

# Busted for brewing beer on campus, Binjai Brew founders will go full steam ahead after graduating



(From left) Mr Abilash Subbaraman is in charge of brewing and design, Mr Rahul Immandira oversees their social media accounts and Mr Heetesh Alwani handles sales for Binjai Brew. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

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SINGAPORE - 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 university grounds.

They were undeterred - two of the Singaporean trio behind Binjai Brew - Mr Abilash Subbaraman and Mr Heetesh Alwani - graduated on Friday (July 26) from NTU's Renaissance Engineering Programme (REP) and will be able to devote themselves full time to their brewery operation.

The third, Mr Rahul Immandira, also in the REP, has more one semester to go. All three are 26 years old.

Over 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 their launch in December last year at craft beer bar American Taproom, they have also secured a steady stream of income through avenues like online grocer Redmart, and other bars and retail outlets.

They have now also started providing the beer at events. Their first, in March this year, 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."

Their latest job is the ongoing Sentosa GrillFest, now on till Aug 12. They estimate 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 are 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.

## 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

Mr Immandira, who started the trio's journey after he returned from a summer internship at a small brewery in California in 2017, oversees their social media accounts while he finishes his last semester. He has one more to go because he had taken a leave of absence to intern at Airbus.

Something the group feels strongly about is 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 that 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 that is provided.

"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 we're free to explore things."