

Figure out more about women-only host bars in Gangnam, Korea

South Korea's rapid financial development has actually implied some startling changes within its traditional social structure, consisting of the surge of so-called host bars, where wealthy ladies pay the equivalent of hundreds of dollars for male company.

In the dim light of a basement, a dozen completely brushed young guys kneel in rows, calling out their names.

Muscular, with glossy boy-band hairstyles, they pack side-by-side into the narrow area, awaiting us to make our selection. Outside in the hallway, even more of their coworkers are showing up for one more night at the workplace. It is 2am, and also we are their initial clients.

Surprise below the sidewalks of Seoul's ritziest postcode, Gangnam, the men at Bar 123 become part of an expanding sector, which outgrew the lengthy practices of Japanese geisha and also Korea's kisaeng homes yet with one vital difference - the consumers here are all females.

Referred to as "host bars", these all-night drinking rooms use women customers the possibility to pay as well as choose for male friends, often at a price of hundreds of pounds an evening.

One of the women I satisfy at Bar 123 is Minkyong, a waitressing manager for a luxury hotel. She says she involves host bars one or two times a month.

The allure of host bars can be subtle. Right here, she states, she has more attention from her male friends, even more choice and, crucially, more control.

PROMOTION

" In normal bars the people who drink with me have only one objective - to have a casual sex. I do not want that, so that's why I come below, I desire to have enjoyable," she states.

Hosts are worked with by bars such as this one to offer companionship as well as home entertainment. Formally that means pouring drinks for their customers, dancing as well as chatting with them, and also vocal singing karaoke.

Host bar in Seoul

Sex is not officially available in most host bars. That would certainly be prohibited but also Minkyong appears delighted to touch and flirt with her host, and the males here estimate that around half the clients wish to spend for sex, either on or off the properties.

James has actually been working at Bar 123 for a number of years. In Korean society, he states, there is a great deal of satisfaction and also bargaining a rate for sex is never ever done explicitly. Rather, he informs me, it is all down to the host's own analysis.

" The men below are pros - we recognize what we're doing," he claims.

" After talking with a lady for an hour we primarily know how much cash she makes as well as what she provides for a living. We've already evaluated her character and also what she agrees to provide."

James and other hosts state their consumers consist of some of South Korea's elite, as well as that the cash and benefits on offer are unbelievable. One client James met, during his initial week in the work, asked him to authorize himself over to her for 2 years.

" She stated 'allow's make a contract. I've got this notepad and I've numbered it 1-5. Whatever you list alongside those numbers, I'll get you.'"

James states at the time he took it as a joke but because figured out the same lady spent 60,000 (\$ 97,000) on one more host.

" If it happened currently, I 'd do it - I would certainly be assuming straight."

Paradoxically probably, host bars outgrew one of Korea's most entrenched and also, some say, misogynist service customs - the room beauty salon. These are personal drinking rooms where teams of males pick, and also are served by, eye-catching women people hosting.

It was the people hosting' requirement to allow off steam after work, claims expert host Kim Dong-hee, that developed the initial demand for host bars, with all-male personnel.

" What these hostesses want is to [make us] do the exact same point they had to do in their very own workplace. These ladies are forced to do things they don't want to do for cash.

" I think a lot of them are in pain, and a whole lot really feel lonesome. Basically, they desire to purchase our time and our bodies."

People hosting still make up a huge portion of the consumers at host bars right here, yet at Bar 123, as an example, approximately 40% of the customers on a provided night are currently from other strolls of life.

The reasons for that growing allure are bound in South Korea's rapid economic rise. Within 50 years, the country changed from post-war destruction to OECD participant.

Yet, according to Jasper Kim, head of the Asia-Pacific Global Research Group in Seoul,

something important was lost in the process.

" I think that with all this fast development comes quick adjustment, and also Koreans simply don't recognize just how to manage it. Significantly, industrialism is surpassing standard societal standards that you would anticipate a pair of decades back."

Jasper Kim says South Korea's notoriously long functioning hrs have actually left many Korean females feeling lonely, while the nation's technical development has actually left lots of people feeling separated.

" The human aspect of Korean society that existed before merely does not exist today. People are concentrated on innovation, people are concentrated on their tasks, they aren't concentrated on human relationships anymore.

" In many methods, Korean society today sort of reminds me of 1960s society in the United States, where it's on the edge of some sort of cultural transformation."

The grandpa of Seoul's host bar scene, Kim Dong-hee, agrees that several of the women who pertain to host bars are not spending for sex however, for companionship, which is why he opened up a brand-new chain of freshly-marketed outlets aimed at the mainstream market - called Red Model Bars.

Red Model Bar hosts.

Image subtitle,.

Hosts at Red Model Bars can not touch customers.

" Men desire to have visual satisfaction as well as wish to really feel points, they're tactile. Females like to chat as well as to listen. Which's why I assumed of opening a bar such as this - a type of dialogue bar."



Red Model Bars are different to conventional host bars in one key respect - there is a no-touching rule. Hosts rest on one side of the table, customers on the other, as well as no physical call is permitted, as well as certainly no sex.

Perhaps consequently there is a lack of furtiveness among individuals that function or drink right here - the lights are reduced, the decor generally dark red as well as the area is split right into very discreet cubicles, but it is an open-plan space as well as hosts as well as clients are separated in each booth by a huge table.

This brand-new organization design depends entirely on females paying the equivalent of hundreds and even thousands of dollars to speak to good-looking boys over a beverage. Still, it appears to be working - 3 brand-new branches result from open this year.

Resting at a table at one end of bench was one of their routine customers, a florist called Kim Nayu. She tells me she comes right here on a daily basis to satisfy her favorite host and also discuss problems she is having at work.

The rate for this piece of male attention is \$487-650 (300-400) a day.

" Talking to pals would certainly be more affordable" she admits, "yet they do not listen as much. They're active, and quickly to discuss themselves. Below, individuals will take notice of me as well as they'll listen to me."

" I spend a great deal of money but it's worth it for what I obtain emotionally. Individuals pay to head to see a psychologist or psychiatrist, so it's similar but less difficult."

Nayu's favourite host Sung-il claims it can be difficult to maintain his professional and individual life different.

" Honestly I would certainly be existing if I say I have not been attracted to take points better with some consumers, because we're human, we're males, yet there are policies."

Among his consumers yapped to her other half regarding him and when the three of them met, Sung-il and also the partner came to be friends.

" No one conceals - the workers don't hide that they work here, and also customers can be open also."

This openness is presenting a new sort of challenge to South Korean culture, different from the in some cases shabby underworld of standard host bars as well as their hinterland of male prostitution.

By using ladies a "commendable" method to challenge traditional gender duties and flex their financial power, these brand-new bars ask questions of Korean culture that are coming to be more challenging to neglect.

Listen to the full report on BBC Radio 4's Crossing Continents. You can pay attention through the Radio 4 site or through the Crossing Continents podcast.

The allure of host bars can be subtle. Below, she says, she has more attention from her male buddies, even more option as well as, crucially, even more control.

James has been functioning at Bar 123 for a couple of years. Rather, he informs me, it is all down to the host's very own assessment.

As well as that's why I thought of opening up a bar like this - a kind of discussion bar."