

Full steam ahead for Binjai Brew founders

Two graduate from NTU and will work full time on business while third finishes studies

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THE STRAITS TIMES



Binjai Brew founders (from left) Abilash Subbaraman, Rahul Immandira and Heetesh Alwani have secured a steady stream of income since the launch event for their business in December last year.

27 JUL 2019 - 05:00

They started brewing their own beer in a Nanyang Technological University (NTU) hostel in September 2017, but were busted a few months later for unknowingly violating the law by brewing and selling beer on campus.

They were undeterred. Two of the Singaporean trio behind Binjai Brew - Mr Abilash Subbaraman and Mr Heetesh Alwani - graduated yesterday from NTU's Renaissance Engineering Programme (REP), and will be

able to devote themselves to their brewery operation full time. The third, Mr Rahul Immandira, is also in the REP with one more semester to go. All three are 26 years old.

For the last eight months, a licensed brewer has been making beer from their recipes.

There are three kinds available now - an India pale lager, a German Altbier and a French Saison - with more in the works.

Since the launch event in December last year at craft beer bar American Taproom, the trio have also secured a steady stream of income through avenues such as online grocer Redmart, as well as other bars and retail outlets.

They have also started providing beer at events. Their first event, in March, was an album launch by local band Royal Estate.

Said Mr Immandira: "The people in the band were similar to us. They were just starting out and it fit with who we are. That's important to us."

• WHERE TO GET BINJAI BREW CRAFT BEERS

- **Online:** Binjaibrew.com; Redmart

Bars and restaurants: Sprmrkt; Native; Oriental Elixir; SG Taps; Canjob Taproom; BunkerBunker; Yellow Cab

Their latest job is the Sentosa GrillFest, which is on until Aug 12. They estimate that 1,000 litres of beer, or about 3,000 cans, will be needed to slake patrons' thirst.

While they are still not making enough to turn a profit, the revenue covers most of their costs, which range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a month, said Mr Alwani.

None of them is drawing a salary yet and sacrifices have to be made, he added. He gives part-time tuition and teaches programming classes to cover his daily expenses.

Mr Alwani handles sales for Binjai Brew, while Mr Subbaraman is in charge of brewing and design.

Mr Immandira, who started the trio's journey after he returned from a summer internship at a small brewery in California in 2017, will oversee their social media accounts while he finishes his last semester of school. He is still studying as he previously took a leave of absence to intern at Airbus.

The group feels strongly about the environment. Said Mr Subbaraman: "We wanted to start out with a 'green' way of producing beer so we don't have to make big changes down the road."

For example, they are reaching out to bakeries to see if they can obtain unsold stale bread - which would otherwise be thrown out - as a substitute for barley or wheat, key ingredients in the brewing process.

They also offer a \$1 discount on their beers at events if people bring their own cups or reuse the first cup provided to them.

"A dollar is quite significant; we could be earning more if not for this. But it has to be a big enough incentive to effect change - offering 10 or 20 cents is not big enough," said Mr Subbaraman. "It's the right thing to do."

While the future is still uncertain, they are keeping an open mind - with "fun" at the top of their to-do list. Said Mr Immandira: "We went into this not knowing where it would take us.

"Although we have a general idea of where we want to go, what happens along the way can be unpredictable. This has shown us that we're free to explore things."