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Introduction

The best bars are much more than the sum of their parts. The various components, like great service, smart design, spectacular views and perfect cocktails, merge to create one joyous drinking experience. It's not always easy to put your finger on the moment when mind-blowing is achieved, but you sure know when it happens. Mid-quaff, you realise you're happy. You look around you and realise you're having the kind of time you just know you'll be telling people about. Probably while you're still there.

But how have we whittled down this list? Well, some bars have earned their spot by playing up their obvious assets, whether it's an interesting urban location or a stunning

natural setting. Others are champions of the basics, be they cocktails or single liquors, while still others do something dramatically unusual or fun; some are so quirky it's impossible not to marvel over a custom-made cocktail. But perhaps the secret sauce in all this is genuine desire to delight each drinker, guest or customer who walks through the door. (Or crawls through a tunnel, takes a glass lift or lounges on a deck chair.) It's a love of hospitality and an enthusiasm for the precious drop.

Whether you're a fan of barefoot, surfside imbibing or you prefer sophisticated cocktails in stylish surrounds, it's time to plan your list. Life is short. Cheers, salut, bottoms up. See you at the bar.



Smuggler's Cove / San Francisco

ISN'T THERE A MOVIE ABOUT THIS?

Once you visit it will be on the silver screen of your memory for years to come.

THAT'S A BIG-TICKET PROMISE!

Doesn't everyone dream of being shipwrecked off the Caribbean coast in a 17th-century brig loaded with alcohol meant for the New World?

SO I CAN EXPECT A BUCCANEERING CROWD SWIGGING RUM BY THE GALLON?

Despite the nautical ropes, carved mermaids and even a

waterfall, this is no tacky bar. Smuggler's Cove is serious when it comes to alcohol, especially its beloved rum. There are over 400 types of rum on offer and many rare and vintage varieties stored in the 'Vault'. The inventive use of rum varies from traditional Caribbean to classic prohibition era and tiki style.

I CAN FEEL SOME SWASHBUCKLING COMING ON.

The expert mixologists at the bar will have you swinging from the rafters with libations like 'The Expedition' – dark rum and bourbon, chicory coffee liqueur and a touch of honey, vanilla and cinnamon. If you pay extra for the drink, you can make off with the tiki-style mug that it's served in. AAAArrrgh.



CALLE 17 NO 302, BTWN CALLES 2 & 4,
VEDADA, HAVANA, CUBA
WWW.MADRIGALBARCAFE.WORDPRESS.COM

Café Madrigal / Havana

I ALWAYS THINK OF HEMINGWAY WHEN I THINK OF CUBA. AND CIGARS.

Well there's no cigars, but it's bohemian, artsy, and quirkily decorated with cinematic paraphernalia, harking back to the former film-directing career of the bar's owner, Rafael Rosales. So Hemingway-esque for sure. In fact, this was once Rafael's home until he decided to turn it into a bar.

TURNING ONE'S HOME INTO A BAR SOUNDS LIKE A GREAT IDEA.

It would have its upside, sure. In this case, the location can be

hard to find – it's in a residential neighbourhood on the top floor of a gorgeous two-storey art nouveau building. Listen out for animated conversations drifting over the rooftops.

WITH WHOM WILL I BE SHARING THIS HOME?

Madrigal attracts young Cuban intellectual types who enjoy intense conversations over their mojitos (it's a classic bar list with the usual suspects). In recent years tourists have joined in with the locals to share the live music (on most nights) and tasty tapas plates. Try the *tostones* (fried plantains) with cheese or the *empanadas del Madrigal* with a plum sauce on the side.

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About the authors

Ben Handicott once published travel pictorial and reference books, dreams about, writes about and sometimes even does, travel. His favourite bars free pour.

Kalya Ryan is a travel writer, editor and strong advocate for visiting your local bar, your far-flung bars, and all bars in between. But especially the far-flung bars that take you to places you haven't been before and introduce you to new and exciting drinking experiences. Though she'd never say no to a classic martini.

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