

Since the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, the laws governing drinking in America are a crazy patchwork quilt of rules at the state (and sometimes county or municipal) level. Want beer above 3.2% alcohol, want to buy alcohol on Sundays, want to BYOB when you go out to eat? Depending on where you are, your local laws may allow it or shut you down.

Fortunately, traveling tipplers now have a handy guide to all the regulations, in the [Field Guide to Drinking in America](#), by [Niki Ganong](#). ([Overcup Press](#), \$19.99.) Ganong sets out to survey each state's bibulous history, its current beverage alcohol laws, and sprinkles the results with interesting factoids and a tip from a bartender in each state. The book is arranged geographically, starting with Maine and the Northeast and moving westward to Hawaii, and the aim is to show the reader how the history of drinking in America unfolded as the states were settled from east to west. (There's an index at the back of the book, but it inexplicably doesn't include the state names; you'll have to go to the table of contents up front if you want to jump to a specific state.)

Each state in turn gets a four-page spread, which includes information on who can sell what kinds of alcohol: in "control states" such as New Hampshire or West Virginia, booze is only sold by state-run (or -licensed) liquor stores. Some places distinguish between beer and wine (in New York, you can buy beer at a grocery store, but for wine you have to go to a liquor store), and some states draw lines based on the alcohol content of the beer, with 3.2% being the most common threshold for differing availability: in Oklahoma, "low-point" beer below this percentage is available at gas stations, groceries, and convenience stores, while you have to go to a licensed liquor store for "strong beer", wine, or liquor, which must be sold at room temperature. The book also outlines the blue laws governing the consumption or purchase of alcohol on Sundays, the hours in which retail stores or bars can sell alcohol, and gives the reader a brief rundown on the local option, in which counties or towns can set their own rules.

The book misses a few local quirks, such as North Carolina's private club system, where bars that sell mixed drinks but food must restrict entry to members and their guests. (You can typically join on the spot for as little as a dollar, and the private clubs don't have to pass health or sanitation inspections, so let's just hope the ice is clean.) Or the "setups" still found in some parts of the rural South, where places without liquor licenses will sell you ice, mixers, and let you use their glassware, as sort of a lower-end BYOB version of bottle service.

Each state's section also includes a map of the principal cities in the state which highlights dry and wet counties where applicable (it'd be nice if it also included locations mentioned in each state's essay), a nice rundown of what you can and can't do legally in that state, a quote from a local bartender talking about their state's drinking landscape, and best of all, some well-chosen interesting factoids illustrated in a colorful, infographic-like style. For instance, did you know that Rochester, NY's [Fee Brothers](#) survived Prohibition by producing (among other things) Bruno, a non-alcoholic malt drink whose slogan read "It's a bear!" and whose label warned you very prominently to be careful NOT to add yeast, because then it would ferment and turn into beer? Or that Colorado only allows one location of a chain store to sell alcohol? Or that you can't get

personalized license plates in New Jersey if you have a drunk-driving conviction? Or that the only kind of restaurant unable to obtain an alcohol permit in Louisiana is a donut shop? Or that sangria was illegal in Virginia until 2008? (A Prohibition-era law forbade mixing spirits with wine. The new law only specifically exempts sangria, so don't expect to find a Kir Royale in the Old Dominion.) The breezy factoids are pretty fascinating and one of my favorite parts of the book. The book's best in smaller sips, and is perfect for bathroom reading, a quick check of the lay of the land before travel, or to find out when you'll run into last call.