

BAR STOOL



Khoai isn't your run of the mill bar. Tucked away in a corner of Binh Thanh District, its design has an unusual inspiration and it can stake a claim to be one of Ho Chi Minh City's best-kept secrets.

The owner, Hai, spent several years living in Budapest, Hungary, and the decor of the bar has been inspired by Budapest's famous ruin pubs, and in particular the legendary Szimpla Kert.

Gritty Chic

The idea behind a ruin bar is simple. During

the early 2000s, abandoned and derelict spaces were transformed in the Hungarian capital to create new drinking spaces, and Khoai has lovingly recreated this style.

There are tables hanging upside down from the roof, a mishmash of paint, graffiti and different-coloured lighting, with tin sheets making up the outdoor roof. It embodies a gritty chic that doesn't take itself too seriously, and with it, it encourages a loose and friendly atmosphere.

Beer fans will be kept happy with their diverse range of European bottled beers, with tipples coming from Germany, Ireland,

Holland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Belgium. Prices are reasonable; you can get a German Kostritzer for VND85,000 or a Belgian Affligem for VND80,000.

There's also a decent selection of beers from Vietnam's Asian neighbours, such as Japan, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. As it's 2017, there is an extensive craft beer menu on offer too which includes favourites such as Platinum Golden Ale (VND50,000) and the East West Summer Hefe (VND75,000) as well as new additions to the menu, such as the CCraftbeer from Hanoi (VND75,000) and Dong Son Golden Ale (VND75,000).

Khoai



PHOTOS BY MIKE PALUMBO

Draft Hoegaarden (VND85,000) and Leffe (VND85,000) are also available.

I go for a Lowen which was brewed nearby in Quy Nhon, and costs VND30,000 for a stubby bottle. Similarly, there's Dung Quat from Quang Ngai also available at VND30,000. Both are light and refreshing summer sups.

Khoai also serves food, and there are bar snacks, such as pickled chicken feet (VND40,000), spring rolls (VND55,000) or fermented pig's ear rolls (VND65,000) as well as fresh sounding salads and European-inspired mains and pastas which range from VND70,000 to VND130,000.

Mixed Crowd

There's a healthy mix of young Vietnamese professionals stopping by for a gossip after work, and expats enjoying a get-together. Everyone seems to get on. It's a cosy space without being poky, and all of the tables are full which always helps you loosen up and settle in. It's great to see a bar thrive that isn't in District 1 or 2.

There's a happy hour, which begins when the bar opens at 4pm and runs until 7pm, with 20 percent off all beer on the menu. In the evenings there are regular events, such as open-mic nights, acoustic performances, DJs

and bands. Bar manager Thanh tells me that they try and mix it up to keep things fresh and they've recently hosted performances such as belly dancing and saxophone playing.

Look out for the friendly pet cats that make good use of the assorted bits of furniture that hang from the roof, as they climb and jump as you enjoy your drink. It's that kind of place. — *Thomas Barrett*

Khoai is located at 89 Pham Viet Chanh, Binh Thanh, close to the border with District 1. For more information on Khoai, visit [facebook.com/nongtraikhoai/](https://www.facebook.com/nongtraikhoai/) [u](https://www.instagram.com/nongtraikhoai/)