sleep.” As far as most of us are concerned, nighttime is for sleeping. After all, we human beings sleep approximately one-third of our lives, and most of us do it at night. Nighttime equals tranquility and rest. Another common response is “dark.” Nighttime equals darkness—and darkness has connotations of a sinister nature. In our culture, “light” is associated with the positive, with life, “dark” with the negative, with death. We speak of the “dark” side of human nature when we mean the “evil” side. Even innocent nocturnal animals such as bats seem vaguely menacing to most. Our fear of the dark goes back to the dawn of humankind, if not further. We can’t see what’s out there in the dark, and the unknown is always scary.

But night isn’t all about sleep. After all, the word “nightlife” exists for a reason. It’s not all darkness and black and white, either, but is painted in a wide range of hues, from velvety blue to pearly gray to the delicate rose of dawn. Night offers us a respite from the busyness of day, with its hurried pace and relentless efficiency, when everything we do has a purpose. At night our thoughts can roam, our dreams take wing. Many creative people say they have their best ideas at night. We see things differently at night, and often more clearly than in the light of day. It is at night, too, that we are most often beset by a sense of longing. Sometimes we know what we yearn for—a loved one far away, bygone days, a better future. Other times, we only know there’s a funny feeling in our stomach, a sense of anticipation that won’t go away. Each night holds a promise—anything seems possible, anything might happen. Though you may not know what you’re looking for, you just might find it.

Everything looks different at night, but cities, especially, are transformed. Even those that are drab by day sparkle; the beautiful ones become truly magical. Cities reinvent themselves every time the sun sets. The city at night is the backdrop against which we present ourselves in our best (and sometimes worst) light, the stage on which we perform. Whether we’re urbanites or visitors, when we dress up and go out for a night on the town, we’re both observers and participants in the great neon spectacle.

The mysterious allure of a big city at night has inspired many artists. Take Edward Hopper’s best-known work, *Nighthawks*. Capturing both the companionship and the essential loneliness of the patrons in a late-night diner, it has become an icon of modern urban life. Weegee, famous for his black-and-white photographs of New York, did most of his work at night, believing that was when the city revealed its soul.

One of the ultimate nighttime thrills has to be cruising through big-city streets—preferably in a convertible on a mild evening, of course—aimlessly, with no particular destination in mind. The antithesis of a purposeful daytime drive, where the aim is to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, a large part of its charm lies in its very purposelessness, though it also makes it a vaguely guilty pleasure. Like kids playing hooky, we escape from the ordered routine of our daily lives and responsibilities and let

the wanderers in us loose, allow ourselves literally to be carried away by the childlike excitement of exploring unknown terrain. Other nighttime drives have a more meditative feel. Skimming down endless miles of freeway in Los Angeles, for example, you’re simultaneously hypnotized by the drone of the road and the parade of headlights and exhilarated by the seemingly endless possibilities that the nighttime breeze whispers in your ear. An almost spiritual experience: distances, time, detours—all become immaterial. The only thing that matters is the flow of your own rhythm.

Among the many artists inspired by the nighttime city was Eileen Gray. An Irishwoman of refined tastes and adventurous spirit, Gray would set out in her sports car for late-night jaunts through Paris, a black panther in the passenger seat beside her—perhaps the ultimate bodyguard. The architecture of the nocturnal urban jungle was a major influence on her work. Her designs, at the same time bold and restrained, are characterized by extraordinary simplicity and clarity, devoid of all unnecessary ballast—much as the city is stripped of extraneous detail and reduced to simple, geometrical shapes in the dim light of streetlamps.

We follow Gray’s example and embark on a post-midnight cruise through the city. But it doesn’t always have to be Paris. ▶



Neon Tigers A Book of Photographs Captures the Spirit of Asia’s Mega-Cities

Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Jakarta, Singapore, Shenzhen: In Peter Bialobrzeski’s award-winning color photographs, they all blend into a single virtual megalopolis—vivid impressions of urban expansion that no longer appear to belong to the real world. Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004; 112 pages, dual-language (English, German), ISBN 3-7757-1394-8; 39.80 euros

City Lights:

Some of the Best Haunts for Night Owls— from Racetrack to Observatory

HONG KONG

If you're in Hong Kong and in the mood for evening entertainment beyond the usual dinner and a show, head to Happy Valley for a night at the races. When the Hong Kong Jockey Club, founded in 1884, puts on its nighttime races, it can count on plenty of excitement-seeking night owls and bettors to fill the brightly illuminated stands.

www.hkjc.com/english

LOS ANGELES

The sky you see in the dome of the Griffith Observatory may be artificial, but step outside and you'll see L.A. spread out before you in all its glittering glory. Over two million visitors make their way to the landmark on Mount Hollywood every year. Many are film buffs, for the Art Deco structure plays a starring role in the James Dean classic *Rebel without a Cause*.

www.griffithobs.org

Tonight we'll be exploring an altogether more modern city: Shanghai. And indeed, the bustling metropolis seems like a different place; its maze of elevated highways, illuminated from below in blue, almost appears to be a network of throbbing arteries in some strange living being so gigantic that its precise shape is unfathomable to creatures as tiny as we. Movement and light trace the pathways of a mysterious life force coursing through the streets as they wind through canyons of high-rises and office towers.

One of the few things that can match the fascination of a night ride through a major city is flying into one, the sea of lights a golden tapestry below. Whether it's L.A. or Stuttgart—New

York isn't the only city that never sleeps, for no city that truly deserves the name does—it is undoubtedly an unforgettable experience, but a detached one. Sitting in the cockpit of your own car provides a far more direct perspective and allows you to do what airplane pilots can't: immerse yourself in the city with every fiber of your being.

The choreography of the streets at night is different. Headlights, taillights, and traffic lights work together to create a syncopated rhythm of their own. The darkness is a continent waiting to be crossed, and our Boxster is ready for any challenges it might have in store. Right now, I can't think of a sight more inviting, a more potent symbol for the limitless possibilities of what lies



City Lights:

Some of the Best Haunts for Night Owls— from Safari to People-Watching

SINGAPORE

It goes without saying that this Asian melting pot has a night market, but a nocturnal zoo is more unusual. The night safari lets you exchange the urban jungle for 40 hectares (100 acres) of real-life rainforest where over one thousand animals roam virtually wild. Amateur photographers beware: So as to disturb nocturnal species as little as possible, no flashbulbs are allowed. The price of the night safari includes dinner. 80 Mandai Lake Road, Singapore, www.zoo.com.sg

NEW YORK

Those petty crimes left over after the Manhattan courts have done a day's work are dealt with in Night Court. The hearings, held in rooms 129 and 130 of the Judicial Building, are always well attended by the public. Tired of watching *Law and Order* on TV? Here, a stone's throw from Chinatown, you can see the real thing from 6:00 p.m. until 1:00 a.m. Be careful what you bring along, though: all visitors are checked for weapons. 100 Centre Street, New York City, www.nycourts.gov

HAMBURG

Nominally it's a gas station, but most of the customers at "Kieztanke" on Hamburg's legendary Reeperbahn come here to fill up on other things. There's hardly anything you can't buy here, and the clientele—a true cross-section of society, from the down and out to the rich and famous—is so colorful that many come here just for the people-watching. So many, in fact, that Kieztanke has its own security staff for crowd control. Reeperbahn and Taubenstrasse, St. Pauli, Hamburg

Research: Felix Krohmer

ahead—in the road and in life—than the string of green lights stretching out before me all the way to the horizon. We turn off the GPS and let ourselves be carried along, impulsively turning here or there as the mood strikes us, guided only by chance. We zip along, the 3.4-liter engine purring contentedly. We may not be going anywhere specific, but that doesn't mean we don't want to get ahead.

The next time I get behind the wheel alone, it's for a solitary drive through Rotterdam. The chatter of a talk show on the radio seems an oddly fitting soundtrack, though—or maybe because—I only understand an occasional word. Odd thoughts pop into my head, as they are wont to do at night. I wonder if cities feel lonely at night, their streets empty of the hustle and bustle of daytime traffic. Suddenly it strikes me that the opposite of "nightlife" would be "daydeath." Peculiar notion. Funny, that never occurred to me before. And so my mind wanders off, taking unexpected turns, meandering as freely as my car roams the streets.

A succession of fleeting moments and impressions that, almost poetically, brings home to me the transience of all experience, my nighttime drive is nearing its end. Imperceptibly, the sky's inky blacks and blues shade into pearl gray with tints of pink—and all of a sudden, it's light. The fairy dust is gone: the city, clad again in its workaday clothes, seems to have little that's glamorous or magical about it. But I know better.

The truth is out there.
Just wait till it gets dark.