FOOD

The Druid Garden – North Bangalore's Newest Brewery

THE DRUID GARDEN

The Druid Garden, the restaurant and microbrewery tucked away in Sahakara Nagar, delights as only a magic trick can.

The light streams in through the long glass windows, gently warming the wooden furniture. Rows of tropical plants, a retractable glass roof, and a high ceiling are reminiscent of a glasshouse. As a tribute to one of Bangalore's fading traditions, custom cement tiles from the Yelahanka brick factory line the floor. It's certainly got a distinct character – this multi-level atrium done up in earthy hues and amber lights. Still, The Druid Garden fits into the template of a Bangalorean microbrewery, reminding you of the book-lined walls of Windmills Craftworks and the eye-catching tiled floors at Communiti. Bangalore's newest brewery is joining ranks with the old guards of Central Bangalore, and is fast becoming a landmark.

So, what is The Druid Garden doing all the way up in North Bangalore instead?

A former suburb earmarked for telecom employees, Sahakara Nagar only got absorbed into Bangalore's city limits in 2008; it's a quiet, convenient neighbourhood that's popular with families. In other words, it's not the first location you'd think of if you were setting up a place like this. And that, says founder Amit Gowda, is exactly why he set up shop here. There are very few dining choices in the area, and given the proximity to the airport, the location was a no-brainer for him. The Druid Garden's raison d'être is to challenge convention, and it seems to be enjoying its first-mover advantage.

The restaurant and microbrewery occupies 32,000 sq ft; it will soon expand to 60,000 sq ft and seat 800 people.

Doing things differently

When Gowda, whose family owns one of Bangalore's iconic theaters (also a landmark, since you ask) conceptualised The Druid Garden, he set out to challenge several practices of the F&B industry.

It is one of the few Bangalore restaurants that makes everything – from bread to stock – from scratch. They grow most of their ingredients at their own production facility. Locally sourced food is given preference for its freshness and flavour, and the menu changes every 90 days, in tune with the seasons. Going a step further, the kitchen is neatly divided into vegetarian and non-vegetarian sections. (Doubting Thomases are welcome to visit the open kitchen).

Each dish teases out the natural properties of its ingredients.

Equally rigorous standards apply to the craft beers at The Druid Garden, which became available only recently.

> It's interesting that Bangalore has emerged as the hub of microbreweries, given that liquor licenses are now notoriously expensive and the red tape is as thick as an iron curtain.

Karnataka's liquor laws are one of the most prohibitive in the country, and the government is now rolling back the policies it used in the early 1980s to promote beer instead of hard liquor.

> Fortunately for us, Bangalore's especially favorable for making craft beer, since the water (or whatever's left of it) has the right mineral composition.

And so, the city and its brew masters persevere, to the extent that Bangalore now has the most number of pubs in Asia.

Toast-worthy brews

The Druid Garden launched its microbrewery a couple of months ago, and has six stellar brews to show for it.

The brews at The Druid Garden have a great range of flavours.

The Indian Pale Ale has a full-bodied flavour and deep character; it stays true to the original brews that were first shipped in the early 1800s from England to thirsty Englishmen withering away in the heat of the subcontinent. Back then, the ales were strongly hopped so that they'd survive the months-long journey across the seas to India, and the IPA at The Druid Garden shows why they were worth the wait. It's easily one of the best in the city.

The Bohemian Dunkel, German for 'dark', has a mild coffee aftertaste that lingers lusciously on the palate. It's layered without being complicated. Credit goes to Ladislav Klazar, the resident Czech brew master, who lords over the 36 tanks of the microbrewery, which were imported from the Czech Republic. He's a stickler for tradition, as is apparent from the Czech Pilsner, which is malty, golden and sharp. The Hefeweizen's made from malt imported from Munich, and tastes mildly of banana and clove.

> Made with equal parts wheat and barley malt, the Hefeweizen is comparable to the Windmill Craftworks' version, and that's a compliment.

Light drinkers will veer towards the Basmati Lager or Witbeir (Belgian wheat beer), which have a less hoppy flavour. They're perfect for lazy afternoons spent basking in the dappled sunlight, but might seem a little watered down to regular drinkers. Try the samplers before you commit to a taller glass; your final choice might surprise you.

> The beer here is stored for 25 days, while most microbreweries wait for only five.

Often, brewers try to sweeten beer to appeal to a wider audience, but The Druid Garden sticks to its guns. The beer is brewed to international standards, and you can either love it or leave it. The Indian Pale Ale and Dunkel, the brews with a more bitter flavour, are the most popular, so enough said.

> Wondering how you can tell if a beer is the real deal, apart from the taste? It's all in the froth. If it sticks to the sides of your glass instead of dissolving into the liquid, you're sorted.

The Druid Garden's brews have another strong-point – the craft beers are crisp and light, with sharp flavours. We sorely missed a Stout in the collection, but it will be introduced it in a couple of months, after being brewed for 120 days.

The kitchen connection

Chef Hemant Kumar and his team serve up dishes from 15 of the world's most loved cuisines, from South American empanadas and Moroccan tagines to true blue Italian pizzas and coastal mainstays from India.

The portions are generous, and it's worth skipping the finger-food for. The Pan-fried Prawns in white wine sauce and toasted brioche is a favourite. The fresh, crunchy prawns are dusted with pepper and infused with the subtle sweetness of wine, and served on a pillow of freshly baked bread.

Most meats here are sous vide – the meat is marinated, vacuum sealed and placed in a water bath hours before it's cooked. At The Druid Garden, the meat is always the hero, lightly done so that its natural flavours shine through.

LAGUIOLE
Jean Dubost
FRANCE

The Druid Garden uses the sous vide method of cooking steaks, which retains the natural flavours of the meat.

The Crab Curry deserves a special mention. The crabmeat is cooked with egg before being stirred into a thick, creamy gravy. The result is a hearty curry that's bonafide comfort food. If the Unbeliever's Dessert (black sesame cake and kaffir lime coconut sorbet served with lemon curd and miso butterscotch) sounds too adventurous, opt for the Classic Baked Cheesecake. It sweetens the palate without giving you a sugar rush.

Know your neighbours

The crowd here is delightfully diverse, something else that separates The Druid Garden from other microbreweries.

At the corner table below the striking metallic ceiling, we were witness to grandchildren introducing their *ajji* to a basket of Spiced Latino Chips. At the table adjacent to the pizzeria, a group of 20-somethings was animatedly discussing the potential of an app they're creating. The German-style community table was packed with a group of families balancing their beers and babies. It's a place you can take your in-laws to, and invite the cool cousins, and everyone will feel right at home.

As someone who grew up in the city and watched it transform, Gowda was keen to give The Druid Garden a uniquely Bangalorean character. And after a visit, one might even say that he's done the city proud.

Dinner for two (with alcohol): Rs. 2,500-3,000
Distance from MG Road: 13.3 kms
Perfect for: Quality time with friends or family

This post was written by Kavita Mohandas Rao.

TAGS: #Bangalore bars, #microbrewery, #restaurant review