

Lighter, Brighter, Better



As temperatures rise, hoteliers are shifting their focus toward cocktails that are lighter and more refreshing...

By Bindu Gopal Rao

Image courtesy: The Westin Mumbai Garden City.

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Anuradha Venkatachalam, Hotel Captain, Moxy Bengaluru Airport Prestige Tech Cloud



Birendra Singh Bisht, Taj Lakefront, Bhopal



Devendra Acharya, The Westin Mumbai Garden City



Rakesh Shetty, Assistant Director of F&B, Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru



Bhaskar Bhatt, Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa

“Bartenders are using fermented elements to introduce subtle acidity, funk, and depth. It adds a narrative to the drink as well, making the process as interesting as the final serve.”

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During the summer months, there is a noticeable shift in how cocktail menus are put together. Lighter, more refreshing profiles using citrus, tropical flavours, and seasonal ingredients that naturally feel cooling dominate the glass.

Haute Drinks

There is a clear preference for drinks that feel cooling and hydrating, with well-balanced flavour profiles rather than anything too heavy or spirit-forward.

Anuradha Venkatachalam, Hotel Captain, Moxy Bengaluru Airport Prestige Tech Cloud, says, “What we are also seeing is a change in guest preferences. Guests today are leaning towards low-calorie, zero-sugar options that feel light and easy to enjoy, with a growing preference for cocktails that are balanced and energising. At the same time, presentation plays a big role. Summer menus are becoming more vibrant and visually appealing because it’s not just about the drink anymore; it’s about the overall experience.”

Looking Good

Presentation and storytelling are now central to the overall cocktail experience. Guests are looking for something more immersive, where the drink goes beyond taste and becomes a sensory journey. Elements like glassware, colour, garnish, and overall aesthetics play a significant role in shaping that experience.

Rakesh Shetty, Assistant Director of F&B, Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru, says, “Storytelling is the very soul of Four Seasons. Every drink in our Garden City Collection tells a story, whether



Image courtesy: Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa

Ingredients like basil and curry leaves work not just as garnishes but as key components that add depth and character

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it is the Ulsoor Cooler, which uses Blue Curaçao to mirror the shimmering reflections of our historic lakes, or the Bonitas Hours menu at Copitas, which celebrates the Mediterranean spirit of leisure. When a guest understands the narrative behind the Tropica, they are not just drinking; they are participating in a seasonal ritual.”

Different styles of glassware, thematic storytelling, elements like ice and smoke, and overall presentation all add to the narrative of the drink. With bar culture evolving and guests now exposed to some of the best bars, presentation has become just as important as the drink itself.

Ingredient Forward

Indian cooling ingredients, such as vetiver, kokum, gondhoraj lime, and curry leaf, play an important role in modern cocktail experimentation.

“This summer, ingredients such as raw mango, watermelon, kaffir lime, and Kumaoni lemon have been particularly versatile. They bring a natural balance of acidity, freshness, and brightness that works beautifully across a range of cocktails. We also enjoy working with herbs like basil and curry leaves, not just as garnishes but as key components that add depth and character. These ingredients allow us to keep the drinks simple yet expressive, while drawing inspiration from fresh, seasonal produce,” says Bhaskar Bhatt, restaurant manager, Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa.

“We are leaning heavily into the botanical heritage of the Garden City. Local passion fruit, coastal coconuts, and Nilgiri peaches are our stars this year. The Cubbon Coconut Daiquiri in our Garden City Collection is a perfect example; it uses the creamy sweetness of Karnataka’s coconuts balanced with the sharp tartness of passion fruit to create a velvety, tropical escape that feels as lush as the city’s green heart,” adds Shetty.

Local Love

There is a growing focus on sourcing locally, as guests today value freshness and authenticity in what they consume. What was once a talking point has now become a working model. ‘Farm-to-glass’ is no longer just a narrative; it’s shaping how bars operate on a daily basis. There’s a visible shift towards sourcing seasonal, local produce and building in-house elements, infusions, syrups, and garnishes that reflect what’s available regionally, rather than relying on standardised, off-the-shelf ingredients.

“This approach goes beyond sustainability; it’s also about creating distinction and maintaining control over quality. When bartenders work with truly regional produce, including



Fiesta at Copitas, Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru



Image courtesy: The Westin Mumbai Garden City.

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Image courtesy: Taj Lakefront Bhopal.

GI-tagged ingredients or locally grown botanicals, the result is not just fresher flavour but a stronger sense of place. It allows them to craft cocktails that feel rooted and personal while giving them a more compelling story to share with guests. Sustainability, of course, plays a key role in driving this shift,” says Birendra Singh Bisht, Food & Beverage Manager, Taj Lakefront, Bhopal.

Bars are becoming more mindful about reducing waste, shortening supply chains, and moving away from overly processed flavouring agents. The focus is on thoughtful sourcing and responsible usage, ensuring that what goes into the glass is as considered as the drink itself.

Flavours Rule

Guests are increasingly drawn to cocktails that are fresh, subtly tangy, and easy to drink, rather than those with intense or overpowering notes. Low-proof options are also gaining popularity, especially for occasions where people prefer to sip slowly.

Devendra Acharya, Assistant Beverage Manager, The Westin Mumbai Garden City, says, “Summer cocktail flavour profiles are clearly shifting, and not just in one direction. The big picture now is that drinkers are leaning lighter and more refreshing, but they also want complexity, balance, and ‘drinkability’ (session-friendly) rather than just sugary, easy sips. Lighter, low-ABV and sessionable leads to the shift. Refreshing is not equal to sweet anymore. Herbal, botanical, and green flavours are booming. Juicy tropical and high-acidity fruits are everywhere. Texture and format are an equal part of refreshing drinks.”

Bitterness, gentle spice, and drier styles are gaining popularity, with guests showing more interest in crisp, structured drinks over syrupy ones. Bright acidity, subtle heat, and clean finishes are defining the palate—making cocktails feel more refreshing, layered, and perfectly suited to the summer mood.

Techniques Matter

Technique has become an important part of crafting well-balanced summer cocktails. Methods such as cold infusions and slow extraction techniques like sous vide help draw out delicate flavours without introducing bitterness. Seasonal cocktails strike that balance by using familiar ingredients in a different way, and they naturally draw more interest. Techniques today are all about achieving depth without weight. Clarification, for instance, is widely used to create cocktails that feel light and polished while still carrying layered flavours. It allows bartenders to take bold, often complex ingredient combinations and present them in a clean, almost delicate format, perfect for summer drinking.

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Sourcing seasonal, local produce and building in-house elements, infusions, syrups, and garnishes are in vogue

Image courtesy: Taj Lakefront Bhopal.



Nandi Hills Spritz, Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru



Low-proof options are also gaining popularity, courtesy The Westin Mumbai Garden City



Espuma at Copitas, Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru

“Fermentation is also gaining strong ground to build natural complexity. Instead of relying solely on citrus or sugar for balance, bartenders are using fermented elements to introduce subtle acidity, funk, and depth. It adds a narrative to the drink as well, making the process as interesting as the final serve. Shrubs continue to be a summer favourite for their versatility and stability. Their vinegar base brings brightness and structure, holding up well in heat while adding complexity without making the drink overly sweet. Together, these techniques reflect a more refined approach—where innovation enhances drinkability rather than overpowering it,” says Bisht.

Future Perfect

Storytelling has become a defining layer of the cocktail experience in India today. Menus are increasingly conceptual, drawing from landscapes, memories, regional cultures, and even personal narratives. Guests are not just ordering a drink; they are engaging with the idea behind it, making the story as important as the flavour itself.

As tasting-led concepts and more intimate bar spaces gain popularity, they naturally lend themselves to rotating menus, ingredient-led showcases, and ongoing experimentation. In that sense, seasonality isn’t just shaping summer; it’s setting the tone for how India’s cocktail culture will evolve year-round. Cocktails are now ‘designed experiences’, not just drinks. Today’s bars aren’t just selling liquid; they’re selling a moment, mood, and memory. So, let’s say cheers to that! 🍷