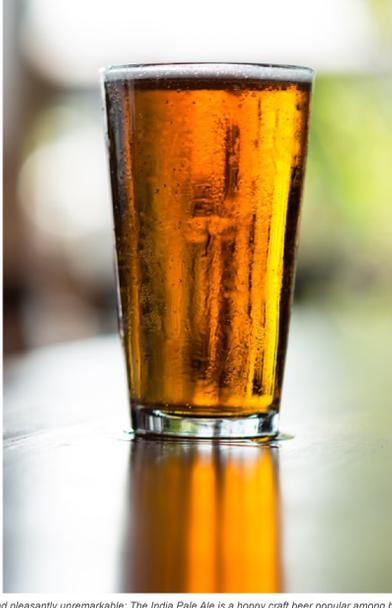


Food + Drink | West Bengal

# Boozy Nights: A Kolkata Pub Crawl

From decades-old pubs serving bottled lager in dimly-lit galleries to shiny, new age microbreweries offering up craft beer, a pub crawl across Kolkata is as much about atmosphere as it is about flavour.



Broadway Hotel (left), which started in 1937, is a commoner's bar where the menu remains unchanged and pleasantly unremarkable. The India Pale Ale is a hoppy craft beer popular among both enthusiasts and brewers. Photo courtesy: Broadway Hotel (restaurant)

BY Malini Banerjee | POSTED ON September 2, 2022

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Date: Sometime in the late 18th century

Time: Midday

Location: On the banks of the Hooghly river

It is hot near the banks. A shipment of beer has arrived. The babu, quite pink under the sweltering sun, has the shipments offloaded and opened and sniffs at a keg for inspection. It smells vile — acidic and almost like whey. It cannot be drinkable. He takes a careful sip only to spew it out...

The sweltering humid Kolkata climate necessitates beer for his men. But where is the beer?! What is this inhospitable climate and land without even a decent pint of beer?

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Fanciful fictional reveries aside, it is possible to envision that perhaps a situation quite like this led to the discovery of India Pale Ale, a hoppy craft beer variety that is wildly popular among beer enthusiasts and brewers alike. Says Sayantan Mukherjee, head brewer of Motor Works and Brewing Company, "As an experiment, brewers added extra hops while shipping them to Calcutta." The six-month arduous voyage across the English Channel, Atlantic Ocean, around the turbulent waters of Cape of Good Hope and into the Indian Ocean and ultimately the Bay of Bengal, turned the beer into a pale, mildly bitter but much better brew that felt very refreshing in our tropical climate.

## Partying on Park Street

This reverie is prompted while tracing the condensation on silver mugs in which bottled lager beer is served at Mocambo (running since 1956) on Kolkata's Park Street. The cold beer and the cool confines of the dimly lit restaurant are a welcome relief on an uncharacteristically hot day. (40 percent rain deficit, shout the newspapers!) Lunch and beer are sort of an amuse-bouche at the start of a beer crawl.

If inexpensive beer, a hefty dose of maudlin sentimentality and an up-close look at the everyman tippler is your idea of the Kolkata experience, then do try Olympia Pub. College students tasting their first drink on pocket money to poets and writers and garden variety winos — it's a splendid place for people watching.

Another institution that warrants a visit is the Broadway Hotel, which opened in 1937. They have monochrome pictures of American GIs from the Second World War and the menu remains unchanged and pleasantly unremarkable. It's a commoner's bar in the heart of Kolkata's Central Business District where you will get your Bengali-style fish fried in mustard oil or Chili Chicken with beer. "It is such a slice-of-life kind of thing in Kolkata — maach bhaja (fried fish) with a draught beer," says brand and communication consultant and all-around food enthusiast Kanishka Chakraborti.



It is such a slice-of-life kind of thing in Kolkata — maach bhaja with draught beer," says brand and communications consultant Kanishka Chakraborti. Grid, with four kinds of beer, is a must-visit for beer aficionados. Photo courtesy: Grid (beer)

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## Happy Hour

Stomachs suitably padded with lunch, an ideal place to begin a pub crawl is the Irish House, according to Gautam Singh, operations head — Global Kitchens, which owns Irish House and Skai, at the Quest Mall. He would know since he was once synonymous with a beery institution. Someplace Else, a tiny English-style pub at The Park Hotel that was considered the mecca of live music in the city and has hosted everyone from Saif Ali Khan to Mumford and Sons, Raghu Dixit and Indian Ocean.

If beer evokes images of a pot-bellied Homer Simpson for you then you'd be quite surprised at the crowd of barely-out-of-their-teens youngsters at Irish House. What draws them here are the beers on tap which are usually on offer as part of pocket-friendly deals. Toothsome kebabs and fried goodies make for a perfect addition to the booze. Singh says they have room to have at least one more beer on tap. "The time is right for more microbreweries to flourish in the city," he says.

## Off The Grid

And while southern and central Kolkata is all about decades-old establishments or outlets of popular nation-wide chains, the home turf for microbreweries is a little distance from the main city, in and around the suburbs of Salt Lake and New Town. The Grid is a must-try for beer aficionados. Spread across 10,000 sq. ft and with a unique Lego bar, they have their vibe down pat. Four different kinds of beer are available including a seasonal one, all marketed under the label Caldera.

When it first opened, Caldera was the name for the hefeweizen which became a raging success, almost eclipsing the brewery's brand name and outselling their other beers and ciders. In fact, it was this beer's success that was the cause of the brewery's transition from a brewpub to a microbrewery. "When we went to stage two and started selling our beers at other pubs and restaurants, we wanted them to have the connect with The Grid. Thus, Caldera became the label under which we sell all our beers," says owner Gaurav Kamani.

Find on tap the Caldera Stout, Caldera Blonde, Caldera Cider and a Caldera Seasonal, and great eats to pair with from the menu which strikes a balance between uncomplicated and trendy.



From a welcome drink that is beer to craft beer in your mini bar to even a beer spa that can be organised in your room bathtub, it is quite the 'immersive' experience. Photo courtesy: Motor Works

## Getting Salty

Depending on what time you start your pub crawl, you might just hit party central in Salt Lake's Sector V during the golden hour. The 218-seater Capella overlooks an endless horizon and offers a spectacular view of the sunset. Ideal for sundowners, grab an alfresco table and watch the stars come out as planes take off and land from the airport in the distance. The brews on tap are all named after constellations — Draco, Crux, Cygnus and Lepus, and comprise wheat beers, an IPA and a hefeweizen. On the menu is their signature fried chicken, the interestingly titled Bengali Wedding Bhetki Fries, and delightfully light Neapolitan sourdough pizzas.

## Snooze and Let Loose

If you want to settle in for the night and have room enough for more craft beers then head to Motor Works Brewing Company. Motor Works occupies the ground floor of the newly opened 60-key hotel Beyzaa Hotel and Suites. From a welcome drink that is beer to craft beer in your mini bar to even a beer spa that can be organised in your room bathtub, it is quite the 'immersive' experience.

Motor Works has a younger, fresher and unconventional approach to making craft beer. Try the Wrench Racer, a watermelon beer that is part of the summer beer collection. Another very offbeat offering is the All Day Long rice beer. Other than seasonal varieties, the ones available on tap are Load n Up, their Bengal wheat beer and Bootleggers Favourite, their take on German Weiss beer. Another must-try is the Lite Auto, a citrusy radler that is half German wheat and half lemonade. If you like shandy, then this is your poison.

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**Malini Banerjee** was a reluctant road-tripper who got seasoned through trips with an almost-ancient mariner. She lives to eat, bake, travel and read, but thankfully does not attempt it all at the same time. Her work has been published in The Telegraph, Mid-Day and India Today.

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