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Gen Z Drives 43% Surge in Cocktail Consumption as Spain Embraces Earlier, Low-Alcohol Socializing

Younger Spaniards favor daytime gatherings, sustainable choices, and premium experiences, reshaping the nation’s beverage and nightlife landscape.

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The Spanish beverage market is undergoing a notable shift, driven by changing habits among younger consumers and a move toward earlier socializing. According to the Bacardi Cocktail Trends Report for 2026, Generation Z, defined as those aged 18 to 29, is at the forefront of this transformation. The report, which surveyed 1,000 people in Spain as part of a global study, highlights that 43% of Gen Z respondents plan to drink more cocktails in 2026, and 66% already prefer drinks with lower alcohol content.

One of the most significant changes is the rise of “tardeo,” a trend where people choose to meet and socialize earlier in the day rather than late at night. Forty percent of Spanish respondents say they now go out to eat, drink, or socialize earlier in the evening, while 32% plan to visit fewer late-night bars. This pattern aligns with a broader global movement toward daytime socializing, known as the “Afternoon Society.” Brands have responded by introducing products tailored for these occasions, such as Martini’s Bianco Spritz and non-alcoholic options, as well as ST-GERMAIN Spritz.

Gen Z is not necessarily drinking less but is choosing to do so differently—earlier in the day, with lighter drinks, and with more intention. The report found that 73% of Gen Z consumed alcohol in the past month, and their interest in cocktails is growing: 43% plan to increase their cocktail consumption next year compared to just 19% of the general population. Preferences are also shifting during meals; 40% of Gen Z would choose a Spritz over wine at lunch, and 35% opt for an Espresso Martini after eating—double the rate seen in other age groups.

Social interaction is also evolving. Forty-one percent of Spanish consumers intend to spend less time socializing online and seek more authentic offline experiences. Thirty percent plan to attend more outdoor gatherings, while 31% expect to host fewer large parties, indicating a preference for smaller, higher-quality get-togethers.

Sustainability is another key concern. Half of those surveyed value reducing single-use plastics, while 40% look for recyclable packaging and 38% prioritize buying local products. Seventy-two percent would choose drinks without additives, and 68% are willing to pay more for beverages aged using traditional methods.

Cocktails are increasingly seen as experiences rather than just drinks. Forty-one percent of Spaniards look forward to celebrating important moments with cocktails in 2026, and 34% are eager to discover new recipes. Quality and presentation matter: three-quarters prefer their cocktails made by a bartender. For social media sharing, unique venues (40%) and garnishes (33%) are top draws. The most popular cocktails for the coming year include Mojito (41%), Gin & Tonic (35%), and Rum & Coke (27%). At home, fruit juice remains the preferred mixer.

Execution remains important for consumers: half dislike when their cocktail isn't cold enough or when ice melts too quickly. Premium spirits are gaining ground; one in four Spaniards reports drinking more high-end liquors. Home consumption is also on the rise—74% expect to drink spirits at home over the next year, and 17% are making more cocktails themselves.

Special occasions continue to drive spirit consumption: spirits are the top choice for parties (38%) and major celebrations (33%). The Margarita remains a standout; 70% associate it with cocktails generally, and nearly a third would order one on a first date to impress.

When it comes to celebrating special moments, cocktails now edge out champagne for many Spaniards—48% prefer a cocktail versus 46% who choose champagne—though champagne still dominates New Year's Eve celebrations with three-quarters raising a glass.

The Bacardi report was developed with strategic consultancy The Future Laboratory and draws on external research, bartender interviews, and consumer surveys across eleven countries. It identifies several global trends shaping cocktail culture: earlier consumption times ("daycap" replacing "nightcap"), an emphasis on meaningful in-person gatherings over digital interactions, increased demand for transparency about ingredient origins and local sourcing ("New Localogy"), brands expanding into lifestyle experiences beyond just beverages, and a return to theatricality and bold flavors in mixology after years of minimalism.

Bars are adapting by offering smaller servings like mini Martinis that stay colder longer—a response to common complaints about temperature—and by experimenting with local ingredients and sustainable practices. Menus are becoming immersive storytelling tools that guide guests through new flavor experiences.

Globally, classic cocktails such as Margarita, Mojito, Piña Colada, Rum & Coke, Whisky & Coke remain favorites. Bartenders report growing demand for spicy (55%), sweet (46%), fruity (26%), and savory (24%) flavors. Sustainability themes like reducing single-use plastics (39%), buying local (37%), recyclable packaging (36%), water conservation (30%), sustainable sourcing (29%), carbon footprint reduction (25%), and ethical sourcing (24%) are increasingly important for consumers worldwide.

The report concludes that cocktail culture is moving beyond traditional boundaries. For Generation Z especially, premium now means authenticity, sustainability, and cultural storytelling—not just price or exclusivity. Brands that succeed will be those that create experiences reflecting these values across new spaces and formats where consumers seek inspiration and belonging.