



Drink

## We're in the Golden Age of the Mini Bar, and It's Awesome



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The new mini bars are more than just overpriced liquor stores—they're tiny destination bars you can check out without taking off your bathrobe.

Try not to be shocked, but most hotel mini bars are there to rip you off. You should not, under any circumstances, pay \$24 for a 50ml pull of generic bourbon you're going to drink out of a wine glass. That is how hotels make a chump out of you. If you need a nightcap, [head downstairs](#). If you want to drink it in bed, ask the bartender if you can bring it back up to your room. I speak from a place of immense experience here when I say: they almost always allow it.

The problem here is not the concept of the mini bar itself. It's that most mini bars suck, especially when it comes to liquor. (When it comes to M&Ms, most minibars are very, very good, and shouldn't change a thing.) This is getting better, slowly but surely, as more hotels embrace their local liquor scenes. At a number of hotels in Brooklyn, for instance, you can grab bottles of locally made spirits either right off the shelf or with a quick call downstairs. The [1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge](#), a new place just across the river from lower Manhattan (with the kind of crazy skyline views you'd expect from a location like that) has Van Brunt Stillhouse whiskey in the minibar, and then spirits from Kings County Distillery, Cacao Prieto Distillery, and New York Distilling Co. orderable to your room via iPad—a pretty damn good lineup. Are they heavily marked up for the convenience? Yes, very much. But the local selection is honestly better than that of a lot of nearby bars.

What's really exciting, though, are the places going beyond the usual mini-fridge thing that's long been the norm. At the **Darcy Hotel**, in **D.C.**, you can order a fully-stocked cocktail cart up to your room, including an array of local spirits and a pro to mix up whatever you want with them. In New York, at the **Renwick Hotel**, near Bryant Park, an expansive in-room cocktail program is there to send drinks up on a sterling silver tray, pre-mixed in a keepsake flask, with proper glassware, garnish, and ice when you're ready to pour. (The place was a favorite of John Steinbeck and Thomas Mann, so, get in the spirit.) **Chicago Athletic Association** stocks local spirits from Koval and Leatherbee distilleries, a shaker, and a short menu outlining simple drinks that can be made from the ingredients. (Grapefruit Gin Fizz; Fernet and Cola; Old Fashioneds.) And the **Mondrian**, in **London**, gets the most out of its relationship with Ryan Chetiyawardana, considered one of the best bartenders in the world, by offering guests his pre-bottled concoctions, like a "Beeswax Old Fashioned" or a "Frosted Martini." Chetiyawardana devised the menu at the Mondrian's always-crowded lobby bar, Dandelyan.)



With all that work going into the selections, it helps to think of the really top-tier mini bars as more than just overpriced liquor stores. In-room selections like this are local experiences in and of themselves, tiny destination bars you can check out without taking off your bathrobe. If I'm headed to a city with an eye on diving into the bar scene or sampling from its local spirits, I always make sure to stay somewhere where the minibar can contribute to the experience. This wasn't always easy, but things change quickly—a decade ago, there were only a handful of local or craft distilleries across the United States, so it made sense that hotels would buy in bulk from the big producers in Kentucky. Obviously we've come a long way. So I'll Google image search "[hotel] + minibar" before I book a place, just to get a sense of what I'm working with. I'm not saying I'll flat-out avoid places with underwhelming liquor selections. But the extent to which a hotel focuses on the details of what's in the tiny refrigerator tends to be a pretty good indication of how much they pay attention to the details of everything else.