

Show

Night Out

What to do on a night out? Here's a look at what our local nightlife scene is up to

# CHEAP CHEERS



TOP PICTURE: CHOO CHWEE HUA

**BUDGET BOOZE:** (Above) An employee at Check In at Robertson Walk welcomes us for a drink. (Above, right) Ms Julianne Lim and her \$5++ white wine at Five Izakaya Bar. (Above, far right) Colleagues Stacey Cross (left) and Bella Romero like their \$6++ wines at Roku.



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**P**ATRONS weren't the only happy campers when Check In bar owner Stacy Chong did away with GST and service charge in 2008.

Sales doubled immediately, Ms Chong told me. Drinks now go for as low as \$4 nett every day except Sunday when the Robertson Walk joint is closed.

More bars are luring the crowd with competitive prices. Take Five Izakaya Bar which opened in February.

At this bustling watering hole, house pours and Japanese-inspired finger food are going for – you guessed it – \$5 a pop all day every day, except Sunday when the shutters are down.

I hear the cash register going off in your head already.

Five's general manager Alfie Moyn said the inspiration came from popular Japanese chain 300 Bar where everything goes for 300 yen (\$4.60).

"We have a good relationship with our suppliers so we're able to get good deals from them."

This means \$5 for drinks like Asahi draught beer and house red and white wine from Chile's Premo.

A few streets away lies Roku, another budget watering hole.

Five and Roku are owned by the same group of directors, one of whom is actor Adam Chen.

It's \$6 for house pours and wines, Asahi draught beer and snacks at Roku, which opened in December.

Prices at Five and Roku exclude service charge and GST.

You'd have to wonder how these places rake in the profits. After all, they are situated in prime locations.

How many glasses would they have to sell to make up for rent and break even? Adam revealed it cost

\$150,000 to set up Roku, which doubles as an R Burger joint in the afternoon, and \$80,000 for Five. Monthly rental fees for Five and Roku are about \$20,000 and \$18,000, respectively.

Adam estimated it would take another year for Roku to break even because of the higher start-up cost, while profits could start rolling in for Five by the year's end.

Check In's Ms Chong would only say that her start-up cost was less than \$300,000 three years ago. Rent is "a low five-digit figure". The joint broke even in two years, she said. Her strategy:

Cheap drinks and good service.

Guest relations officer Michelle Lee, 29, who was there for the first time last Friday, was impressed.

"You get cheap drinks and a cosy place to chill out. The staff are friendly and very attentive. That's really important."

Adam said it took three months to cultivate a regular crowd at Roku, which he admits was a longer time than expected because of competition from the neighbouring bars.

But it took just a heartbeat for colleagues Stacey Cross and Bella Romero to defect from Harry's which they frequented before Roku opened.

Marketing manager Ms Cross, 29, said: "We came here because we wanted to switch things up. It's down the road from where we work."

Even though these places sell premium liquor – Five's most expensive bottle is Cannus XO which is \$380++ while a bottle of Kubota sake at Roku goes for \$350++ – patrons seemed reluctant to pay more than the special deals.

But Ms Julianne Lim, 28, who has been to Five three times, doesn't mind paying for beer towers and liquor by the bottle.

But she'll stick to house pours and wines if she is drinking by the glass because "it's more worthwhile".

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## UNDER-\$10 DRINKS

### CHECK IN

Robertson Walk #01-10/11, Tel: 6732 6098, Monday to Thursday 4pm-12am, Friday and Saturday 5pm-1am.

\$4 nett for tequila mixes; other house pours, wines at \$6 nett, Heineken half pint for \$5 nett, \$8 nett for cocktails.

### FIVE IZAKAYA BAR

Hitachi Tower #01-05B, Tel: 6536 8955, Monday to Saturday, Noon-midnight.

House pours and wines, Asahi draught beer and Japanese-inspired finger food for \$5++.

### ROKU

Market Street Carpark #01-02/03, Tel: 9722 0004, Monday to Wednesday and Saturday: 5pm to midnight, Thursday and Friday 5pm to 3am.

House pours and wines, Asahi draught beer and bar snacks for \$6++.

### BEAUJOLAIS WINE BAR

1 Ann Siang Hill, Tel: 6224 2227, Monday to Thursday: 12pm-1am, Friday 11.30am to 3am, Saturday 5pm to 2am, Noon to 9pm: \$10 nett for house wines, after which it's \$10++.

### TEQUILA BLUE

5 Changi Village Road, #01-2011, Tel: 6543 1153, Monday to Friday: 4pm to midnight, Saturday and Sunday: 11am to midnight.

Cocktails from \$9++. Noon to 6pm, draught beers from \$5++, spirits from \$7++.