

📍 Ho Chi Minh City

Raising the bar

If you're looking for an upscale nightlife experience in Saigon, check out these hot new bars in Districts 1 and 2

1

SMOG

The frustration of Ho Chi Minh City's stop-start metro construction is keenly felt on Le Loi Street, where you'll find dystopian-themed SMOG. "We're trying to do something different," co-founder Vu Tuan An says. "Saigon is chaos, and we want to harness that chaos for the bar." With a concept inspired by the cyberpunk genre, the interiors here are tinged with a post-apocalyptic red hue while cheerful staff are dressed in orange jumpsuits. A compelling list of five signatures includes The Shining Paloma, a sweet and sour infusion of tequila, pink grapefruit liqueur and grapefruit tonic, served in a chili salt-rimmed glass. fb.com/smogsaigon

2

Ryu

Marvel at the commanding vistas of the historic Grand Hotel Saigon from Ryu, located above Dong Khoi Street. A floor-to-ceiling corner window makes the most of the scenes outside, which you can enjoy from intimate tables. Alternatively, sit at the cozy bar and watch the bartenders at work. "The best drinks I make are customized cocktails," founder and lead bartender Tien Duc says. "It's challenging, but I always try and match the drink to the mood of the customer." Don't be put off by the seedy entrance shared with a dubious spa – any doubts will melt away once you step inside the bar. fb.com/ryu.cocktailbar

3

Dram

A new kid on the block that opened its doors to a neighborhood of expats and locals in October, Dram is nestled in District 2's Thao Dien and boasts a rooftop garden bedecked with ancient trees and a billiards room. The dark wooden floors and British racing green walls set the stage for crisply dressed bartenders that craft bespoke cocktails and themed whisky flights. "There are a lot of folks out there who are tentative about the entire Scotch whisky category," Australian co-founder Andy O'Brien says. "So drinking in the flight format is helpful." fb.com/dramwhiskybar





These places can get crowded on weekends, so call dibs on seats by booking a table ahead of your visit

4

The Gin House

When the city's rowdy Pham Ngu Lao neighborhood gets too busy, escape into The Gin House, hiding a few streets north. The bar has been going strong since 2016, but an April renovation has provided its gin-obsessed owner, Thanh Tan, the push to expand the space and refresh the menu. Try the *Banh Mi Op La* (omelette baguette) which offers umami flavors enhanced with Vietnamese spices. Perch on highchairs around intimate candlelit tables or check out an impressive collection of gin bottles at the bar. [fb.com/theginhousesaigon](https://www.facebook.com/theginhousesaigon)



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5 6

Irusu Lounge

Named after the Japanese act of pretending to be out when someone knocks at your door, Irusu Lounge lies hidden in an unassuming alleyway that's a short distance from the Notre Dame Cathedral. Adding to the Japanese theme are black and gold interiors that feature eye-popping photographs of tattooed Yakuza members. Signature drinks include the Irusu Sour, which mixes Japanese plum liqueur with shiitake-infused honey, sudachi limes and Angostura Bitters. "We also pride ourselves on our tableside mixology," explains group operations manager Nguyen Cao. [fb.com/irusulounge](https://www.facebook.com/irusulounge)

7

The Cocktail Merchants

Welcome aboard The Cocktail Merchants, a maritime-themed bar that opened in July. The theme reflects the six years that the owners spent traveling around the world, gleaning inspiration at every port. The menu – presented on a treasure map – offers an array of inventive tipples, as well as wines made from local produce such as mango. Aside from tropical wines, ingredients used for the cocktails include honey from the north, pepper from the south and the fingered citron, a bizarre-looking citrus fruit commonly found on Vietnamese prayer altars. [fb.com/thecocktailmerchantsgn](https://www.facebook.com/thecocktailmerchantsgn)



7