

US Bartenders See Growing Demand for Low-Sugar/Low-Alcohol Drinks, Hard Seltzers, and Spicy Cocktails

New IWSR Bartender Study Examines Trends, Most-Mentioned Brands, and Top Consumer Preferences Across the United States

New York – Bartenders are not only an increasingly powerful influence on consumer choice and purchase, they're also an important window into current and future drink trends. IWSR Drinks Market Analysis, the leading authority on data and intelligence on the global beverage alcohol market, has just released a comprehensive bartender study conducted across the US that examines trends, most-mentioned brands and consumer preferences.

The IWSR *US Bartender Strategic Study* research includes in-depth and in-person qualitative bartender interviews, cocktail menu analysis, and on-premise consumption metrics across different categories of establishments (from craft bars to neighborhood restaurants), in 15 US cities. While some learnings varied from market to market, the study also found several key national trends:

Demand for low-sugar and low-alcohol drinks

Consumers are increasingly interested in creating healthier lifestyles, and this is impacting their cocktail decisions. Across the US, the IWSR study found a rise in consumer interest for lower sugar or skinny cocktails, as well as lower alcohol (or zero alcohol) drinks, as people seek to manage their health and wellness. To meet the request for lower ABV options, bartenders have also started using sake, sherry and other lower ABV spirits as a cocktail base as well.

“The low sugar/low alcohol cocktail trend has certainly been gaining momentum but it’s not widespread, yet,” says Brandy Rand, Chief Operating Officer of the Americas at IWSR Drinks Market Analysis. “People want a high-quality, handcrafted low-alcohol or alcohol-free cocktail experience, and are willing to pay for it, but on-premise operators need to move beyond soda and juice concoctions and develop a serious no- and low-alcohol cocktail menu with high-quality fresh ingredients. It’s also up to brand owners to develop products and provide education to the trade on how to do this well.”

Hard seltzers, canned cocktails and other “bubbly” drinks

Consumers are increasingly turning to fizzy drinks such as hard seltzers, spritzes, and spirit and soda cocktails in bars and restaurants. White Claw has essentially created a new category of canned refreshment that is now crossing over to the on-premise environment. IWSR forecasts that by 2023, the hard seltzer category will more than triple, to reach over 281m cases.

Mezcal and Spicy Cocktails

US consumers drink more tequila than any other nation in the world, and this has undoubtedly helped fuel interest in mezcal (IWSR forecasts that mezcal volume in the US will almost double by 2023). Mezcal is being heralded by bartenders for its smooth yet smoky flavor and overall versatility. This also dovetails with another consumer trend that bartenders are witnessing across the country – cocktail flavor preferences are skewing towards spicy, smoky, bitter, and even herbal flavors. Fresh ingredients such as ginger, jalapeno, habanero peppers, and pepper infusions are increasingly being used to add texture and flavor to cocktails.

Most-Mentioned Brands

Consumer preference for brands is regionally varied, but bartenders across the US report that the products most often called include:

Whiskey: Maker's Mark, Jameson, Bulleit, Woodford Reserve, Buffalo Trace

Vodka: Tito's, Ketel One, Grey Goose, Absolut

Tequila: Casamigos, Don Julio, Patrón, Espolon

Gin: Bombay Sapphire, Bluecoat, Plymouth, Tanqueray, Hendrick's

Other: Aperol, Campari, White Claw

"One of our goals in creating this report was to study what motivates bartenders, and to better understand how they influence category and cocktail trends. We were also interested in what consumers are asking for at the bar, and examine how that varies regionally," says Rand. "What we found were interesting and valuable trends that bars, restaurants, and brand owners can use to help them develop relevant programs and products that will appeal to constantly evolving consumer tastes and preferences."



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Press contact:

Greg Cohen – greg.cohen@theiwsr.com, +1 917 714 8237

Other enquiries: enquiries@theiwsr.com

About the IWSR

The IWSR is the leading source of data and intelligence on the alcoholic beverage market. The IWSR's database, essential to the industry, quantifies the global market of wine, spirits, beer, cider, and mixed drinks by volume and value in 157 countries, and provides insight into short- and long-term trends, including five-year volume and value forecasts. The IWSR tracks overall consumption and trends at brand, price segment and category level. Our data is used by the major international wine, spirits and beer companies, as well as financial and alcoholic beverage market suppliers. The IWSR's unique methodology allows us to get closer to what is actually consumed and better understand how markets work. Our analysts travel the world in order to meet over 1,600 local professionals to capture market trends and the 'why' behind the numbers. For more information, please visit www.theiwsr.com.