

Houston's Best Dive Bars: Drinking and Diving in the Bayou City

John Nova Lomax

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John Nova Lomax : Houston's Best Dive Bars: Drinking and Diving in the Bayou City before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Houston's Best Dive Bars: Drinking and Diving in the Bayou City:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. a tour guide for a city where tourists do not goBy Creg L. LovettDive Bars of Houston: Drinking and Diving in the Bayou CityBy John Nova LomaxReviewed by Creg LovettJohn Nova Lomax's hero, the lategreat Sig Byrd, wrote about Houston in a way that made the city feel downright intimate. Tiny, in fact. The city was smaller then, in the 1950's, but as he spent mornings downtown, afternoons in the then-nearer suburbs, and evenings in the bars, his man-on-the-street journaling shrunk the town to villagelike proportions. Just a bunch of salesmen, mechanics, delivery drivers, and mentally ill unemployed addicts

keeping cool with Jax beer, it seems we were back then. Sometimes I think Galveston might be now what Houston was like then. Well Houston has grown to a sickening, mind boggling degree since the 50's, but in his book "Houston's Best Dive Bars: Drinking and Diving in the Bayou City" Lomax applies the Sig Byrd treatment to our hellishly hot, humid and inhumanly large Houston of 2010, and the result is a view which renews your faith in our city's livability. Taking it in small chunks, viewing it as a city of neighborhoods even though no one else really does, he claims a new and deserved cultural look at the town. In its smallest bars, these dives, people who rebuke corporate chains and find comfort in the charm of a smaller perhaps family owned neighborhood bar are more likely to be individuals. After all, most of the characters with speaking roles in the book wouldn't last more than a few beers in a Bakers Street Pub. They'd be suspect. Asked for cash or a credit card authorization first. Then the tightjeaned bitches and bro's would make faces at these smelly bastards until they carried there asses back to the dive they belong in. And in these dives Lomax finds them all, the port workers and machinists with rotten guts and life stories that make us the gloriously callous handed anti-Dallas that we are. In fact, speaking of Dallas, one of the finer points of Lomax's book, other than pointing out a couple hundred local bars where beer is cold and cheap, is that he often rates the bars on their patrons degree of douchebaggery. He refers often to the content, quality and placement of tattoos. Which is helpful, because I'd much rather spend an evening among pimps, hustlers and deviants of any sort that to mix with the cologned, hairgelled douchebags that I grew up with. He inventories each jukebox, warning of doucherock, lest a reader trek out and plop down \$1.75 for a Lone Star, and be forced to listen to Creed or Nickleback. Instead in these dives you'll find biker bars with Motorhead playing, bars full of Mexican laborers drinking Bud Lite listening to ranchera music, and lower Westheimer's amiable hipsters listening to carefully curated jukeboxes of punk, hardcore and Americana. Of these there is an especially thoughtful analysis of why they/we/I drink "blue collar" beers such as Pabst and Lone Star while actual blue collar rednecks and immigrant types view it as pisswater, opting for the more expensive but smoother Miller/Coors/Bud oeuvre which hipsters would find, perhaps pretentious. Don't view this as a guide to slumming it, or as disaster tourism. This is a first rate insider tour guide to a city that tourists do not visit. He rates each dive on a scale of 1 to 5, with little beer bottle icons. 1 beer bottle means the bar is safe, friendly, clean and unintimidating. 5 beer bottles denotes a much rougher atmosphere, but perhaps more fascinating experience as well. So it's not a strict value judgment sliding scale of good-to-bad. Here's an example from my part of town taken from the book. The Old Quarter Acoustic cafe is given a rating of 1 beer bottle but it is also given a deservedly glowing review. It's a special place, a dive bar for sure, but a place of a certain (slightly convoluted) historical significance where I'd feel comfortable taking my visiting cousins from Kentucky. There are some wonderful people at The Old Quarter. A mile away is the Hard Times and Misery Saloon. Dogs live on the roof of this place. Other dogs wander in and out seemingly using the bar's two opposite doors as a short cut from 43rd street to Avenue S. On one of my visits a man sat next to me at the bar and said "You're a tourist ain't you? You're buying all my beers tonight.", and while I entertained an inner dialogue about choosing my battles, and Robert Durst, and something about discretion and valor, the bartender approached. "Hey, you don't have to buy him nothing if you don't want to.", and I didn't. So the bartender reached across me and hit the man in the head with a stick several times, telling him to leave as if he were a donkey or a goat or a horsefly. He hit, smacked, and slapped the man several times for each of the 5 or 6 steps it took him to reach the door. The Hard Times and Misery Saloon earned a rating of 5 beer bottles on Lomax's scale. That bar is a living hell. And I mean that in the nicest way possible. There are no poets at the Hard Times, and those people do not have Jesus in their hearts. But what finally, truly sets the book apart from any other guidebook is the conversations the author has with these broken spirits he finds in dive bars across Houston. Byrd didn't invent it and neither did Lomax but his book certainly embodies my long held theory that a conversation in a bar can be the great leveler. After all it's one thing to give a homeless guy a dollar. But it's another thing to buy him beer. And still another thing to drink that beer with the bum and listen to his life story. I'll bet you a beer it's a better story than we've got. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great Read! By JohnnyPayout I've been a regular and have also been banned from most of these bars. The Blue Lagoon is still around and is as the author depicts it except for Mr. Dooley, the confederate general, has since passed away. Sadly, the Burlap Barrel had to close down and won't be coming back, but this legendary watering hole will live on forever in the pages of this epic novel. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Resource By T. McConathy Fantastic resource with countless stories tucked into each vivid description. I really liked the author's introduction and how he sorted his listings geographically on account of the Bayou City's enormous footprint. Bought the Kindle edition and would recommend the hardback edition.

Houston, that sun-drenched, humidity-steamed subtropical megapolis, might not be the first place you think of when you rattle off great American drinking towns. When most outsiders think of the city at all, images of cowboys, astronauts and oilmen come to mind. And truth be told, many natives wrestle with the concept of a dive bar, thinking that any gin mill that lacks a velvet rope, bottle service and a valet parking service is a dive. In Houston's Best Dive Bars, award-winning journalist (and third-generation Houstonian) John Nova Lomax sets the record straight on what exactly a dive is (and isn't) in the Bayou City. From Korean houses of ill repute on Telephone Road to bluesy Third Ward juke joints, from Galveston County bayside gang haunts to Spring Branch redneck redoubts, from famous old

Inner Loop standbys like the Lone Star Saloon and the West Alabama Ice House to obscure gems like the DW Inn and the Sundown Saloon, Lomax drank, and with this book as evidence, lived to tell the dive-y tales. The result is the first of its kind and the only guidebook to drinking and diving in Houston you will ever need.

About the Author John Nova Lomax is currently a staff writer at the Houston Press, the city paper of Houston. He is the great nephew of Alan Lomax, the American music folklorist and musicologist.