

ROM-COM READY
BARS FOR SINGLES
SEEKING MEET-CUTES

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50

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Sipping Solo

The best bars for singles seeking good old-fashioned in-person meet-cutes

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Remember talking to people? Chatting up an attractive stranger over the hazy din of your local drinking establishment? Letting the night take you somewhere spontaneous? If you were born after, say, 1987, perhaps you don't—the ideal of the perfect meet-cute exists to you only in dusty Meg Ryan DVDs and *Sex and the City* reruns, a dream lost to Bumble and Hinge and Tinder and all their nauseatingly swipe-centric ubiquity. It's no secret that today's daters are firmly fatigued with online apps and looking for screenless alternatives to meet up with other singles. But we must remember, the humble bar stool didn't stop existing after the iPhone was invented. It's only our nerve to put ourselves out there that has been stalled. Fortunately, this is a curable affliction (and, as an added bonus, dirty martinis await).

While it might at first feel uncomfortably vulnerable to leave emotional-support friends, books, and screens behind, there's nothing sexier than owning your solidarity and inviting friendly barkeeps and perhaps a lucky fellow single to join you in a drink. So, get into your main-character energy, be brave, and check out some of San Diego's best watering holes. You never know what might happen when you sit at the bar solo.

THE CLASSIC: Waterfront Bar & Grill

Tucked away somewhat unassumingly on Kettner Boulevard in Little Italy is one of San Diego's oldest and still liveliest drinking establishments. Opened in 1933, Waterfront Bar & Grill possesses San Diego's longest-held full liquor license and is one of the city's most packed bars most times of the day. So, it's a great place to try being on your own for the first time, because you're always likely to meet at least one person. Plus, you'll be in great hands with the incredibly friendly bartenders slinging stiff and affordable drinks. Grab a burger at the bar or get a basket of complimentary popcorn and see where the night takes you.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: During the day, you'll find the Little Italy local who's been coming here for years. They'll introduce you to the bartender and tell you all the insider lore. At night, say hi to the young professional, ready to dump their high-stress job at the door and show you how to party Waterfront-style. Long Island iced tea, anyone?

THE OG: Tivoli Bar and Grill

Tivoli opened in 1885 as a saloon and still features its original wooden bar inside. Among the city's oldest watering holes, this Gaslamp Quarter dive bar is a local favorite, especially during baseball season. Head here before a Padres game and channel your inner Wyatt Earp. Order a gin and tonic to give you some liquid courage and be ready to meet your soulmate—at the very least, you'll come away with a history lesson and a story to tell.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: The Padres diehard who knows it's much smarter to pregame with \$6 whiskey sodas than it is to shell out for the \$18 beer at Petco Park.

THE BREWERY: Modern Times Far West Lounge

Looking to meet a surfy, down-to-earth cutie with great taste in hazy IPAs? Modern Times' Far West Lounge in Encinitas is the spot. Delicious brews and craveable vegan and omnivore bar food (those smashburgers!) draw in a host of outdoorsy, active North County types. The generous semi-circle bar offers plenty of space to find a spot, and the chilled-out '70s vibe makes chatting up your neighbor feel groovy. Plus, dogs are welcome—bring your fluffy buddy as a wingman. It's easily accessible right off the 101, so head over after your next wave sesh and see if someone catches your fancy.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: The dawn patrol devout, who just got off work at Sun Bum next door. Their rescue dog is well-behaved, and they're planning a trip to Hawai'i next month. They'll flirt with you over a lager and ask you for a walk on the beach afterwards.

THE TIKI: False Idol

Make sure to go to Little Italy speakeasy on a weekday night, when it's less crowded but still lively enough to give you the opportunity to chat up a stranger. The bold décor and inventive drinks draw a diverse crowd, including bigtime tiki enthusiasts (and take it from us, the local tiki scene in San Diego is packed with interesting characters who you'll want to get to know). For drinks, rum is the name of the game. Grab a Painkiller and offer your barmate your best dad joke about its name—it's sure to at least get a convo going.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: They're in full regalia for Tiki Oasis every year and might let you sample their homemade falernum if the night goes well. You can dance to Les Baxter in their palapa.

THE HOT SPOT: Happy Medium

This charming corner spot in North Park opened in 2024 and offers fresh takes on cocktail classics, delicious bar bites, and a youthful vibe. Though it's popular, there's usually a seat at the bar. Like any good neighborhood haunt, this place is often filled with locals talking about their latest vinyl purchase or which taco shop serves the best adobada. Order a Super Grass (lemongrass mezcal, tequila, lime, mango, and pandan), then get cozy and people-watch. Pro tip: Talk music to the person sitting next to you; there's typically someone nearby who will be excited to share their album recs.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: They're a bookseller at Verbatim by day and the DJ at Soda Bar by night. They're sweet, passionate, and impossibly cool.



OPPOSITE PAGE Even if you don't meet anyone, Waterfront's staff will make going out worth your while.

ABOVE & RIGHT Get frisky with False Idol's complex tiki drinks—just don't wear polyester around the Haleakala volcano.

BELOW Hang out at Happy Medium to meet the concert companion of your dreams.



THE DIVE: Aero Club Bar

This much-beloved neighborhood spot off the 5 in Spruce Canyon supports a roster of regulars. It has all the trappings of a satisfying dive bar: strong drinks, friendly staff, flight-themed décor on every surface, and colorful Christmas lights strewn across the ceiling. (Because who doesn't love a good holiday romance on a random Tuesday in January?) Aero Club is known for its whiskey collection, so ask the bartender to recommend one you've never tried and use it as a way to start a convo with the person next to you. Or, busy yourself with a round of pinball (the bar boasts a room dedicated to arcade games) while you work up the courage to approach the cutie playing Big Buck Hunter.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: The tatted former hipster who's laddie with all of the industry folks and can give you the rundown on their favorite ryes.

THE HOTEL: Nine-Ten

The beauty of a hotel is that you're sure to never run into the same crowd twice. Fresh faces and new opportunities are in high supply, and if you want the heady combination of new romance and a great drink, head to Nine-Ten, tucked inside the Grande Colonial hotel in La Jolla. Striking the right balance of upscale yet laidback, Nine-Ten draws an elegant and professional set looking for great food and a refined ambiance. You'll find someone here to match your ambition and discerning standards. Start at the bar, and then head outside to the patio for a more private conversation.

WHO YOU'LL MEET: The jet-setting sophisticate. They know their way around a wine list and might have a house in Monaco. You can impress them by ordering the pork belly.

At Aero Club, challenge the hottie at the pool table to the next game. Winner gets the next round of WhistlePig! **BELOW** Nine-Ten's Jamaican jerk pork belly might woo a potential love interest.

