

GRUB STREET

The Absolute Best Bar on the Upper East Side

While the Upper East Side might not be a destination for nightlife, there are still plenty of low-key spots worth checking out. Places where you can be a regular and they will remember your name, or where you can just be passing through and feel equally as welcome. Satisfying food and drink is a must, of course, and an atmosphere that will entice you to stay awhile.



Sugar East

1125 First Ave., nr. 62nd St.; 212-832-4610

First thing's first: This new kid on the block is not for everybody. Formerly the Merchants NY Cigar Bar, the tobacco license here was grandfathered in, making Sugar East one of only eight bars in the city where you can smoke indoors. Cigars aren't on the menu (and they'd rather folks not bring them), but packs of cigarettes are, and if you'd like to light one up, you're welcome to. Even the candle in the bathroom is cigar-scented. But if you can get past all that, you're in for a treat: A Havana-in-its-heyday bar with handsome Art Deco lines, big roomy booths, and cocktails by Jeremy Strawn, a Death & Co. and Mulberry Project alum. Drinks are named for their primary taste profile, the gin-based Celery (\$16) tastes like celery, the bourbon-based Charred Lemon (\$16) like charred lemon, etc.; to flex your senses, order the Coconut, with Havana Club rum, Fernet, absinthe, and coconut juice. Served in, well, a fuzzy coconut, it's presented with a lit cinnamon stick, meant to be inhaled as you drink, and truly transports. Bites like lobster arepas with tart pomegranate seeds and chorizo-pineapple-and-mint skewers are small but potent, and DJs spin regularly later in the evening.