

By Shoba Narayan

# Big city brews

## 啤酒之城

Beer is thirsty business in Bengaluru, India's pub city  
班加羅爾被稱為印度酒吧之城，當地啤酒銷情最為暢旺

**T**IS Saturday night and The Biere Club in Bengaluru's upmarket Lavelle Road district is humming. The city, also known as Bangalore, is India's pub hub, and the young IT professionals downing pints of handcrafted ales, lagers and stouts, all made in-house, are living up to the city's reputation. "Bengaluruans enjoy their beer and we thought that it was about time that beer got its due in this city," says the young and chic Meenakshi Raju, who along with her brother Arvind opened The Biere Club a few months ago. The Rajus belong to a family that is in the hospitality business. "My father and uncles all own hotels and resorts so my brother and I wanted to do something different," she says. It was only after visiting Singapore's Brewerkz that they honed in on a craft brewery: the pub city of India had none of its own.

Bengaluru's salubrious climate, cosmopolitan citizens, colonial buildings and army cantonments all give this city a faintly British touch and with it a strong tradition of watering holes. Nostalgic Bengaluruans talk about downing pints of beer at the Windsor Pub, Guzzlers, Scottish Pub and Underground as a rite of passage. Not surprisingly, India's most famous beer brand, Kingfisher, is headquartered in Bengaluru. Kingfisher organises The Great Indian Oktoberfest, an annual three-day event to promote its range of beers, each appealing to a different price point. "Beer drinking is

so deeply entrenched into the fabric of Bengaluru that I see no way that it could ever be dethroned," says Manu Chandra, Executive Chef of Olive Beach restaurant, Bengaluru, and Olive Bar and Kitchen, Mumbai. "The good news is that beer is no longer in the male domain, which it was often perceived as. That simply doubles the demographic. It will forever remain a student and youth favourite – that's a substantial number too."

The IT industry and the disposable income it bestowed on young professionals only increased the demand for beer. Many of them went abroad as engineers and learned to enjoy beer; some, when they returned home, decided to figure out how to duplicate the same thing in India. Narayan Manepally and Paul Chowdhry are two such schoolmates who went abroad and then returned to Bengaluru.

Manepally worked at Intel in Portland, Oregon, for many years and brewed beer in his garage. When he returned to take over his family's air-filter business, he longed to taste the microbrewed ales that he had enjoyed on the American west coast. So he and Chowdhry, who describe themselves as "techies gone wild", started Geist, which they call India's first handcrafted beer. "The city of Bengaluru is like the state of California, which typically sets the trends for the rest of the US to follow," says Manepally. "What we need in Bengaluru is a progressive



legislature like California's that will allow Bengaluru to shine to its full potential: opening up markets and levelling the playing field that promotes consumption of lower-alcohol drinks like wine and beer."

Beer in Bengaluru, much like other alcoholic beverages, is under the control of the government with crippling regulation of production, distribution and pricing. Beer aficionados have tried importing Trappist and Belgian beers, but even this requires persistence. In spite of all the hurdles that the Indian government imposes, beer prevails. "As a food-and-beverage professional for over a decade, I was astonished to learn that almost 20 percent of beverage sales are derived from beer," says Vinod Pandey, Food and Beverage Manager of the Taj West End hotel. The West End stocks more than 450 labels of beer, including



**Cheers! Beer fans raise their bottles at the Blue Bar at the Taj West End hotel in Bengaluru (left)**

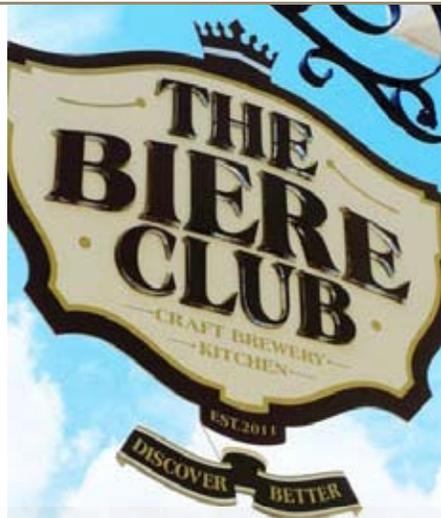
在班加羅爾Taj West End酒店，啤酒迷在Blue Bar內舉杯暢飲（左圖）

**When The Biere Club hung its shingle, it became Bengaluru's first craft brewery (top right)**

當The Biere Club掛起招牌開張之日，它亦成為班加羅爾第一間精釀啤酒館（右上圖）

**Handcrafted beer Geist is brewed by IT professionals who acquired the taste abroad (bottom right)**

精釀啤酒品牌Geist，由在外國工作期間愛上喝啤酒的資訊科技業精英創辦（右下圖）



**周**六晚上，班加羅爾時尚社區的Lavelle路上，The Biere Club酒吧內人聲鼎沸。當地的資訊科技業新貴大口大口地喝著酒吧自家精釀的麥芽啤酒、淡啤酒、麥啤和黑啤。班加羅爾被譽為「印度酒吧之城」，這情景印證了其美譽。出身於酒店業世家、年輕時髦的Meenakshi Raju說：「班加羅爾人喜歡本地釀製的啤酒，我們相信啤酒業在這兒能有一番作為。」數個月前，她跟兄弟Arvind創辦The Biere Club：「我的父親和叔伯都經營酒店或度假村，我和Arvind卻想做點別的生意。」兩人到訪新加坡專售自家釀製啤酒的Brewerkz餐廳後，決定在「印度酒吧之城」開創釀酒事業，因為當地尚未有本地精釀啤酒廠館。

氣候怡人的班加羅爾是個大都會，居民見多識廣。市內殖民地建築和軍營隨處可見，隱約散發著英倫氣息；到處林立的英式酒吧更是城中的一道風景。昔日，班加羅爾人總愛到Windsor Pub、Guzzlers、Scottish Pub及Underground等酒吧暢飲，念舊者更愛將那段時光掛在嘴邊。總部設在班加羅爾的Kingfisher，是印度最有名

的啤酒品牌。為了推廣旗下不同市場定位的產品，每年都會舉行為期三天的The Great Indian Oktoberfest啤酒節。班加羅爾Olive Beach餐廳兼孟買Olive Bar and Kitchen行政總廚Manu Chandra說：「啤酒文化深植班加羅爾，其地位已無可取代。啤酒現已成為男女皆宜的飲品，不再像昔日般，被視為男性專利，喝啤酒的顧客也因而倍增。另外，啤酒還是學生和年輕人的最愛，這消費群的人數亦不容小覷。」

資訊科技業發展蓬勃，加上年輕專業人士收入上升，助長了當地人對啤酒的需求。當地有許多自海外回國的工程師等專業人士，他們在僑居地愛上啤酒，部分人在歸國後更決心「複製」這樂趣；當中包括Narayan Manepally和Paul Chowdhry，這對由國外回到班加羅爾定居的同窗好友。

Manepally曾在美國俄勒岡州波特蘭的英特爾公司工作多年，閒時愛在車房釀製啤酒。返國後，他接手家族的空氣過濾設備業務，卻對美國西岸的精釀麥芽啤酒念念不忘。於是，他和Chowdhry合作創辦印度首個精釀啤酒品牌Geist，Chowdhry還自嘲兩人都是「發瘋的工程師」。Manepally說：

「班加羅爾就像美國加州，是帶動全國潮流的地方。本地的立法機關若能與加州看齊，逐步放寬法例，班加羅爾的啤酒業定能大放異彩。政府應開放市場，提倡公平競爭以推廣葡萄酒和啤酒等低酒精飲品。」

現時，班加羅爾政府對啤酒等酒精飲品的生產、分銷和售價均有嚴格規管。曾有啤酒迷嘗試進口修道院和比利時啤酒，均不得要領。雖然印度政府設下重重關卡，但啤酒依然大受歡迎。當地著名酒店Taj West End餐飲部經理Vinod Pandey說：「我在餐飲業工作十多年，當獲悉啤酒約佔飲料總銷售額的兩成時，我感到十分驚訝。」他續道，Taj West End目前提供逾450款啤酒，包括甚受客人歡迎的Geist啤酒Whistling Wheat及Blonde。不過，外國客人都想試試印度的Kingfisher。他自己則比較喜歡Golden Eagle及Rosy Pelican等老牌子，因為能喚起他於「攻讀酒店管理時跟朋友暢飲的時光」。

然而，班加羅爾的啤酒熱潮已稍見消退，因為葡萄酒逐漸成為市場新寵。酒店業專業人士兼食家Aslam Gafoor指出：「葡萄酒已在班加羅爾和全印度掀起熱潮。喜愛紅酒」

Geist's Whistling Wheat and Blonde beers, which have become hot favourites with guests, says Pandey. International guests, however, predictably want to drink the local Kingfisher beer. Pandey is nostalgic for beers such as Golden Eagle and Rosy Pelican, which, he says, brings back "fond memories of his days in hotel management school with good old buddies".

Beer's hold over Bengaluru might be weakened, however, thanks to the popularity of another drink: wine. "Today, another drinking culture which is rapidly taking over Bengaluru – and the rest of India – is wines," says hospitality professional and avid foodie, Aslam Gafoor. "There is a growing tribe of people who are la-di-dah-ing with a glass of red and who would rather be seen dead than with a pint. So in that sense I am assuming that there is a shift taking place in drinking habits."

Lending credence to this is the presence of many wine clubs including the Bengaluru Wine Club, the Wine Society of India, the Bengaluru Black Tie, and *Food Lovers'* magazine's wine dinners, none of which serve beer.

India saw an increase in beer consumption of more than 90 percent from 2002 to 2007 compared to a rise of less than 60 percent for other alcoholic beverages. Bengaluru's beer mavens are more avant-garde and willing to experiment with new micro-brewed ales and lagers. "Personally, I have seen more beer being consumed here than in other cities I have worked – Hyderabad, Delhi and Kolkata," says Amaan Kidwai, Executive Assistant Manager at the ITC Gardenia hotel. "Bengaluruans love draught beer more than people in other cities and are



**The Biere Club (above) brews original beers in small batches. Take your pick of the varieties (right) made with traditional methods. Kingfisher (below) is India's best-known brew**

**The Biere Club (上圖) 以傳統方法釀製啤酒，雖然少量生產，但選擇眾多(右圖)。Kingfisher (下圖) 是印度最著名啤酒品牌**



willing to try new beers like Trappist and other handcrafted international beers. And Bengaluru is also among the first cities in the country to have a microbrewery."

Some state governments are making the right noises about lowering taxes and loosening regulations. Still, India has a long way to go. International brands such as Carlsberg, Tuborg, Budweiser and Fosters are also in the game to sell beer to the vast Indian market.

As beer maven Sanjay Roy says: "Beer lovers the world over see themselves as part of a large, worldly, fun-loving tribe. Brand preferences may vary, but their love for beer is a unifying factor."

His words ring true, especially among the beer-loving regulars at The Biere Club.

So devoted are these "tribe members" that they have been known on occasion to drink their favourite brew dry.

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事實上，班加羅爾近年新開設了多家葡萄酒酒吧，如Bengaluru Wine Club、Wine Society of India及Bengaluru Black Tie，還有《Food Lovers》雜誌舉辦的葡萄酒晚宴；這些場合一律不供應啤酒。

然而，由2002年至2007年間，印度的啤酒銷量仍激升九成；其他酒精類飲品同期只有少於六成增長。

班加羅爾的啤酒專家敢於創新，嘗試釀製新的麥芽啤酒及淡啤酒。ITC Gardenia酒店的副行政經理Amaan Kidwai說：「我曾在海德拉巴、德里和加爾各答多個城市工作。就我所見，班加羅爾的啤酒銷情最佳。班加羅爾人比其他城市的人更愛喝生啤，也更樂於嘗試修道院啤酒等外國精釀啤酒。此外，這裡也是首先出現小型啤酒廠的少數城市之一。」

目前印度已有數個邦政府提議降低啤酒稅及放寬規管，但其啤酒業還有一段很長的路要走。另外，嘉士伯、Tuborg、百威及Fosters等國際啤酒廠均覬覦龐大的印度市場。

啤酒專家Sanjay Roy說：「全球各地啤酒迷都認為自己是懂得及時行樂一族，他們或許喜歡不同品牌的啤酒，但對啤酒的熱愛卻是一致的。」

Roy說得一點也沒錯，「啤酒族」總會把至愛的精釀啤酒喝得半滴不留，The Biere Club的常客就是最佳例子。CC

