

Tap into BIRA

The company opens its first taproom in Bengaluru where customers can try a new brew every week



APARNA NARRAIN

For the five-year anniversary this year, the folks at Bira 91 decided to do something different. Sure, they could have launched a new beer, but why enjoy one new variant for months on end when you can enjoy a new brew every week?

With this in mind, Bira 91 has opened its first Limited Release Taproom in the country in the beer capital of Bengaluru, with the aim of directly connecting with customers and using their feedback to determine which new brew will find a place on the menu and which can be bottled and sold nationally. (Taprooms offer their own specialty beers – just offer, unlike breweries which also brew it on site. Pubs usually just serve bottled fare on tap.)

Familiar space

Formerly home to The Beer Café (which is managing operations for the new venture), the taproom in Koramangala is spread across a spacious 3,500 square feet. Not a lot has changed in terms of décor, which is for erstwhile regulars at The Beer Café to either appreciate or disparage. The high ceiling with Mangalore tiles is still there in the main area; it's just that now it sports the Bira 91 logo. With visible metal framework, an unpainted brick wall on one side, wood-top bar and wooden furniture, and of course, the Bira mascot in all its colours on another wall, the vibe is a little industrial yet warm. There is also an *al fresco* area, complete with plants and coconut trees. The upstairs area is where you can kick off your shoes (perhaps, not literally) and shoot pool or lounge on the sofa outside.

As for the star attraction, there are a total of 20 taps (more than the average). This means that apart from Bira's regular portfolio of beers that includes White, Blonde, Light, Strong, and Boom, new brews will be created and transported on a regular basis from the microbrewery in Mysore to the taproom.

For now, among your choices is the mango lassi (yes, you read that right), a concoction that takes your favourite summer drink and amps it up to make, well, your other favourite summer drink. It also comes in a nitro ver-



Two states From mango lassi to Malabar stout, the possibilities are endless • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sion, which is far frothier. The Malabar stout, which also comes in a nitro version, is meant to mimic cold brew with alcohol, while the pomegranate champagne rose, created to mark the anniversary, is fermented with champagne yeast and pomegranate juice. But the most popular beer since the launch has been the West Coast IPA, inspired by crisp, bitter and hoppy brews from the American west coast, the first batch of which quickly ran out.

DID SOMEONE SAY JOWAR BEER?

Says Thomas Hartman, "So, Ankur Jain (founder of Bira 91) challenged me to launch a beer every week. That's a lot of different beers to come up with. I had to think about how to compartmentalise it and start working on themes. One theme that we're going to be doing is a larger exploration series, under which we will be playing with unique Indian grains like jowar. We're also going to be playing around a lot with unique Indian fruits. That will mostly be either with sour beer or wheat beer, and we will be injecting different types of fruits into them. Another thing we really want to do is hand over the keys to the brewers and if they want to come up with something, we definitely have the capacity to encourage that."

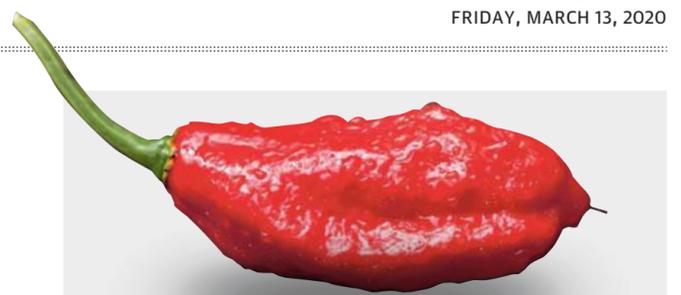
Says Thomas Hartman, vice-president, brewing and innovation, with a laugh, "I think we learned that the hard way with the West Coast IPA. We sold it all on the first night and were like 'okay, we need to brew this immediately'. Based on the success, that's the beer we think we want to have as the house beer."

He adds, "At the microbrewery, we have four tanks or fermenters and each one is of five-hectolitre capacity. We can rotate them so we can do about four different beers a month. So, we can pretty much crank out a new beer every week. Depending on the beer, the brewing process takes anywhere from two to four weeks."

Far from seeing the number of microbreweries in Bengaluru (over 60

as a disadvantage, Thomas welcomes it. "We are looking at this less as a competition and more like a party we want to join. Now there's a lot of activity in Bengaluru and we want to get in there and engage with the customers and beer brewers. Specialty beer (sector) in India is relatively new but it's similar to everywhere else in that it's kind of a community. If brewers aren't in dialogue with each other and trying each other's stuff, then it just won't evolve as quickly."

Beer prices start at ₹135 for a 330ml glass of Bira 91 Boom. Other alcohol is also available, as is food. Bira 91 Limited Release Taproom is located at 33, 80 Feet Road, 4th Block, Nirguna Mandir Layout, Cauvery Colony, Koramangala. ☎ 8929188568



A sip of bhoot jolokia

A special blend of tea leaves from Assam now has bhoot jolokia in it

PRBALIKA BORAH

Move over chilli tea and civet dropping coffee, because *bhoot jolokia* is now getting blended in tea leaves. Termed the world's most notorious chilli, *bhoot jolokia* is now used to make a 'deliciously hot' tea by Aromica tea – a home-grown brand in Guwahati, Assam.

Aromica was established in 2018 by Ranjit Baruah, founding director of Tender Buds Teas & Crafts. A former tea planter with over 20 years of experience in tea plantation and manufacturing, Baruah's quest to make tea more flavourful and interesting had him working on blending *bhoot jolokia* with organic tea leaves "in order to get the deliciously hot beverage. We call it the fiery tea," adds Ranjit.

Everyone talks about *bhoot jolokia* and the tea leaves of Assam. They are both spoken of individually. No one had tried combining the two most popular products from the State, so Ranjit leapt into action and started working to create the unique tea blend.

Known by many names in the different parts of the Northeast region, the most common among them, for the chilli which has been rated at 1 million-plus scoville heat units, are *bhoot jolokia*, *bih jolokia*, *nagahari*, *raja mircha*, *raja chilli* or *borbih jolokia*.

The chilli is cultivated in Nagaland and Assam, and in parts of Bangladesh as well. "We source our green teas from different organic tea gardens in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to support local producers. The chillis, which are grown in farms in Amguri in Sivassagar district of Upper Assam,

are pounded in a *dheki* (an indigenous manually operated pounder)," adds Baruah. He says the tea underwent several trial-and-error sessions before it was brought out. "Everything is done in the backyard of my home in Guwahati. I converted my garage into a little factory, where apart from trials, we also carry out packaging work. I have put my knowledge of 20 years in the tea industry to build a setup that is efficient and hygienic."

"While creating the blend, it was important to see that we don't simply sell *bhoot jolokia*. The tea had to have all the elements of the Assamese tea-drinking tradition. I was sure of what I wanted. When people sip the fiery tea, they should be able to enjoy the aroma, the taste and the look (colour of the decoction). So with a lot of study and work, we have chosen those leaves that give a ruby red liquor when combined with the dried paste of the chilli. If I have to categorise the blend, it will come under 'exotic specialty blend', because it is not only organic but also handcrafted," explains Baruah.

When one gram of the *bhoot jolokia* blend tea is steeped for 40 seconds, the aroma of both tea and *bhoot jolokia* has your mouth watering, claims Baruah. The heat is just a teaser, he says, it is the combination of the aromas and the flavour that is a win-win.

People in Assam love their black tea or *laal saah* with a hint of ginger, so Baruah has infused the gingery flavour into the fiery tea as well.

Currently, Aromica tea has four specialty blends and has applied for a patent for its *bhoot jolokia* tea. They are all available online at www.aromicatea.com



HORS D'OEUVRE



Fresh from the coconut

Founded by paediatrician Dr Narasimha Reddy, Coco Works' focus is to make the healthiest cold-pressed beverages along with coconut water, which they claim are 100% pure and natural. "We put our efforts to improve the scenario for farmers. We source directly from the farmers who carry out IPM farming and avoid the use of banned pesticides," he explains, "This way, we eliminate middle-men and ensure farmers can get better prices, through fair means." The drinks come in glass bottles as per Coco Works' sustainability goals and their reliance on single-use plastics in their production line is less than four percent.

All the coconuts, fruits and vegetables undergo a three-step cleaning process before they are juiced, according to a company statement. Available flavours include Pomegranate Melange, Pinacoladas (pineapple) and The Pink Panther (watermelon) among others.

REVIEW

Guilt-free gastronomy

Serefe Cafe and Malt, Jubilee Hills, serves up various global cuisines with healthy doses of glamour

DIVYA KALA BHAVANI

Step into Serefe and you get a whiff of the attractively-perfumed air that emanates from Absorb, a boutique bar which is owned by the same team: Neha and Nitin Ganerwal. While Absorb is known for its spacious luxury island vibe, Serefe is reminiscent of an intimate midnight bar.

I arrive at Serefe at lunchtime, when the floor-to-ceiling curtains are drawn, allowing natural light to pour into the resto-bar. Neha says the space takes on an entirely different character at night; the space, encased by geometric mirrors, gives the lighting from the high-up chandeliers more of a playground to add some mood. "We definitely offer glamour to our patrons – in look, feel and service," explains Neha.

Deeply passionate and committed to making Serefe a success, Neha says perfection should not be a far reach for thriving restaurants in the city. "When you say you want to start a restaurant in Hyderabad, it becomes a day-to-night commitment. Having been a housewife for 20 years, my whole routine has changed when bring Serefe from the ground-up."

SEREFE CAFE AND MALT

Where Road Number 59, Jubilee Hills

Hits Desserts, drinks

Misses Hummus plate

Cost for two Approx ₹2500

☎ 9000047700



Umpteen options

The menu at Serefe is a seemingly never-ending one. Not sure what to order, Neha brings a spinach salad laced with creamy cheese, walnuts and cherry tomatoes. She sends some tandoori



Flavourful fusion The various offerings at Serefe Cafe and Malt • DIVYA KALA BHAVANI



chicken tikka our way, the chicken fillets tender and the accompanying cheese sauce – rather than the traditional mint chutney – adding just the right amount of tang. However, do gobble these up quickly before the chicken dries up.

If you are looking for something basic, get the hummus plate, it is not too overwhelming in variety and gives you company while you wait for your next dishes or drinks. What does come next is a tasty grilled fish slathered with lemon-garlic butter sauce. As someone who eats garlic-anything, this was a treat and a light one too to keep us paced before the arrival of the pesto-stuffed chicken roulade glazed with olive tapenade, drizzled with cheese.

Do not miss out on Serefe's desserts. I have a major sweet tooth but when a chocolate tart and a tiramisu is set in front of me, it is as though the previous binge session never happened. The chocolate tart is puddled in dark chocolate sauce, the dish a flourish of both sweet and bitter. The tiramisu, was a delight, though there were no discernible layers of biscotti and sponge. However, the mascarpone cheese was whipped to a cloudy lightness while the filling has a satisfying amount of coffee liqueur with-

not inciting guilt.

When ordering a drink, be sure to consult general managers Tony Snehashis and Dominic who have been in the mixology game for a hot minute. I first order a whisky-based drink which has fruit overtones and a pretty sunset ombre going on, but Tony is quick to say, "You have got to finish that in five minutes or the drink is dead." He then orders me a Cosmopolitan which has cointreau instead of triple sec and sugar syrup, my first Cosmo in a while which does not taste like bubblegum.

Dominic sends me a vodka-based berry drink (with biodegradable straws, yay!); as someone who detests vodka, this was pretty decent as it was balanced out with green tea. Then – do not worry, I am gulping food down while this happens – he dares me to go for an unnamed sambucca-based drink which is piled high with crushed ice, but has flavourings of fresh basil. This drink felt like more of a night-out drink for me, given the slightly indulgent nature to it.

It is easy to understand why Serefe is doing well as a destination for both day and night outs, so the establishment will not be slowing down anytime soon.