

Women's Day Special: How women mixologists are changing the cocktail culture in hotels

Women Redefining the Bar

A relatively new trend in hotel bars is the increasing presence of women bartenders and mixologists—spaces once widely perceived as a male stronghold. This shift is not merely about women occupying space behind the bar; it is about resilience, talent, and overcoming long-standing barriers to establish credibility in a demanding craft.

Testing the Waters

For many women, stepping behind the bar has not been an easy journey. The industry often demands that they work harder to prove their capabilities.

“When I first stepped behind the bar at Chidya Ghar Bar in Roseate House, it felt like I was being tested,” recalls Samim Bano, Cast Member Mixologist at Chidya Ghar Bar, Roseate House, New Delhi. “The standards are high, and guests are knowledgeable about their drinks, so everyone is observed closely. I felt I had to prove my skills from day one. But that’s also what makes working here special—once you show consistency and professionalism, you earn respect for your craft.”

In an industry historically dominated by men, progressive hotel brands are increasingly creating opportunities for women to thrive. Bano credits Roseate Hotels & Resorts for fostering an environment where talent matters more than gender.

“There was no discrimination between male and female bartenders. In fact, I felt encouraged to train harder, experiment, and take ownership of the bar during busy shifts. Claiming my space wasn’t about competing with men—it was about growing in an environment that truly supports talent.”

Breaking the Gender Barriers

For women working behind the bar, earning recognition often comes through perseverance and performance.

At Double Up, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park, the pace can be intense during corporate evenings and weekend rushes. “Claiming my space wasn’t about making a statement,” says Sonali Wangkheimayum, F&B Associate. “It was about showing up every day, managing the pressure, and doing my job well. Once people see you can confidently run the bar, you earn your place.”

She admits that staying sharp is crucial—knowing the menu, understanding guest preferences, and maintaining consistency.

“There was a busy evening when a guest ordered a cocktail I had never made before and the bar was packed. For a moment I felt stuck, but I stayed calm, clarified the order, checked the details, and served it properly. Moments like that remind you how important composure is in this profession.”

Owning the Scene

Confidence, composure, and clear communication are qualities that often help women excel in high-pressure bar environments.

Athihrii Maniziini, Mixologist at ZLB23 at The Leela Palace Bengaluru, credits a supportive workplace culture for her growth. “Respect comes from how you show up every day—your preparation, composure, and dedication to the craft. Both my male and female colleagues have been encouraging, and that collaborative environment makes a huge difference, especially early in your career.”

She also highlights the role of structured training and mentorship in building credibility.

“At The Leela, continuous learning and leadership development helped me grow. As guests began trusting my recommendations and returning for the experience, the initial pressure transformed into confidence and a strong sense of belonging.”

Navigating Challenges

Despite progress, women behind the bar still encounter challenges, including handling inappropriate behaviour while maintaining professionalism.

“There have been moments when guests crossed lines, verbally or behaviourally,” says Sanjana Pol, Assistant Restaurant Manager at HYPE, Shangri-La Bengaluru. “As a woman in hospitality, that can be a reality. What it teaches you is that resilience isn’t silence—it’s knowing when to stay composed and when to assert boundaries professionally.”

She believes confidence comes from mastering both the art and business of the bar.

“Stand straight. Speak clearly. Know your numbers—GP%, stock variance, and menu logic. When you understand both the creative and operational aspects of the bar, people stop underestimating you.”

A Woman’s Touch

Women are also bringing their own perspective to cocktail culture, often focusing on storytelling, sensory balance, and guest connection.

“I think women bring emotional intelligence into service,” says Pol. “I observe body language, mood shifts, and subtle preferences. My cocktails are not just about flavour balance—they’re about creating an experience.”

Maniziini echoes this sentiment. “At ZLB23, we focus deeply on detail and guest connection. From flavour balance to the temperature of the glass and timing of service, every element contributes to the guest experience. Each cocktail is crafted to feel thoughtful and memorable.”

Looking Ahead

As the bar industry evolves, women are helping redefine leadership behind the counter through creativity, perspective, and skill.

“Do not let fear decide your future,” advises Bano. “Bartending is not about gender—it’s about skill, confidence, and passion.”

Wangkheimayum adds, “If you’re considering a career behind the bar, don’t let doubt stop you. It’s demanding, but incredibly rewarding if you’re willing to learn and stay resilient.”

The bar industry needs more women—not simply to fit into the space, but to reshape and elevate it. And that is certainly something worth raising a toast to.