

#ASIA

The 10 Best Cocktail And Wine Bars In Singapore

Hemingway-inspired speakeasy, anyone?



Atlas

ASIA

SINGAPORE

FOODANDBEVERAGE



By Jacqueline Parisi 21 JUNE 2019

Food is only half the story of any gastronomic hub. And when it comes to drinks, Singapore doesn't disappoint.

Local chefs and bartenders weigh in on their favorite signature cocktail and wine joints for happy hour, nightlife, and everything in between (beyond the quintessential Singapore sling, of course)...

1. Operation Dagger

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Left: *Poison Oasis* (tonka bean, cherry vinegar, coumarin, apple blossom) /
Right: *New Skin* (potato skin, dill, coffee caramel, cold brew chocolate) /
[@operationdagger](#)

In the world of fine cocktails, Operation Dagger on Ann Siang Hill is a must-visit—as much for the inventive omakase menu as for the seasonal cocktails and extensive roster of natural wines on the drinks menu. It’s landed more than once on the World’s 50 Best Bars list and was awarded most creative cocktail bar in Singapore in 2016. And yet, it still manages to retain a hidden

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gem-type feeling. Like you're in on a well-kept secret every time you descend into the sleek, dimly lit space.

Unlike traditional bars, Operation Dagger operates like a kitchen, creating drinks the way chefs create recipes: based on flavor profiles. And there's a strong sustainability bent to it, too.

"Because we are very into natural wines, most of them don't last very long because there's no sulfur added," explains Operation Dagger bartender/mixologist and Singapore native, Sasha Wijidessa. "But instead of throwing the oxidized wines out, we just re flavor them and sell them again. So we're bringing a second life to the product."

Their signature banana wine, for example, is made with oxidized Chenin Blanc infused with ripened bananas.

Wijidessa is also known to experiment with fermenting different fruits and vegetables to incorporate into her cocktails. On a recent trip to Thailand, she became enamored with their signature sticky mango rice dessert and set out to replicate those exact flavors in drink form. The first step? Ferment mangos, then make rice water with glutinous rice. Add pineapple skins to accelerate the fermentation, and finish with a coconut cream reduction that's combined with the fermented wine.

"Everyone says it tastes like the liquid version of the dessert," says Wijidessa. "So that's good news for me."

2. Atlas



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*Left: Henri Dubois Brut NV from the Épernay region of Champagne, France
/ Right: The iconic gin tower housing more than 1,200 gins from around the world | [@atlasbarsg](#).*

As Ivan Brehm, chef at Singapore's Michelin-starred Nouri, will attest to, the majority of cocktail bars in Singapore lean on the louder side—which makes Atlas that much more notable in an otherwise crowded cocktail scene.

"Atlas is great for an incredible drink and a good snack," says Brehm, "but also nice conversation, and bars like that are few and far between in Singapore."

The cocktail menu at this "grand lobby and bar" pays homage to the *Arts Décoratifs*, a visual art and architecture movement that first popped up in France prior to World War I. It transformed modernism into fashion, representing the luxury, wealth and sophistication of the Roaring 20s.

Atlas celebrates the artists who captured the "glitter and sophistication" of the era with cocktails like *Nude On A Terrace*, a smoky and bittersweet "rendezvous" with Venezuelan dark rum, Italian bittersweet liqueur, citrus, agave and red hibiscus. As a way to pay tribute to the "sleek lines and

ornate motifs” that characterized the architecture during this time, there’s the aptly named Palace Of Nations cocktail that comes together with Speyside single malt whiskey, cognac, banana liqueur and Swiss absinthe—a drink that the menu deems “a bold union of richness and warm spice, a monumental mission for world peace.”

Although the menu is long, feel free to head straight to the gin and Champagne, which is what Atlas is best known for—with one of the world’s most diverse physical gin collections (more than 1,000 in all, with select London dry gins dating back as far as 1910) and one of Asia’s great Champagne lists (more than 250 labels, which is fitting, given how liberally Champagne flowed during the Art Deco era).

The elegance of the drinks at Atlas is rivaled only by that of the setting itself, a grand lobby outfitted with gold accents, rich mahogany, deep leather and plush velvet chairs. It’s a bar scene that draws you in, inviting you to stay a while.

Another similar, upscale cocktail bar to consider? [The Tippling Club](#) in Chinatown.

3. The Old Man





Left: The Snows Of Kilimanjaro with marshmallow gin, lacto-fermented raspberry, citrus and gruyère | Right: The Capital I-shaped bar at The Old Man | [@theoldman_sg](#)

The Old Man is a Hong Kong institution—the brainchild of industry legends Agung Prabowo, James Tamang and Roman Ghale—that rose to fifth place on Asia’s 50 Best Bars list for 2018. And since February 2019, it’s been taking Singapore (and Wijidessa) by storm.

The entire space exists as a love letter to the old world of Ernest Hemingway, a man with an undeniable penchant for fine spirits and classic cocktails rivaled only by that of his fictional characters. For one, there’s the name, a riff off the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*. And the space, intimate and buzzing with speakeasy vibes. But the most direct connection to this literary legend is the menu of cocktails, all of which are named after one of Hemingway’s works: The Sun Also Rises, The Torrents of Spring, A Moveable Feast... the list goes on.

Wijidessa’s favorite is Death In The Afternoon, an unexpected cocktail featuring absinthe and sparkling wine, with coco-pandan yogurt froth and nutmeg.

“This is my favorite drink of the year,” she tells us. “It’s nothing like the classic drink.”

4. Junior The Pocket Bar



Left: Missionary's Downfall with hints of mint and peach | Right: Pork Belly Sandwich with pineapple goachujang-glazed pork belly and pickled green papaya to pair with the tropical drinks in rotation | [@juniorthe-pocketbar](#)

Junior, which opened in Singapore in July 2017, is just as small as you'd imagine a "pocket bar" to be. Four seats at the bar, two small tables. Nothing more, nothing less. But then again, that's part of its intimate, "watering hole" charm in the city of soaring skyscrapers—that, plus the rotating menu of themed drinks and decor.

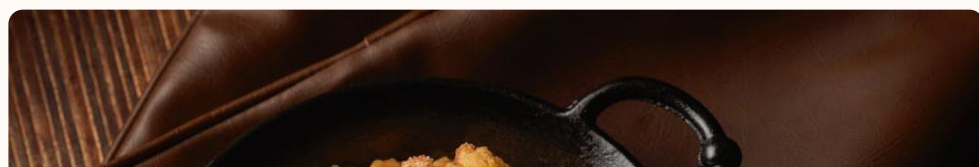
Unlike other bars, Junior takes a cue from art galleries by thinking of concepts as exhibitions. When the menu changes, the decor and music does, too.

“Many bars change menus,” says Wijidessa, who's a big fan of Junior, “but they change the whole space. It was once old-country German, and before that based on New Orleans, and so on.”

At the moment, Junior is feelin’ tropical with a Pacifica theme, embodied by cocktails like Hua’ai Tais: an earthy and savory spin on the classic Mai Tai doctored up with fresh carrot, cachaça, corn and miso. And for a light bar bite, Ponzu chicken—a close cousin to the Hawaiian staple Mochiko Chicken that comes together with a soy and rice wine-based marinade and sweet, homemade ponzu sauce.

Junior’s [Instagram bio](#) (at the moment) sums it up best: “If you can’t get to paradise, I’ll bring it to you.”

5. Neon Pigeon





Left: "Not Classic" Old Fashioned with coffee-infused sake umeshu, coffee liqueur, pineapple-infused sake and chocolate bitters | Right: Golden Curry Rice with deep-roasted cauliflower, green onion and egg yolk |

@[neonpigeonsg](#)

This modern, urban izakaya is where you'll invariably find Aaron Foster, the Canadian-born chef at The Westin's Cook & Brew, post-hockey practice. The cocktail list, which he describes as straight forward but with a twist, means you can easily stay in your comfort zone or venture out. And once you take a peek at the menu of inventive cocktail names and watercolor drawings, odds are you'll opt for the latter.

Take the "Not Classic" Old Fashioned, for example, made with coffee-infused sake umeshu, coffee liqueur, pineapple-infused sake and chocolate bitters. Or the "Is It A Mojito," which comes together with sakura tea-infused white rum, yellow chartreuse, sea buck thorn, apple cinnamon syrup and pineapple rum.

Foster usually always goes for the Teasy, a honey melon sake liqueur, sakura wine reduction, grapefruit and Prosecco-based cocktail "which is always a help to beat the Singapore heat," he tells us.

On the food front, Neon Pigeon offers a wide variety of small bites (coined "birdfeed" on the menu), vegetables, meat and seafood dishes to pair with the cocktails. There's even a large-format roasted prime rib dish that serves 4-6 people. Perfect for a hockey team-sized appetite.

Bonus points for Neon Pigeon's strong sustainability ethos, too, from biodegradable straws to a \$1 donation per person made to help cover the cost of a water filtration system.

6. Waku Ghin



*Left: Bloody Negroni with blood oranges from Sicily and seasonal spring vegetables from Shizuoka, Japan | Right: Tasmanian Beef Tartare |
@wakughin*

Although Waku Ghin is best known for its food—the list of accolades is long, and most recently this two Michelin star restaurant in Marina Bay Sands landed at number forty on the list of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants in 2019—Brehm reminds us that they also have an exceptional bar.

Head bartender Kazuhiro Chii has dreamt up an impressive roster of 85 handcrafted cocktails to pair with the small bites. The Scotch Peppery Man is a crowd-favorite, featuring Talisker whisky, soda and black pepper. On the fruitier side? The Whin Martini, with a baby peach soaked in truffle oil in lieu of the traditional olive, or the Sakura-bito, with sake, sakura liqueur and peach bitters.

Despite Waku Ghin's prestige, a drink at the bar won't break the bank, as most hover around the \$20 mark.

7. Maison Ikkoku





Left: One of Leong's bespoke cocktail creations at a Master Mixology class /

Right: Avocado Cheese Galette | @maisonikkoku

Ethan Leslie Leong, the man behind this modern Japanese restaurant and bespoke cocktail bar, started his career as a chef specializing in the cuisines of both the east and the west. Five years in, he turned his attention to drinks, and quickly claimed the title of “Bartender of the year 1998.”

Today, he runs the bar program at one of Wijidessa’s go-tos: Maison Ikkoku, conducting Master Mixology classes every month and partnering with major fashion brands like CHANEL, Guess, Giorgio Armani, Polo Ralph Lauren, Mont Blanc and more to design bespoke cocktails for their events.

The crowd-favorite concoction from his menu is the Salted Caramel Martini with sea salt, French caramel liquor and vanilla gelato. A close second is the Yuzu Mojito, which comes with Japanese Yuzu, apple mints, green lemon and light rum.

Given his culinary background, it makes sense that the food at Maison Ikkoku shines. There’s organic, savory galettes made with buckwheat flour that veer towards the west or the east—for the former, don’t miss the Ratatouille or Foie Gras Oo La La, and the latter, the Crabmeat, Wagyu Beef or Squid Bonito galette.

The list of appetizers is long (truffle fries, anyone?), as is the list of sushi, sashimi and maki. For elevated fare, Maison Ikkoku also offers a nine-course omakase menu.

“The food is really good,” Wijidessa tells us, “and then maybe over the last three years they’ve really upped their bar program as well. The current drink menu is based off of perfume!”

8. Napoleon Wine Bar





Left: Maranges 1er Cru La Fussière 100% Pinot Noir / Right: Wild Mushroom Risotto / @napoleon_sg

For a dose of French flair in Singapore, Foster swears by Napoleon Wine Bar. There's 28 wines available by the glass, with Enomatic wine dispensers to allow guests to opportunity to enjoy a tasting portion.

It's a "no-frills list at great prices," says Foster, who appreciates the mix of French classics and New World vintages.

The menu of food dreamt up by Singaporean chef Benjamin Yip to pair with the wines skews hearty, brasserie-style with a twist: wild mushroom risotto, Hokkaido scallops carpaccio, hand-cut beef tartare. On the lighter end is a selection of shared plates: Parma ham croquettes with mango

cilantro and chili peanut butter dressing, cheese and cold cut platters, crostinis.

Foster may come for the wine and small bites, but he stays for the decor.

The cozy, inviting space is outfitted with warm tones and natural wood, with a French pocket design for the sofas—inspired by the fact that the bar's namesake, Napoleon, had a habit of tucking his hand into his tunic.

9. Meat Smith





Foster is a BIG fan of Meat Smith, a meat and potatoes joint proving to the world that "real-deal barbecue" doesn't just exist outside of the American traditional barbecue heartland, it thrives. The menu of 10-hour smoked beef, craft beer-battered onion rings, crinkle-cut fries with pulled pastrami and cornbread may not sound like the *most* compatible menu for a cocktail, but Foster begs to differ.

"[Meat Smith] is always my go-to spot, and I can't get enough of the Smoked Negroni—simple, sweet and with a twist. Hay-smoked meats and smoked cocktails—what a combo!"

Other notable cocktails? Hemingway Daiquiri (Bacardi Superior rum, Luxardo Maraschino, grapefruit), Burnt Orange Cobbler (Jack Daniels, black tea, smoked and burnt orange, mint, sugar) and watermelon spritz (Aperol, Tito's Vodka, fresh watermelon, basil shrub, Prosecco).

10. Le Bon Funk





Left: 100% Grenache Blanc from the hills of Montpeyroux in Languedoc, France | Right: Japanese tangerine aged for six weeks with Manuka honey sorbet and Sicilian olive oil | @lebonfunk

Brehm comes to Le Bon Funk, a cozy spot along the bustling Club Street, for the natural and organic wines that he calls “second to none.”

“They’re very progressive,” says Brehm. “And they have cider and beers, too.”

Curated by head sommelier Josée Yeomans in partnership with chef-owner (and Burnt Ends alumnus) Keirin Buck, the wine list at Le Bon Funk celebrates “people over place, winemakers over wine regions, leisure over labels.”

It’s at once elevated elevated but approachable, imbued with a vibe that lends credence to their guiding principle of “showing you a good time.”

As such, the food doesn’t disappoint, either. On any given day, the ever-evolving menu can include Don Bocarte Cantabrian anchovies, Japanese sea bream with pine nuts and pickled pumpkin, or cavatelli with tripe and Calabrian pepper. The Japanese tangerine with Manuka honey sorbet and Sicilian olive oil is a requisite dessert.



Other Singapore bars that we *love* (and that your Journey trip designer would be **more** than happy to incorporate into your itinerary)?

- The three bars at Raffles place: Long Bar, the alfresco Courtyard, and Writers Bar
- Manhattan Bar at Regent Singapore: Think grand hotel bar glitz and glamor-type ambience
- Tipple and Dram: A whiskey and wine bar
- Jigger & Pony: #1 on Asia's 50 Best Bars list for 2020
- Lantern Rooftop Bar at the Fullerton Bay Hotel: Known for its panoramic views of Marina Bay Financial Centre waterfront and the city's skyline
- Employees Only: Discreetly tucked behind a fortune teller's lair
- Loof: For a dose of "whimsy, nostalgia, and unbridled playfulness in an urban garden atop Odeon Towers in downtown CBD"
- The Spiffy Dapper: The bar that doesn't give a f*ck—head up the dingy stairs to the second floor at 73 Amoy Street, "and there is a chance that we might be open and sober enough to serve." Open every day.
- The Other Room: Come for the drinks, stay for the drinks—and the tapas
- 28 HongKong Street: A nondescript speakeasy with stellar cocktails and small bites. Don't miss The Nymph Cocktail with Willet Pot Still Bourbon, Bianco Vermouth, Mathilde Cassis Liqueur, and a dash of Bitters.
- Clove: A casual spot for a bite to eat alongside a glass of bubbly, wine, beer, boozy milkshakes, and bottled spirits

To understand how Singapore's cuisine came to be in the world of Asian—and international—gastronomy (and get some stellar restaurant and hawker stall recs while you're at it), don't miss our [definitive guide to Singapore dining](#).



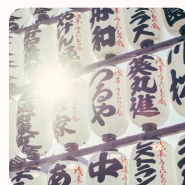
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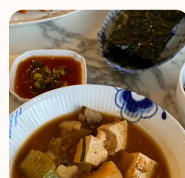
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