

# Find out even more regarding women-only host bars in Gangnam, Korea

South Korea's fast economic development has implied some shocking modifications within its conservative social framework, including the increase of supposed host bars, where well-off females pay the matching of thousands of dollars for male firm.

In the dark light of an underground space, a lots completely groomed young men stoop in rows, calling out their names.

Muscle, with shiny boy-band hairdos, they pack alongside right into the narrow area, awaiting us to make our choice. Outdoors in the passage, more of their coworkers are showing up for one more night at work. It is 2am, and we are their first consumers.

Concealed under the pavements of Seoul's ritziest postcode, Gangnam, the men at Bar 123 become part of an expanding sector, which grew out of the long practices of Japanese geisha and Korea's kisaeng houses however with one essential distinction - the clients here are all women.

Called "host bars", these all-night alcohol consumption areas offer women customers the chance to pay as well as select for male companions, sometimes at a price of hundreds of extra pounds a night.

One of the women I satisfy at Bar 123 is Minkyong, a waitressing supervisor for a five-star hotel. She says she concerns host bars one or two times a month.

The allure of host bars can be subtle. Here, she claims, she has even more focus from her male buddies, even more selection as well as, most importantly, even more control.

PROMOTION

" In regular bars the individuals who drink with me have just one objective - to have an one-night stand. I don't desire that, so that's why I come below, I want to have enjoyable," she claims.

Hosts are employed by bars similar to this one to provide companionship as well as home entertainment. Formally that indicates putting drinks for their customers, chatting as well as dancing with them, and vocal singing karaoke.

Host bar in Seoul

Sex is not officially available in many host bars. That would certainly be illegal but also Minkyong appears satisfied to flirt and touch with her host, and also the men below estimate

that around half the customers intend to spend for sex, either on or off the facilities.

James has actually been operating at Bar 123 for a pair of years. In Korean culture, he says, there is a great deal of satisfaction and working out a rate for sex is never ever done clearly. Instead, he informs me, it is all to the host's very own evaluation.

" The individuals here are pros - we recognize what we're doing," he states.

" After speaking with a girl for a hr we essentially understand exactly how much money she makes and also what she does for a living. We've already analysed her personality and also what she agrees to give."

James and also various other hosts claim their customers include a few of South Korea's elite, as well as that the cash and also advantages on offer boggle the mind. One customer James fulfilled, during his very first week in the task, asked him to sign himself over to her for two years.

" She stated 'allow's make a contract. I've got this paper and also I've numbered it 1-5. Whatever you create down beside those numbers, I'll get you.'"

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

" If it happened currently, I 'd do it - I 'd be thinking straight."

Paradoxically probably, host bars outgrew one of Korea's most entrenched and, some state, misogynist service customs - the area salon. These are personal alcohol consumption areas where teams of guys choose, and also are offered by, appealing women hostesses.

It was the hostesses' demand to allow off steam after work, claims professional host Kim Dong-hee, that created the initial demand for host bars, with all-male staff.

" What these people hosting want is to [make us] do the exact same point they needed to do in their own workplace. These ladies are required to do things they don't want to do for money.

" I think a great deal of them are in discomfort, and a lot feel lonesome. Basically, they wish to get our time as well as our bodies."

Hostesses still make up a huge percentage of the clients at host bars right here, yet at Bar 123, for instance, as much as 40% of the consumers on an offered evening are now from other walks of life.

The reasons for that expanding appeal are bound in South Korea's fast economic surge.

Within 50 years, the country moved from post-war destruction to OECD participant.

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

" I assume that with all this fast development comes quick adjustment, and also Koreans simply do not know how to deal with it. Progressively, industrialism is overtaking fundamental societal norms that you would anticipate a pair of decades ago."

Jasper Kim says South Korea's infamously lengthy functioning hrs have left several Korean ladies feeling lonely, while the nation's technical advancement has actually left lots of people really feeling separated.

" The human component of Korean culture that existed before merely doesn't exist today. Individuals are concentrated on technology, people are concentrated on their tasks, they aren't concentrated on human relations anymore.

" In many means, Korean society today sort of reminds me of 1960s society in the US, where it's on the brink of some type of social transformation."



The grandfather of Seoul's host bar scene, Kim Dong-hee, concurs that much of the women who come to host bars are not spending for sex but also for friendship, which is why he opened a new chain of freshly-marketed outlets intended at the mainstream market - called Red Model Bars.

Red Model Bar hosts.

Image subtitle,.

Hosts at Red Model Bars can not touch clients.

" Men intend to have visual satisfaction and also wish to feel points, they're responsive. Females like to chat and to listen. And also that's why I considered opening a bar similar to this - a sort of discussion bar."

Red Model Bars are different to traditional host bars in one key respect - there is a no-touching guideline. Hosts rest on one side of the table, clients on the various other, and also

no physical call is enabled, and also definitely no sex.

Maybe therefore there is a lack of furtiveness amongst individuals that function or drink below - the lights are reduced, the decoration mainly dark red as well as the area is split into discreet cubicles, yet it is an open-plan space as well as hosts and consumers are split in each cubicle by a big table.

This new service model depends entirely on women paying the matching of hundreds or also countless dollars to talk with good-looking boys over a beverage. Still, it appears to be functioning - 3 new branches are because of open this year.

Resting at a table at one end of bench was one of their routine clients, a flower shop called Kim Nayu. She informs me she comes here everyday to satisfy her preferred host as well as talk about issues she is contending job.

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

" Talking to pals would be less expensive" she admits, "yet they do not listen as much. They're busy, and also quickly to speak about themselves. Here, individuals will pay interest to me and also they'll pay attention to me."

" I spend a lot of cash however it deserves it wherefore I obtain emotionally. Individuals pay to head to see a psychologist or psychoanalyst, so it's comparable however less difficult."

Nayu's preferred host Sung-il states it can be difficult to keep his personal as well as professional life separate.

" Honestly I would certainly be existing if I say I haven't been attracted to take points further with some customers, due to the fact that we're human, we're males, however there are regulations."

One of his clients chatted a great deal to her hubby concerning him and when the 3 of them satisfied, Sung-il and the partner came to be friends.

" No one conceals - the workers do not hide that they work here, as well as customers can be open as well."

This openness is posing a new sort of challenge to South Korean society, different from the occasionally seedy abyss of standard host bars and their hinterland of male hooking.

By offering females a "respectable" means to test conventional sex functions as well as flex their economic power, these new bars ask inquiries of Korean society that are becoming more difficult to overlook.

Hear the full record on BBC Radio 4's Crossing Continents. You can pay attention through the Radio 4 website or by means of the Crossing Continents podcast.

The attraction of host bars can be refined. Right here, she says, she has more attention from her male companions, even more selection as well as, crucially, 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 assessment.

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