

# Brewing up a storm

A self-confessed lover of the magical golden brew, Karina Aggarwal embarks on a whirlwind microbrewery trail across India to encounter some rather serious men at work.

The craft beer craze is already well established in the world and the United States is quite the epicentre of fervid ferment activity. India has taken its time welcoming this phenomenon and the major reason for this would be the stringent laws controlling the production process, which made it impossible for such a set-up to fundamentally exist. The very idea of brewing and serving a drink at the same venue is contrary to the (prohibitive) way the Indian Excise controls alcohol distribution



IMAGE COURTESY ARBOR BREWING COMPANY

and hence, the system took its time figuring out a way to put the necessary measures and checks in place.

In as much as I enjoy writing about malts and wines, I am shamelessly proud of being an ardent beer lover. And when the brew happens to be a small-batch variant, one where the hops and the malt each have a predestined role to play, I allow myself to be considerably partial towards this marvellous golden elixir.

My recent jaunts have been about scouting for some of the best microbreweries around the country. Be assured that sampling the suds that poured forth from the taps is serious business. Here then is a round-up of the most interesting (and sometimes most promising) microbreweries I've encountered so far.

## **Arbor Brewing Company, Bengaluru**

Let's begin with the city which is closest to being the Indian beer capital. In a city where the many

restrictive laws play spoilsport to the party scene (the 11.30 pm deadline being one of them), Bengaluru has arguably the best drinking culture in the country. It is also in my opinion one of the few cities which gets better with every successive microbrewery that opens. From the good old days (even if just three years ago) when The Biere Club and Toit held reign over craft beer lovers till today, when close to a dozen outlets serve fresh brews, the craft beer quality (and accessibility) has definitely improved and evolved to better serve the consumers' palate.

Arbor Brewing Company, a franchise of ABC Michigan, is among the new breed of microbreweries to open in Bengaluru. From the outside, you'd mistake it for a small second-floor bar with a little outdoor space, but once inside, it resembles a rock & roll factory with ambient pub-style lighting and loud 'comfort' music (the kind that everyone knows the lyrics to). You are greeted by

an army of steel tanks lined up sombrely just as you walk in and the tables spread out on either side of you. The beer is clearly the focal point here. There's a certain fresh vibrancy running through all



IMAGE COURTESY ARBOR BREWING COMPANY

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**Soi7, Gurgaon**

Gurgaon always draws me to make a particular observation and this is it—there's a host of microbreweries in Gurgaon drawing in the crowds for a sip of fresh ferment, but these places are clearly more about the ambience than the quality of beer. It seems to be a formula that works well though, and every new microbrewery seems to offer more in terms of entertainment instead of vouching for the quality of their beer.

Started by the same people who are behind the rather successful Striker microbrewery, which is also in Gurgaon, Soi 7 tries to recreate the essence of a Bangkok side street, with a medley of other themes thrown in. With a massive arena outdoor where martial artists perform on certain days, this is a place for people to get their kicks and pints, if that ever was a combination. They have four beers on tap including the usual suspects—wheat, premium lager, and stout. The beers here aren't anything to write home about and lack clear definition, but if in the mood for beer, I would pick one of these over a pint of Kingfisher any day of the week. In conclusion, Soi7, with its mixed martial arts ring, in-house DJ, and a lovely expanse of an outdoor seating overlooking the concrete vista that is Cyber Hub, is a prime example of how ambience can matter the most. Of course,

of ABC—from the decor to the names of the beer like the Raging Elephant (IPA), Phat Abbot Tripel (Belgian Tripel), Red Snapper (Amber Ale), and No Parking (Pilsner), among others.

“At Arbor, we are dedicated to bringing the true American craft brewing experience to India. That means: quality local beer, all-malt beer and beer with the flavour and aroma of hops! We know craft beer drinkers love discovering new styles and flavours as much as we love brewing them. That's why we make a variety of beers and constantly innovate with the kinds of beers you can find on tap.

“In the last year alone, we've

brewed over 30 unique beers and that's what keeps patrons excited about coming back,” says Gaurav Sikka, Managing Director, ABC India. The beer flight guides you through the range on offer. As part of their tasting flight, ABC serves a set of eight with generous pours all around. The wheat is the crowd favourite, but the IPA, the Belgian Tripel, and the Amber Ale, are standouts as well.

**Also Visit:** Toit holds fort strong and stout, pun intended. The Biere club has good brews and great pizzas. Windmill in Whitefield is worth the trek and Punjabi by Nature is also good enough to be included on a beer jaunt.

that most likely means you'll have more people sipping on whisky or wine. Still, a great place for a night out but perhaps not quite the beer pilgrims' destination.

**Also Visit:** Manhattan is a popular alternative as also Striker and both can be found in the same mall space, across from each other.

**The Barking Deer, Mumbai**

Mumbai's first brew pub and still the only one brewing in the city, The Barking Deer will go down in history as the one that got the ball rolling and generations down, fellow brewers and pub-owners will thank them for having taken on this task head-on and enduring right till the end. Two years worth of persistence by founder Gregory Kroitsh finally culminated in November 2013 when the taps opened and brewer Ben Johnson's brews poured forth.

Fortunately for them, their success story doesn't end with this achievement; the place is packed not just for its novelty value, but for the fact that they really do know good beer. Trouble is that with the limited capacity of their tanks, they're now down to just two beers on tap lest they run out of the most popular Bombay Blonde (German-style wheat) and Belgian Wit. My favourite though has been a porter which was brewed in a small batch at the time of the microbrewery's opening, and will hopefully make a comeback. But there's little reason for despair as they also happen to have an exhaustive list of beers from around the world, long and wide enough to make any beer aficionado sit up and notice. Add to this the great pub grub on offer and it makes for a good night (or afternoon) out.



IMAGE COURTESY: THE BARKING DEER



IMAGE COURTESY, GATEWAY BREWING COMPANY

House Brew's method requires just three cylindrical tanks—one fermenter and two for storage. They simplify the beer making process by eliminating the first few steps. With House Brew, there's no hunting for grains, hops or yeast; instead, just open a pre-processed beer mix and you're halfway there. There's of course a variety of mixes including Pilsner Light, Golden Lager, American Brown Ale, Golden Ale, and Indian Pale Ale, among others. Adatia says that House Brew machines can manufacture

### Gateway Brewing Company, Mumbai

Any conversation about Mumbai's craft beer scene is incomplete without a mention of Gateway Brewing Company. The men behind GBC had the same troubles to deal with as Kroitzsh. But Navin Mittal, Rahul Mehra and Krishna Naik changed tactics and decided to start a brewery instead, requesting permission to supply their fresh brews to restaurants and bars across the city. Recently, the first kegs were tapped at Woodside Inn-Colaba and Bonobo- Bandra, but will soon be available at half a dozen outlets in Mumbai. On tap now—White Zen (German Style Wheat), Like That Only (Session Blonde Ale) and IPA. The IPA is my favourite!

### SinQ Brew, Goa

What do you do if you want to brew beer in a restaurant you own but don't have the space for the entire set-up? You call Amit Adatia. That's what popular party spot in Goa, SinQ did recently. Now SinQ Brew is Goa's first and only microbrewery.

Under Abhijit Impex, Adatia imports specialised brewing machinery called House Brew. These machines are not as elaborate as the usual set-ups.



IMAGE COURTESY, SINQ BREW

about 500 litres of beer per week in a brew cycle of five to seven days and the beer mixes are of ISO 9002 quality, ensuring an international standard.

Beer purists will no doubt scoff at this 'out of a packet' formula, but to most consumers, if it tastes like the real deal, then it is good enough. I haven't tasted the beers at SinQ Brew yet, but the next time I'm there, I'm definitely making a beeline for it.

### Independence Brewing Company, Pune

In 2010, two Indian beer lovers met in California and soon fixed on a plan to bring artisanal, craft beer to India. Shortly after, Shailendra Bist and Avani Vellanki met Greg Koch, co-founder and CEO of Stone Brewing Co., which is widely credited as the company that heralded the beer revolution in America. Koch had visited India in the past, and while he realised that the Indian market posed many challenges for Stone (and other US-based breweries), he

was convinced of the need to introduce India to the world of craft beer. He came on board as an advisor, investor, and ultimately a partner of what would become the Independence Brewing Company.

Today, IBC is spread over a sprawling area in Mundhwa Road, and is fitted with impressive equipment. If all goes as planned, they will be able to serve their brews mid-February. As a brewing

philosophy, the team goes with the simple premise of making beers that they will enjoy themselves. "Our beers will be chemical and preservative-free; adjuncts, if any, are only to be used to enhance the flavour and character of the beer. All our beers must score at least a 30/50 on the Beer Judge Certification Programme (BJCP) scale. Also, there needs to be honesty to the beer. Pandering to



IMAGE COURTESY, INDEPENDENCE BREWING COMPANY



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perceived customer preference and/or gimmick is not our style," says Vellanki.

Although Pune has been among the first few cities to have instituted a microbrewery law, it hasn't grown as one would expect in terms of the quality of craft beers. However, I believe that IBC holds great promise. In a market where Doolally has long been considered the only worthy microbrewery, hopefully, we'll see another unveil soon. Besides, the more good beer there is out there, the better for everyone.

**Also Visit:** Doolally at Corinthian, Pune's first microbrewery, remains a popular choice and their Pub-quiz and Beer & Acoustica nights are especially fun. 🍺