

BAR STOOL



You are reminded of the age of this place when you travel up to the 5th floor of the Majestic Hotel in quite possibly the smallest elevator in Ho Chi Minh City. Its wooden panelling gives the illusion of stepping into a time machine — back to when Ho Chi Minh City was still Saigon, and Dong Khoi was the Rue Catinat. But when you walk onto The Breeze Sky Bar it's an airy space, with plenty of space befitting of the bar's name.

The hotel has stood at 1 Dong Khoi since 1925 — with the rooftop bar being a staple in the city for nearly as long. It has

stubbornly survived war, as well as the arrival of deluxe super-hotels such as the nearby Park Hyatt. The bar hopes to retain some of the class that helped make its famous name.

Cocktails are the name of the game up here, with all the 20th century design classics such as the Long Island Ice Tea to a margarita that you'd expect to see. The Happy Saigon (VND185,000) is the bar's signature — it was concocted for the war correspondents who came to the bar looking for a good time among the chaos, with the hope that it could give a bit of vigour back to those who drank it. It's made with

Vietnamese rice wine, Malibu, triple sec, orange juice and grenadine — and it hits the spot without being earth-shattering. The cocktails are all sweet with the intention being to bring a bit of feel-good factor to your visit.

Evocative

A couple of the cocktails on the menu take their name from the hotel itself and I also try the 'Majestic by Night'. (VND185,000). It's a tippie featuring vodka, cherry brandy, cranberry juice and lime juice. It's a refreshing drink to help while away the afternoon watching the river below.

The Bar at the Majestic Hotel



PHOTOS BY MIKE PALUMBO

As well as the special cocktails that were designed by the head bartender — there is also an extensive shorts menu (VND170,000), with classic options such as the margarita and daiquiri sitting alongside many others. There is a stacked menu of long drinks (VND180,000), ensuring you won't be short on choice.

The bar is famous for being the favourite watering hole of Fowler in Graham Greene's classic 1959 novel *The Quiet American*. Greene's rich and evocative description of the bar still lingers when you sit up here — "it would ever be seven o'clock and cocktail-time on the roof of

the Majestic, with a wind from the Saigon River" he wrote, and much of the classic style of Greene's era has been kept.

Dignified

Photos of the various world leaders and dignitaries who have stayed at the hotel have pride of place on the walls inside the bar. Like the hotel, the bar's design has remained in that recognisable French colonial-era fashion for its long lifespan. It's a style that was built to last.

The rooftop is where the bar shines the most. With a main outside area standing adjacent to the bar inside and two further

levels above it offering blessed seclusion from the city, it offers a fabulous view of what is happening on the other side of the Saigon River with the Thu Thiem project, as cranes and machinery engulf the green space that once was.

With a Happy Saigon cocktail in hand, it's impossible not to reflect on how much the city has changed from the days when The Majestic was in its pomp, and how drinkers at the rooftop bar here have watched the city change into what it is today, and what it will be tomorrow. — **Thomas Barrett**

Breeze Sky Bar is in the Majestic Hotel, 1 Dong Khoi, Q1, HCMC 