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Shhh! 7 Top-Secret Bars and Speakeasies You Need to Add to Your Bucket List

James Halloran | November 12, 2021

Bucket List

Date Night

Night Out

The Best



Few things make you feel more in-the-know than being let in on a secret, but when that secret is the location of a hidden establishment . . . curiosity *really* takes over. You almost have to visit a speakeasy the moment you find out that it exists, right?

“*What is a speakeasy?*” you might be asking. It’s a secret bar developed around the 1920s during Prohibition. Speakeasies get their name from their owners asking their patrons to whisper or “speak easy” to not attract the attention of authorities.

Often located in private, secluded places like a rooftop, a basement or a hidden room, most speakeasies also have a secret entrance, and some may require membership or a password to get inside.

Although they’re no longer a necessity, the allure of secrecy still attracts visitors to these bars. Here’s our list of seven speakeasies that make the “must see” cut.

The Back Room | New York City



For a night of lavish secrecy, step on down into The Back Room in Manhattan's Lower East Side. (You will literally have to step down into a hidden alleyway to get to it.)

The Back Room is one of two of New York City's original speakeasies from Prohibition, and its ambience exemplifies the era with secret basement rooms, elegant Victorian furniture, fireplaces, chandeliers and more. If it looks familiar, it's probably because you've seen it in the background on shows like "Boardwalk Empire" and "Secrets of New York."

Every corner has a piece of history – gangsters like Bugsy Siegel, Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky all held "business meetings" here. Today, it's a popular hangout for celebrities like Adele, Pearl Jam, U2, Martha Stewart and more.

Pro Tip: The secret tunnel to The Back Room provides a good backdrop for pics! And if you're out on the town, check out other great NYC [nightlife activities](#) nearby.

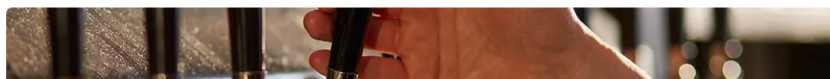
Bourbon & Branch | San Francisco

Perhaps the most notorious speakeasy of them all, Bourbon & Branch operated during Prohibition under the guise of JJ Russell Cigar Shop (nowadays, it's known as "Wilson and Wilson Private Detective Agency").

Just like during Prohibition, Bourbon & Branch still has secret access ways, secret passwords and hidden rooms. You also need to abide by the house rules. Patrons are told "no phones" and to "speak easy," just like the good ol' days. Oh, and before you go, be sure to make a reservation to receive the secret password.

Pro Tip: Since Bourbon & Branch is more for cocktails and drinks, we recommend eating a meal beforehand. Visit one of [San Francisco's top restaurants](#) to start your night.

McGillin's Olde Ale House | Philadelphia





One of the country's oldest bars (established in 1860), McGillin's Olde Ale House boasts surviving through all kinds of hardships - wars, pandemics and Prohibition.

The only way to access this bar is down a narrow, historic, cobblestone alleyway. With its big red neon sign, McGillin's is more of a *former* speakeasy, but it's still worth visiting for its 30+ beers on draft, including some of their own. The tavern itself is a large and spacious structure with two floors stuffed in an old-timey colonial brick house near Philadelphia's City Hall.

Pro Tip: Before grabbing a pint here, pair your visit with a [sightseeing tour](#) of Philadelphia to learn more about the city's long history.

The Cave | Bretton Woods, N.H.

Located in the basement of the Mount Washington Omni Resort in Bretton Woods, N.H., this former speakeasy still charms with Prohibition-era secrecy.

Rich stone and brick walls cover every inch of this speakeasy, giving it a secure, secluded feeling. Several trap doors built into the walls hide whiskey bottles, and there's a dance floor that was once disguised as an indoor racquetball court. Legend also has it that Joseph Kennedy himself had smuggled booze into this exact facility during Prohibition.

Pro Tip: While you're here, be sure to try the establishment's famous rum-spiked Prohibition Punch, served in its signature teacups. And check out lots of nearby [things to do](#) throughout New England on your way.

La Descarga | Los Angeles



To find La Descarga, you'll need to walk up a set of dilapidated stairs in East Hollywood. You'll then enter a dimly lit Cuban cigar lounge with chandeliers, brick walls and a bar stocked from floor to ceiling with liquor and cigars. Stick around for the weekend burlesque shows (from Thursday to Saturday), or come on select Tuesday nights for salsa dance lessons.

The only catch is they have a strict dress code, so be sure to dress to the nines.

Pro Tip: Check out deals on other [nightlife activities](#) nearby once the show is over.

The Violet Hour | Chicago



Another fancy option, The Violet Hour in Chicago's Wicker Park offers an upscale experience with award-winning signature cocktails and an ambiance to match.

With a single discreet entryway that leads to the speakeasy's three interior salons, its exclusive atmosphere features candlelit tables, tall-backed leather chairs, velvet curtains and a dashing marble bar. It's the perfect speakeasy to gossip with friends or meet someone discreetly for a night on the town.

Pro Tip: Before heading to The Violet Hour for a nightcap, check out several of Chicago's top [things to do](#).

The Gotham Club | San Francisco

If you're a baseball fan, this is a must. Hidden behind the San Francisco Giants scoreboard in Oracle Park is The Gotham Club – a members-only speakeasy with spectacular views of every Giants home game and the bay.

Anyone wondering what a speakeasy is might also wonder if a *baseball stadium* can truly hold one. The Gotham answers that easily, as the club includes a hidden billiard and game room complete with a pool table and a bowling alley. The only catch is it can be expensive (think between \$4,000 - \$7,000 per year). But if you can afford it, or if you're looking for a great gift for a San Francisco Giants fan, The Gotham Club will satisfy any baseball and/or speakeasy fan (preferably both).

Pro Tip: Visit these other [top bars](#) in the San Francisco area before a game.

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