

Discover more about women-only host bars in Gangnam, Korea

South Korea's quick financial advancement has actually meant some stunning adjustments within its conventional social structure, consisting of the increase of so-called host bars, where rich ladies pay the equivalent of hundreds of dollars for male firm.

In the dark light of a basement, a dozen flawlessly brushed young men stoop in rows, calling out their names.

Muscular, with shiny boy-band hairdos, they stuff alongside right into the narrow area, awaiting us to make our choice. Outside in the corridor, even more of their colleagues are getting here for one more evening at the office. It is 2am, and we are their first customers. Covert under the sidewalks of Seoul's ritziest postcode, Gangnam, the males at Bar 123 become part of an expanding industry, which outgrew the long traditions of Japanese geisha as well as Korea's kisaeng houses yet with one important distinction - the consumers below are all ladies.

Referred to as "host bars", these all-night drinking areas provide women customers the opportunity to pay and also select for male buddies, in some cases at a cost of thousands of pounds an evening.

Among the ladies I fulfill at Bar 123 is Minkyong, a waitressing supervisor for a luxury resort. She states she concerns host bars one or two times a month.

The appeal of host bars can be refined. Below, she claims, she has more focus from her male companions, even more choice and also, most importantly, more control.

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" In routine bars the people who consume with me have just one objective - to have an one-night stand. I do not desire that, so that's why I come here, I want to have enjoyable," she says.

Hosts are employed by bars such as this one to give companionship and amusement. Officially that implies pouring drinks for their consumers, dancing and also talking with them, and also singing karaoke.

Host bar in Seoul

Sex is not formally available in many host bars. That would be unlawful however also Minkyong appears pleased to touch as well as flirt with her host, as well as the males below approximate that around half the consumers intend to spend for sex, either on or off the facilities.

James has actually been operating at Bar 123 for a number of years. In Korean society, he states, there is a whole lot of satisfaction as well as negotiating a cost for sex is never done clearly. Instead, he informs me, it is all to the host's own assessment.

" The guys here are pros - we understand what we're doing," he states.

" After chatting to a lady for a hr we generally understand just how much money she makes and also what she does for a living. We've already analysed her character as well as what she agrees to give."

James as well as other hosts state their clients include several of South Korea's elite, and that the cash and advantages on offer are unbelievable. One client James satisfied, throughout his very first week in the task, asked him to authorize himself over to her for 2

years.

" She claimed 'let's make a contract. I've got this paper and I've numbered it 1-5. Whatever you list next to those numbers, I'll get you.'"

James states at the time he took it as a joke however since discovered the very same woman spent 60,000 (\$ 97,000) on an additional host.

" If it took place now, I 'd do it - I 'd be thinking straight."

Actually possibly, host bars outgrew among Korea's most entrenched as well as, some state, misogynist organization traditions - the space hair salon. These are private drinking rooms where groups of guys pick, and also are served by, appealing women people hosting.

It was the people hosting' demand to allow off heavy steam after work, states veteran host Kim Dong-hee, that produced the preliminary need for host bars, with all-male staff.

These women are required to do points they don't want to do for money.

" I believe a great deal of them are in pain, and a whole lot feel lonesome. Basically, they want to acquire our time and also our bodies."

Hostesses still compose a large portion of the customers at host bars right here, but at Bar 123, for instance, approximately 40% of the customers on a provided night are now from various other strolls of life.

The factors for that growing allure are bound in South Korea's rapid financial surge. Within 50 years, the country moved from post-war devastation to OECD participant.

However, according to Jasper Kim, head of the Asia-Pacific Global Research Group in Seoul, something vital was lost along the means.

" I believe that with all this rapid development comes rapid change, as well as Koreans just do not understand exactly how to handle it. Significantly, commercialism is surpassing basic social norms that you would certainly anticipate a couple of decades ago."

Jasper Kim states South Korea's notoriously lengthy functioning hours have left numerous Korean females feeling lonesome, while the nation's technological development has actually left many people really feeling removed.

" The human component of Korean society that existed in the past just does not exist today. Individuals are concentrated on modern technology, people are concentrated on their jobs, they aren't concentrated on human relations anymore.

" In many methods, Korean culture today sort of reminds me of 1960s culture in the United States, where it's on the brink of some kind of social change."

The grandfather of Seoul's host bar scene, Kim Dong-hee, concurs that a number of the women who involve host bars are not paying for sex however, for companionship, which is why he opened up a new chain of freshly-marketed outlets focused on the mainstream market - called Red Model Bars.

Red Model Bar hosts.

Photo caption,.

Hosts at Red Model Bars can not touch clients.

" Men desire to have visual satisfaction and desire to really feel points, they're responsive. Women like to chat as well as to listen. As well as that's why I thought about opening up a bar similar to this - a kind of discussion bar."

Red Model Bars are various to conventional host bars in one essential respect - there is a no-touching regulation. Hosts rest on one side of the table, consumers on the other, as well

as no physical get in touch with is permitted, as well as absolutely no sex.

Maybe as a result there is an absence of furtiveness amongst the individuals who function or consume alcohol below - the lights are reduced, the decor generally dark red and also the area is split right into very discreet booths, yet it is an open-plan space as well as hosts and also consumers are split in each booth by a large table.

This new business design depends entirely on females paying the equivalent of hundreds or even hundreds of dollars to speak with fine-looking young men over a beverage. Still, it seems to be functioning - three brand-new branches result from open this year.

Resting at a table at one end of bench was among their routine clients, a florist called Kim Nayu. She informs me she comes below everyday to fulfill her preferred host and discuss concerns she is having at job



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

" Talking to friends would be less costly" she confesses, "but they do not listen as much. They're hectic, and quickly to chat concerning themselves. Right here, people will certainly focus on me and they'll pay attention to me."

" I spend a lot of money however it's worth it wherefore I obtain mentally. People pay to visit see a psycho therapist or psychiatrist, so it's comparable however much less demanding."

Nayu's favorite host Sung-il claims it can be hard to maintain his individual and expert life different.

" Honestly I would certainly be existing if I claim I have not been attracted to take points additionally with some customers, since we're human, we're guys, however there are rules.". One of his clients spoke a lot to her hubby about him and when the three of them met, Sung-il and also the other half became buddies.

" No one hides - the workers do not hide that they function right here, as well as clients can be open also.".

This openness is posturing a new kind of difficulty to South Korean culture, different from the sometimes sleazy abyss of typical host bars as well as their hinterland of male hooking.

By supplying ladies a "commendable" way to challenge conventional sex functions and bend their economic power, these brand-new bars ask questions of Korean culture that are ending up being harder to disregard.

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The appeal of host bars can be subtle. Here, she says, she has more interest from her male buddies, even more selection and, most importantly, even more control.

James has actually been functioning at Bar 123 for a couple of years. Instead, he tells me, it is all down to the host's very own analysis.

And that's why I assumed of opening up a bar like this - a kind of dialogue bar.".