



If the first thing that comes to mind when you think of tequila is an epic night of cheap, bottom-shelf shots in college that resulted in a painful morning full of regret, then let us tell you: you're doing it wrong.

When it comes to spirits, tequila's got everyone around here buzzing. Due to San Diego's proximity to Mexico, it's no wonder that there's a burgeoning community of agave addicts coming up in our bar scene. Even though these tequila aficionados can shoot it with the best of them, they'd much rather sip it from a snifter. So forget about the salt, and you can save that lime wedge for your tacos; with these guys behind the bar, you'll have a whole new appreciation for "te-kill-ya." From añejos to mezcals, here are the places with tequilas so good you'll want to drink the worm.

Sandbar

Mission Beach

Over the past year or so, Sandbar has gone from being known as the beach bar with award-winning tacos to a tequila bar by the beach. Don't worry, those award-winning TKO tacos are still on the menu, along with a selection of 66 high-end tequilas and mezcals. Sandbar also has its own hand-selected barrel of tequila from the Herradura Tequila distillery in Guadalajara, Mexico. Not sure which tequila to drink?

The [menu](#) makes it easy to figure out what you like, with flights like the "Beginner's Mezcal" and "Sandbar Does Jalisco" to get you started. It also serves plenty of

margaritas and tequila cocktails perfect for sipping while overlooking Mission Beach from the rooftop patio.



SARA NORRIS/THRILLIST

Cantina Mayahuel

North Park

If you want to learn everything you ever wanted to know and more about agave, then the staff at Cantina Mayahuel will be more than happy to drop some knowledge on you. They'll make you a margarita if you really want them to, but these guys are purists who drink their tequila neat. Behind the bar, there's an ever-changing collection of around 240 tequilas and 100 mezcals on the shelf, including its very own brand, [Don Lorenzo Reposado Reserva](#). It's a sippable mix of five different tequila expressions from five different agave harvests that are expertly blended to make one fine tequila. Just tell the guy or gal behind the bar that you want to get "Lorenzo'd." They'll know what that means.



SARA NORRIS/THRILLIS

La Puerta

Gaslamp

La Puerta is the spot for good tequila in the Gaslamp. It offers about 115 tequilas, 40 mezcals, four raicillas, nine sotols, and two bacanoras. If you have no idea what a raicilla, sotol, or bacanora is, the bar staff knows their stuff and will be more than happy to give you the lowdown on the selection. Everything is half off during happy hour seven days a week, meaning you can try twice as many. If you want to keep things simple with a cocktail, order the Royal. It's La Puerta's take on a classic paloma made with Don Fulano blanco suave, agave nectar, fresh-squeezed ruby red grapefruit juice, and lime. It's topped with a float of Ancho Reyes ancho chile liqueur and a pinch of Tajín, then garnished with an orange peel.



COURTESY OF THE PATIO ON GOLDFINCH

The Patio on Goldfinch

Mission Hills

The Patio on Goldfinch has more than 80 tequilas and another 35 Mexican spirits, including mezcal, raicilla, bacanora, and sotol to choose from. Forget sucking that lime dry after a shot of tequila; the best chaser is sangrita. Not to be confused with sangria - - which is also a favorite at The Patio -- sangrita is a traditional tequila chaser that dates back to the 1920s. There are five sangrita selections on the menu named after their color: naranja, rojo, rosado, verde, and amarillo. All were created especially to complement the flavor profiles of tequilas with which they're paired.



SARA NORRIS/THRILLIS

Puesto at The Headquarters

Seaport Village

Puesto might have one of the smaller collections on this list, with between 30 and 40 agave-based spirits, from tequila, to mezcal, to bacanora, raicilla, and sotol, but that's intentional. It's all about curating the best selection from the individual producers, so that customers have the most thoughtful variety available. On April 1st, it started a mezcal infusion collaboration with Kettner Exchange, Madison, and The Patio on Goldfinch (also on this list). Each bar created an infused mezcal, then traded it with another who made the infusion into a cocktail. For a limited time, Puesto is serving the Mezcal Alexander, made with a coco butter-washed mezcal created by the guys at Madison. However, the Mercado Margarita is a permanent staple on Puesto's cocktail list; it's made with Casa Noble Crystal tequila, Pierre Ferrand dry curaçao, seasonal organic citrus, and agave.



COURTESY OF BRACERO

Bracero Cocina de Raiz

Little Italy

The last place you'd look for great tequila is in the middle of Little Italy, but the addition of Bracero last year brought some Latin flair to this neighborhood, both in the kitchen and behind the bar. With the restaurant's commitment to honoring Mexican heritage, you can bet there's a killer tequila program going on. It has a well-rounded selection of around 20 tequilas, 20 mezcals, a variety of bacanoras, raicillas, sotols, and one of the best tequila-based craft cocktail lists in SD. The Javier Wallbanger (pictured) is a local favorite and a cheeky nod to chef Javier Plascencia. It's made with tequila, Galliano, lemon, orange, vanilla, and allspice dram.



COURTESY OF COASTERRA

Coasterra

Harbor Island

For drinking tequila with one of the best views in town, stop by Coasterra. Its Tequila Lounge is perched right on the end of Harbor Island with an outdoor patio overlooking the water and the Downtown SD skyline on the horizon. Refine your palate with the six tequila tasting flights, which range from mezcals to aged tequilas. Coasterra's staff also gets a little creative with flavors for the house-made infusions, like strawberry Espolon Añejo, grapefruit Olmeca Altos Blanco, and poblano cilantro Olmeca Altos Blanco. If you just want to chill out during happy hour, try Deb's Coconut Margarita, made with Olmeca Altos Reposado Tequila, Coco Lopez, and lime juice.



SARA NORRIS/THRILLIST

Karina's Mexican Seafood

Chula Vista

Karina's is known for Mexican seafood, but the Chula Vista hub offers something extra special when it comes to tequila. In addition to the selection of more than 50 tequilas, it also has tequila pops. You can order house-made paletas in all sorts of flavors, served in a wine glass so you can dip them in a shot of whichever tequila you choose. VIP customers can also keep a personal bottle in their very own tequila locker at the restaurant.



COURTESY OF EL AGAVE

El Agave Tequileria

Old Town

Walking into El Agave, you get the feeling that there might be more tequila under this roof than there is in all of Mexico. The tequila museum is an astonishing sight to behold, and is the largest in the United States. With almost 3,000 agave spirits in its archive, you'll find bottles displayed in just about every available nook and cranny. Only about 1,000 of them are available for drinking, but some of the tequilas are more than 100 years old. Aside from its unbelievable collection, El Agave is also serving some interesting cocktails. One of these tequila-based concoctions is served in a green bell pepper on a wooden plank, and comes with assorted salts and sugars and a shot of its signature sangrita on the side. Also on the list is a margarita made with damiana liqueur, popular for its aphrodisiac properties; but who isn't already feeling frisky after a few shots of tequila?