How to set up bar tabs in Square POS

Bar tabs preauthorization lets you secure a guest's card before you open a tab. This guide explains how to set up bar tabs in Square POS, from enabling preauthorization in your Square Dashboard to starting, managing, and closing a tab on the Point of Sale.

Preauthorizing cards up front offers several benefits:

- Reduces walkouts by securing cards up front
- Speeds up service during peak hours
- Minimizes errors in tab management
- Creates a smoother guest experience

Prerequisites

- Access to your online Square Dashboard
- The Square Point of Sale (POS) app on your device
- A card reader for preauthorizing guest cards
- A list of the business locations you want to configure, because preauthorization is enabled at the location level and you can set it up differently for each one

Enable bar tabs preauthorization in the Square Dashboard

Step 1: Open Service Settings

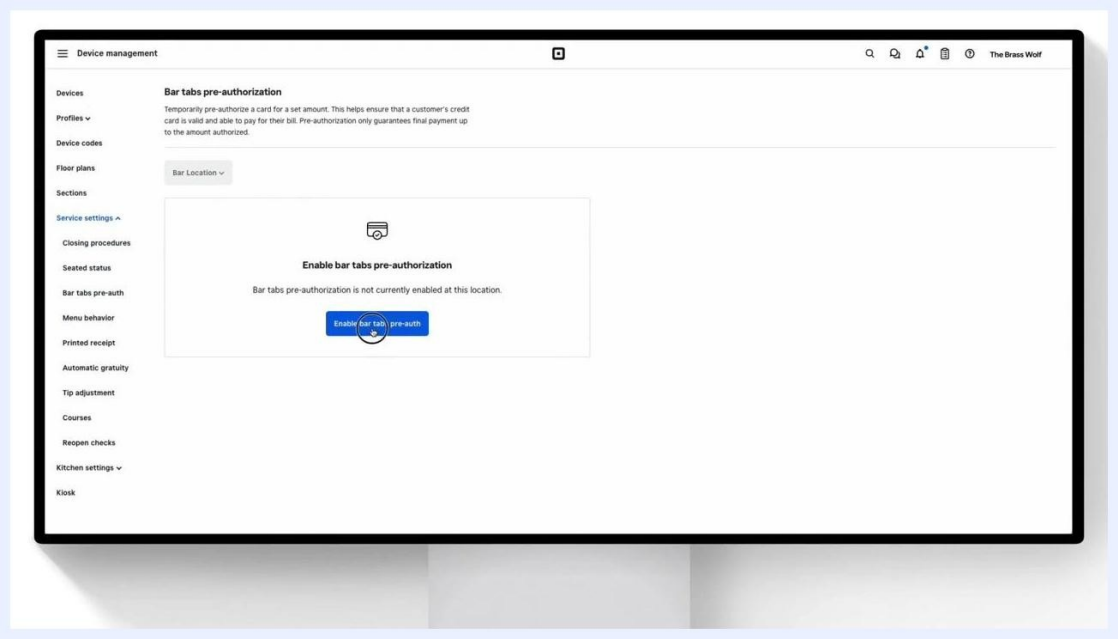
1. Go to your online Square Dashboard.
2. Select **Device Management** from the main menu.
3. In the left-hand menu, click **Service Settings**.

Step 2: Select Bar tabs pre-auth and choose a location

In Service Settings, click **Bar tabs pre-auth**. A drop-down menu lists all your locations. Select the location you want to configure.

Step 3: Enable bar tabs preauthorization

Click the blue **Enable bar tabs pre-auth** button.

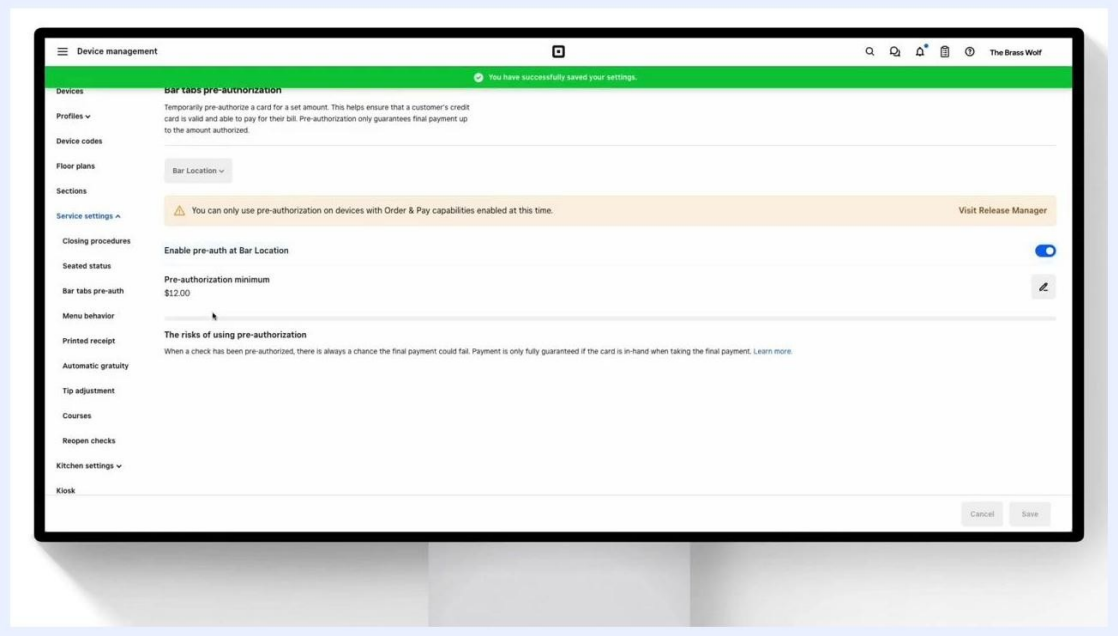


The Enable bar tabs pre-auth button highlighted in the Square Dashboard under Device Management > Service Settings > Bar tabs pre-auth

Step 4: Set a minimum preauthorization amount

A dialog prompts you to set a minimum preauthorization amount. Enter the amount you want, for example **$12.00**. Square recommends an amount close to your average tab value, so standard orders are covered.

Click **Enable** to confirm.

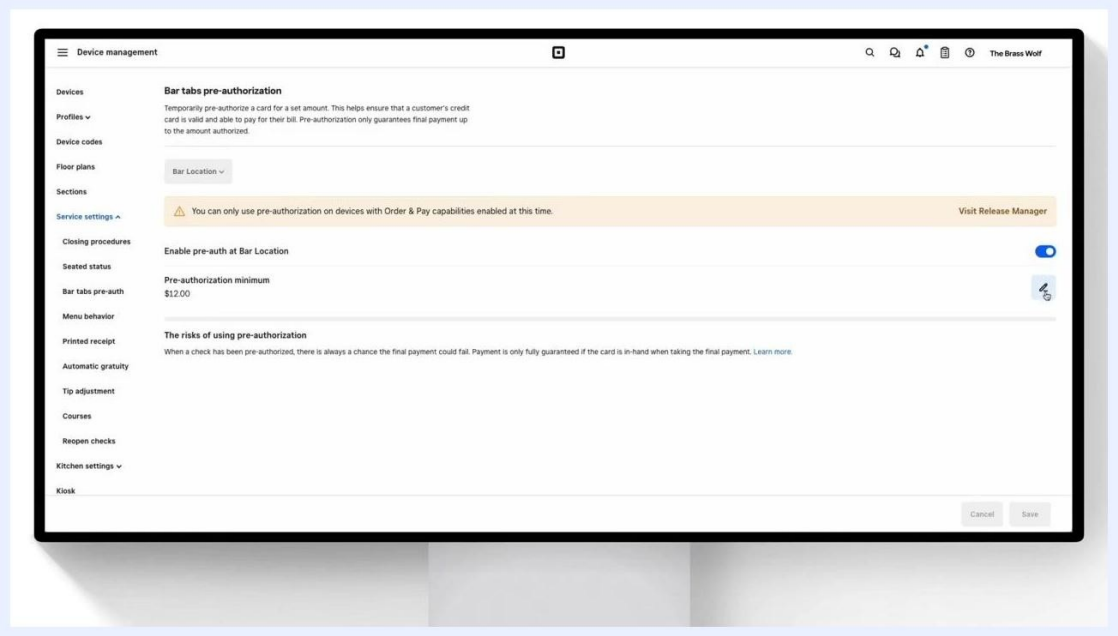


The minimum pre-authorization dialog with the value being changed from $15.00 to $12.00 and the Enable button visible

Step 5: Review your settings and the disclosed risks

After you enable the feature, the page shows the details for that location. These include the preauthorization minimum (for example, $12.00) and the risks of using preauthorization.

To change the minimum, click the **Edit** (pencil) icon next to the amount, update the value, and save.



The enabled pre-authorization settings showing the $12.00 minimum, the risks section, and the pencil icon next to the amount

Read the risks listed below the settings:

- The final payment can still fail after preauthorization.
- The final payment is only fully guaranteed if the card is in hand when you take payment.

Step 6: Repeat for other locations

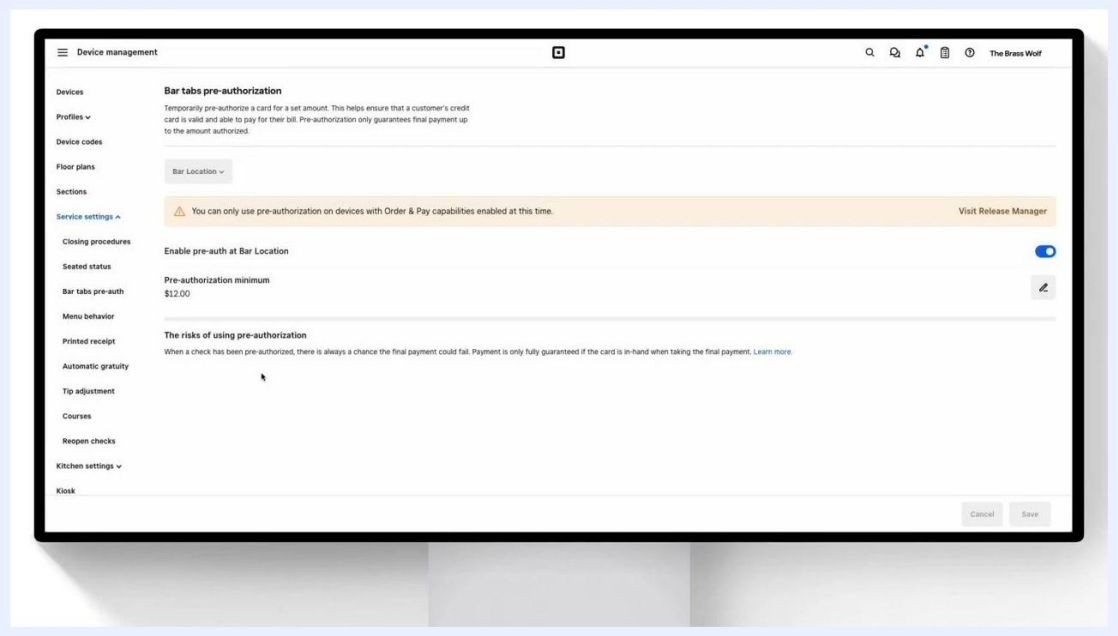
If your business has multiple locations, repeat steps 1 through 5 for each location.

Start a bar tab on the Point of Sale

Step 7: Begin a new sale

1. Open the Square Point of Sale app on your device.
2. Go to the Bar Menu screen.

3. Make sure you are logged in as the correct user (for example, "Erin H" in the top left).

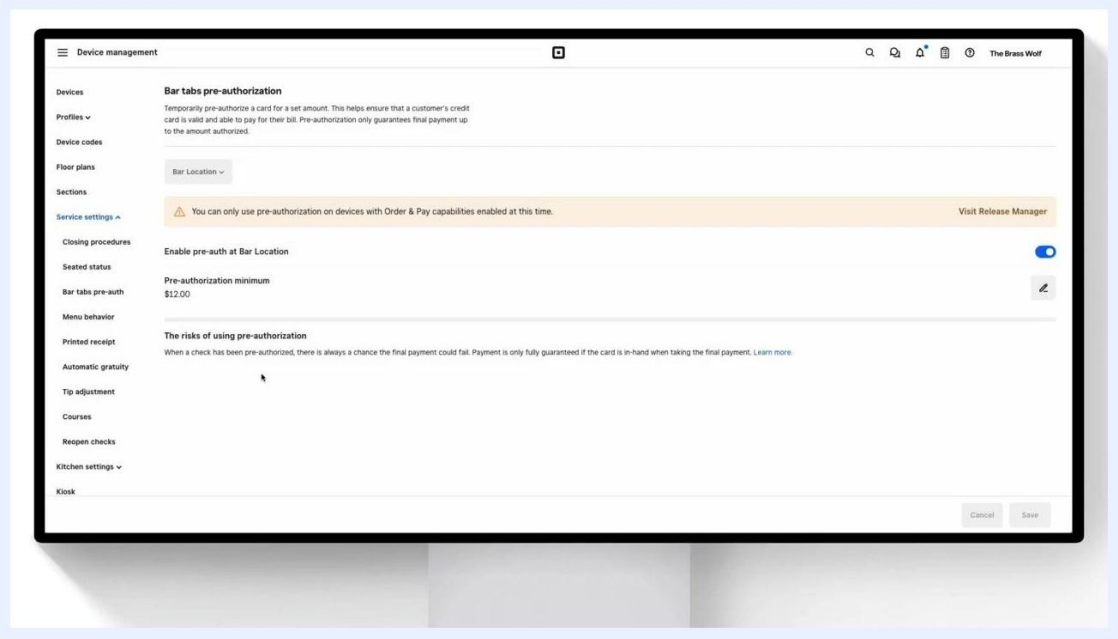


The Bar Menu screen with menu categories, item options, and the New Sale panel on the right

Step 8: Add items to the cart

Select the items the guest wants. For example, tap **Martini** ($10.00) and **BBQ Chicken** ($9.95).

Confirm that the items appear in the New Sale panel with the subtotal, sales tax, and total calculated. In this example, the subtotal is $19.95, sales tax is $1.60, and the total is $21.55.



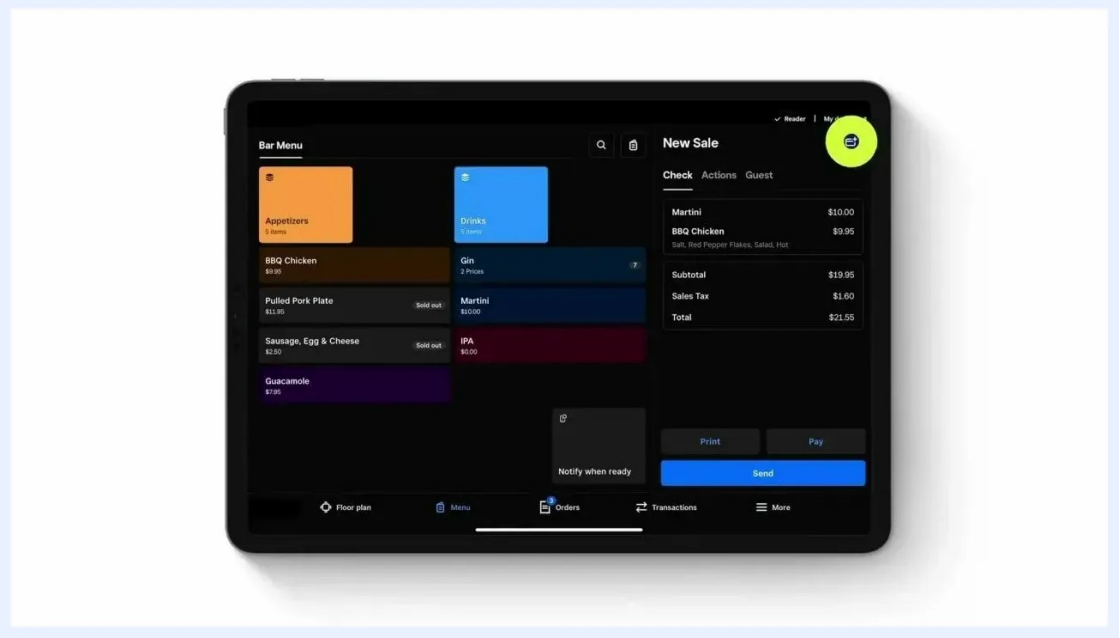
The cart with a Martini and BBQ Chicken added, showing itemized prices and the total

Step 9: Choose to start a tab

Ask the guest whether they want to pay now or start a tab. To start a tab, you have two options:

- While in the cart, dip, swipe, or tap the guest's card to start the tab.

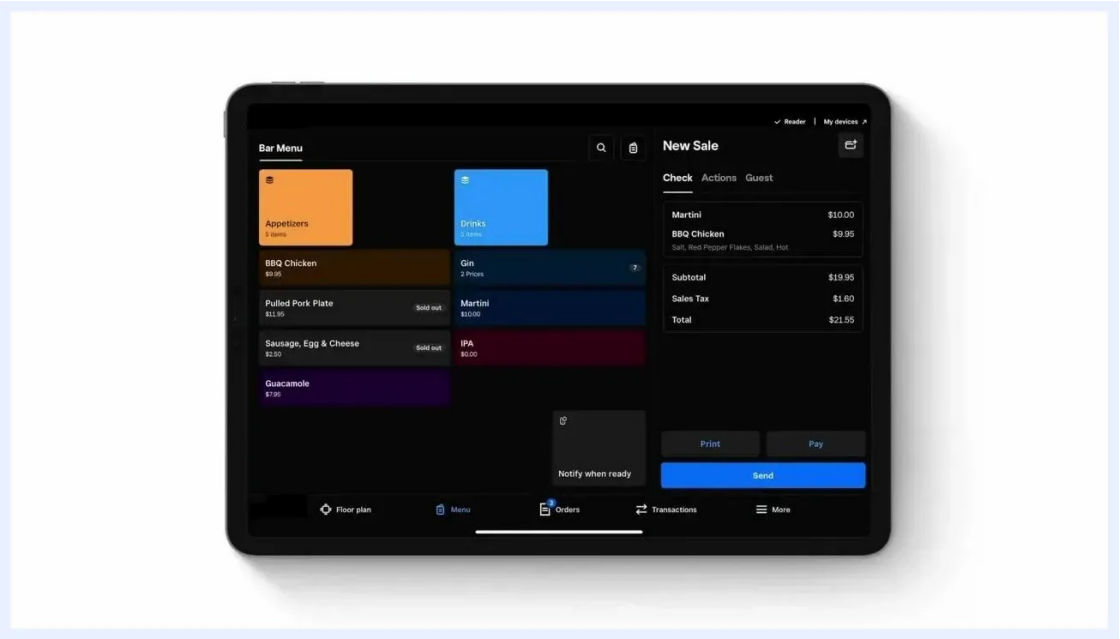
- Tap the **Pre-auth** button in the top right corner of the cart area.



The Pre-auth button highlighted in the top right corner of the cart area

Step 10: Preauthorize the guest's card

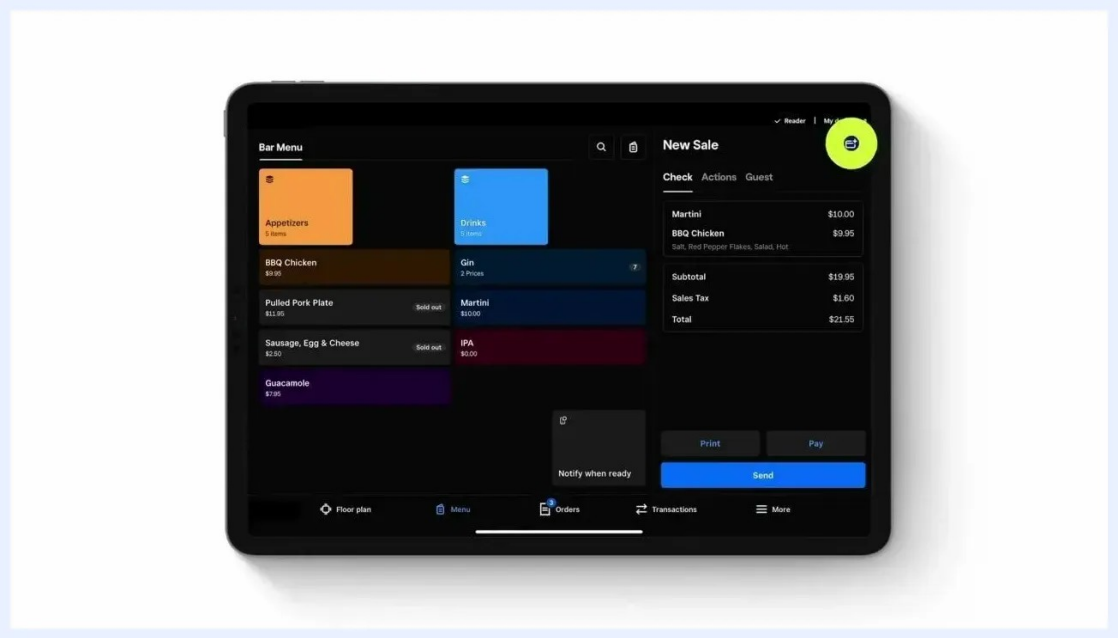
The POS prompts you to preauthorize the card. Swipe, tap, or insert the card in the reader as instructed on the screen, then wait for the system to process the preauthorization.



The Pre-authorize card screen with instructions to swipe, tap, or insert the card

Step 11: Assign the tab to a check

After preauthorization, choose whether to assign the tab to a predefined check, such as "Bar 3" or "Bar 4". To create a custom check instead, tap **Custom check**.

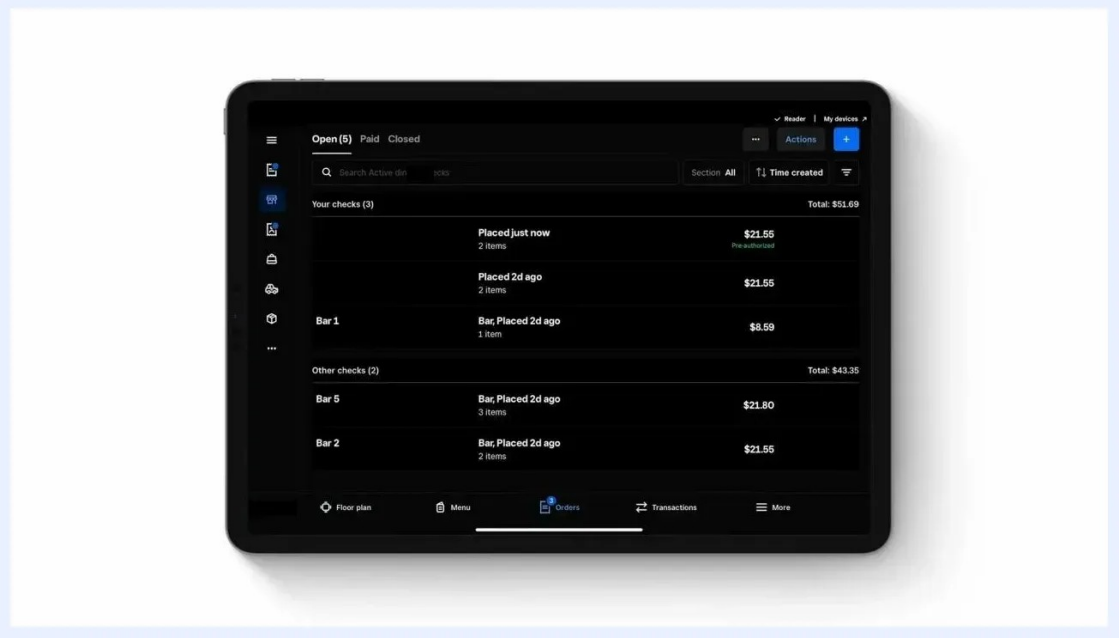


The New Bar check dialog with options for Bar 3, Bar 4, and a Custom check button

Step 12: Enter the cardholder's information for a custom check

1. In the **Check name or swipe** field, enter the cardholder's name in the format "Last name, First name" (for example, "Boozan, Hadley").
2. Optionally, add a note. Customers can't see it.
3. If you have sections set up (for example, "Bar"), select the right one. Otherwise, leave it as "None".

4. Tap **Save & send** to finalize the check.



The New custom check dialog with the name Boozan, Hadley entered, a section selection, and Save & send highlighted

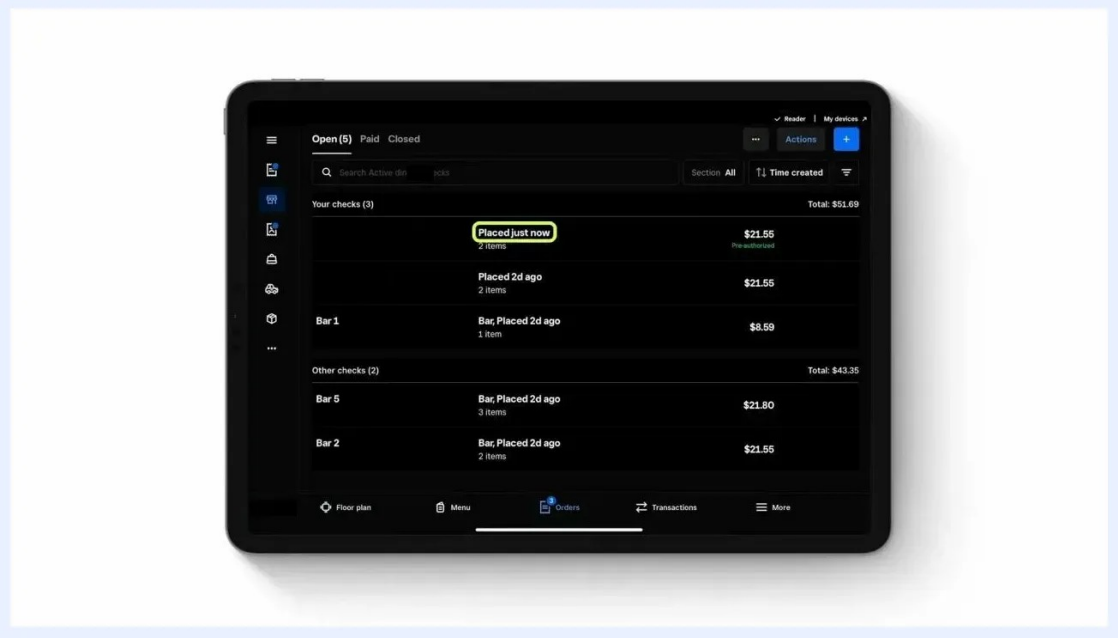
Review and manage open tabs

Step 13: Review open tabs in Order Manager

Go to the **Orders** section in the POS. Open tabs are listed by "Last name, First name" so you can identify them easily. Each tab shows:

- Who the check is assigned to (for example, "Erin Hills")
- When the check was last sent (for example, "Placed just now")
- The amount (for example, $21.55)
- The preauthorization status ("Pre-authorized" in green text)

You can use filters and views to manage open, paid, and closed checks.



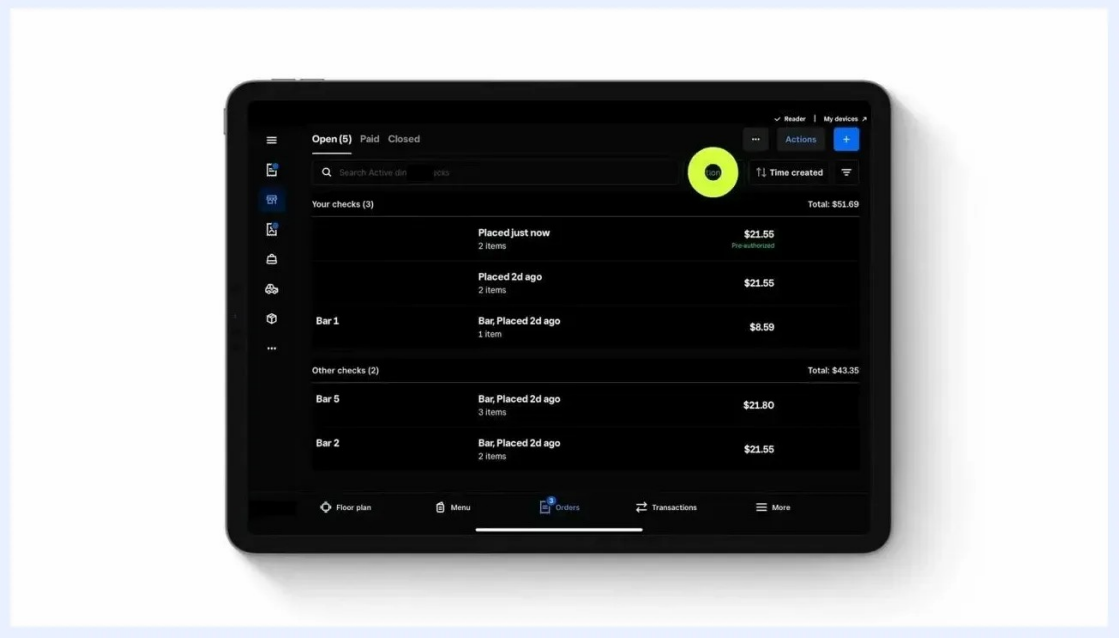
Order Manager showing the open check for Boozan, Hadley, placed just now, $21.55, with a Pre-authorized label

Step 14: Filter and manage orders

In the **Orders** section, you can:

- Filter checks by section (for example, "Bar" or "All")
- Sort orders using options such as "Time created"

- Select multiple checks and comp, void, or print them in bulk

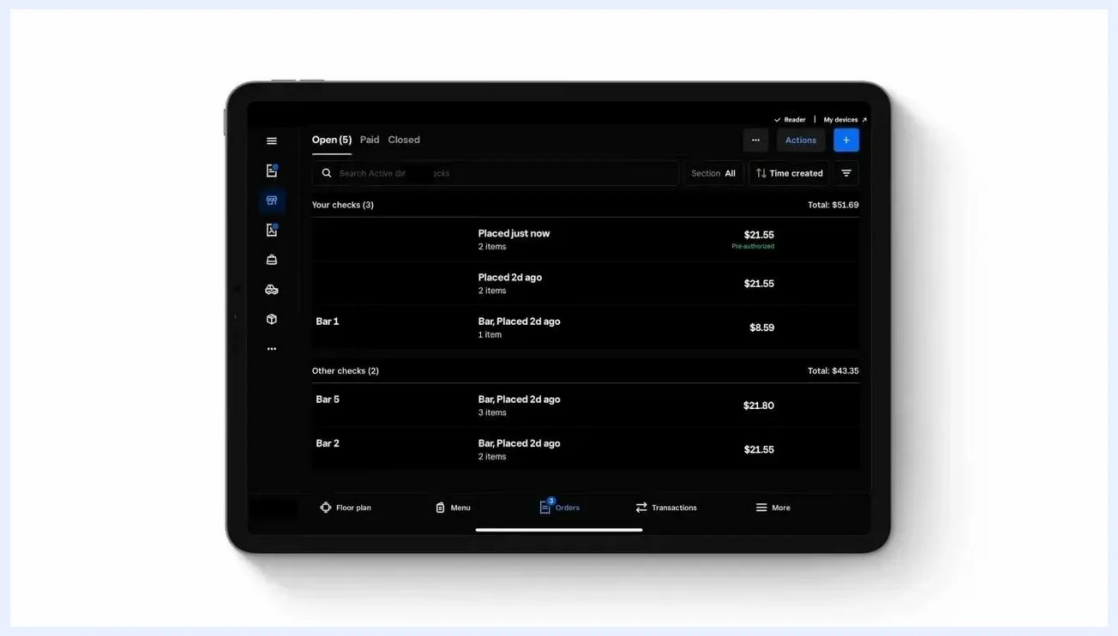


Order Manager with filter and sort options, open checks grouped by server and section, and bulk action buttons

Step 15: Open and modify an existing tab

Tap the order you want (for example, "Boozan, Hadley") in the Orders list. The order reopens in the cart view, where you can review or modify items.

In the top right corner, look for the green check mark. It confirms the tab is preauthorized.

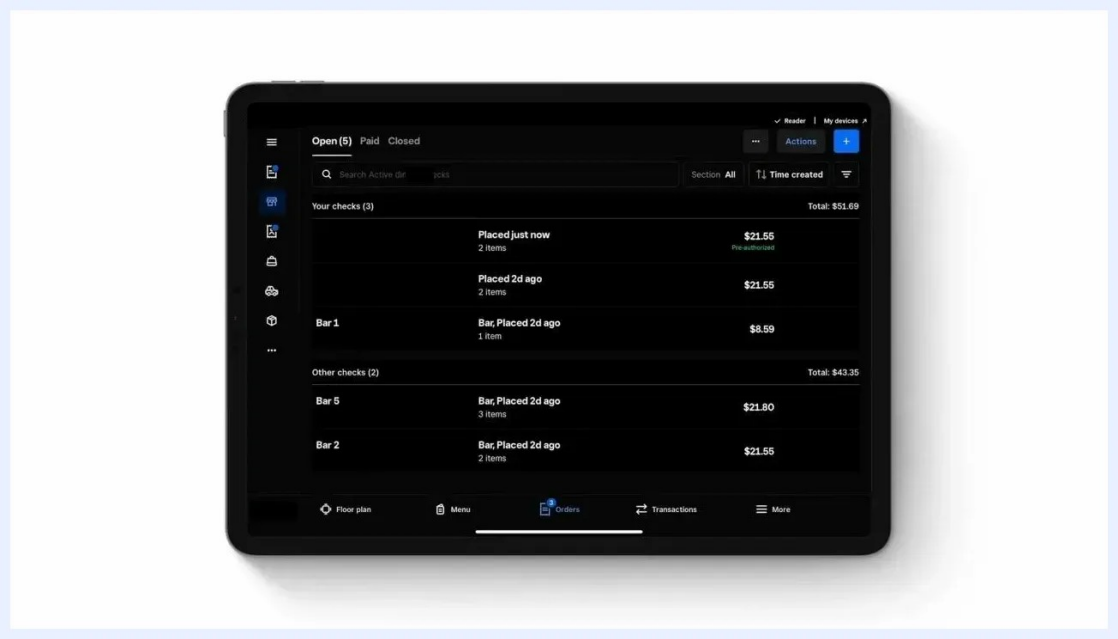


Order Manager with an order selected and ready to open in the cart view

Close the tab

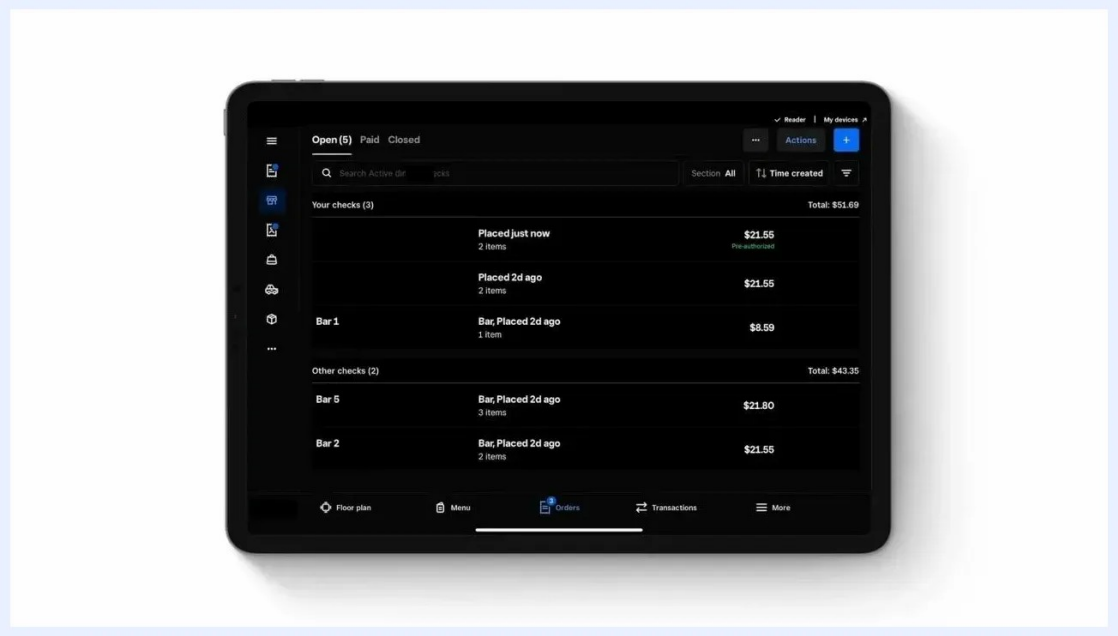
Step 16: Check out with the preauthorized card

When you finish serving the guest, tap **Pay** in the cart view. The payment screen shows the preauthorized card as the first payment option. Select it to complete the transaction.



The cart view for Boozan, Hadley with the Pay button highlighted, showing order details and payment options

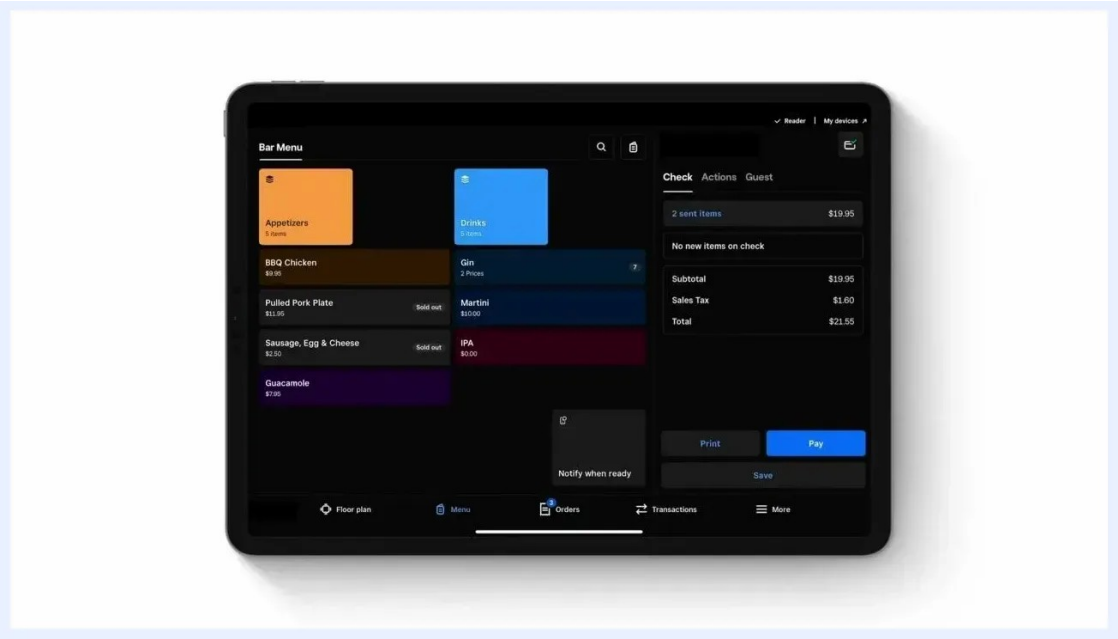
If prompted, confirm the transaction without a tip or signature. The system processes the payment and closes the tab.



The cart view after tapping Pay, with the transaction being finalized and no tip or signature required

Step 17: Return to the main screen or offer a promotion

After the transaction, the POS may show a promotional offer, such as "Get a coupon: $5 off for signing up to receive text message offers & updates." Choose **No thanks** or **Sign up**, depending on the guest's choice. The system is then ready for the next sale.



A promotional offer for $5 off when signing up for text message offers, with No thanks and Sign up options

Summary

You now know how to set up bar tabs in Square POS. You enabled preauthorization for each location in the Square Dashboard and set a minimum amount. You then started a preauthorized tab on the Point of Sale and assigned it to a check. Finally, you managed open tabs in Order Manager and closed them with the preauthorized card.