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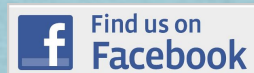
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TOM TOM ENGLISH



Host Clubs

VOCABULARY

Lothario =

a man who behaves selfishly and irresponsibly in his sexual relationships with women

spurge =

an act of spending money freely or extravagantly

lavish =

bestow something in generous or extravagant quantities on

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. What do you think about host/ hostess clubs? Have you ever been to one? If not, what is your image of a host/ hostess club?
2. Do you think it's wrong that these men (hosts) in the article string women on and make them believe that they could fall in love? Why? Why not?
3. Why do you think of Japan's new image of host clubs? Do you agree that it's a "mark of status or success"? Why? Why not?
4. What would you say to your child or friends child if you knew they were trying to get into the business? Do you think it's wrong? Would you try and stop them? What if it was only a temporary job? Why? Why not?

VOCABULARY

denizen =

a person, animal, or plant that lives or is found in a particular place

crimp =

compress (something) into small folds or ridges

shady =

of doubtful honesty or legality

Smoke hangs thick in the air of a Tokyo nightspot as Aki Nitta sips champagne with a trio of sweet-talking **Lotharios** peddling fake love at premium rates. In a country which has lost its mojo, many wealthy Japanese women spend eye-watering sums on male hosts in return for an evening of sweet talk, flirting and often sex. "I want my heart to flutter," Nitta told AFP at a popular club in Kabukicho, lined with chrome and mirrors. "Japanese men aren't very attentive and don't show their feelings, but hosts treat you like a princess. I want to be pampered and I don't care how much it costs." The 27-year-old businesswoman spends around 1 million yen a month on the object of her desire, a young man with bleached hair and a boyish grin.

But some big-spenders **splurge** 10 million yen in a single night to have their egos stroked by smooth-talking rental Romeos who can earn five times that amount in a good month. There are a growing number of wealthy and successful Japanese women who have become frustrated with traditional dating and prefer to focus their romantic energies where they are sure to be treated well. "I'm paying for time, rather than men," explained Nitta. "Time is more important to me so I want to live for now, without any regrets."

Many women - ranging from 20s to 60s - **lavish** expensive gifts on their favorite hosts. "When I was 20, a customer bought me a Porsche," said former host Sho Takami, who owns a chain of clubs and likens a host's role to that of a psychiatrist. "It's a 24-hour job. Our real work starts after hours - going for drinks with customers, crawling into bed at 9 a.m., meeting another one for lunch. It's important the customer believes there's a chance of love. That's how you get her to come to the club and spend money." Host clubs are a 1 trillion yen industry with some 800 venues nationwide. Around 260 are

located in Tokyo, most squeezed into Kabukicho's narrow streets where flickering neon signs display the air-brushed faces of hosts outside clubs with names such as Romeo, Gatsby and Avalon. Hosts have been compared to male geishas and Takami believes the culture, which began in the early 1970s, empowers women. "A host's job is to support a lady's heart. We're here to encourage women's social advancement. It used to be considered vulgar to party with hosts but these days letting your hair down at a host club is a mark of status or success."

Japan's hosts, **denizens** of the night instantly recognisable by their spray tans, **crimped** long hair and tight-fitting suits, are often accused of preying on women's emotions. "The customers are buying affection," shrugged ex-host Ken Ichijo. "We're selling them dreams, so you lie about loving them in return for money," he added. "That leaves a bad taste for some people who think we're just ripping girls off." Ichijo argues that it is simply a case of supply and demand. "Hosts exist to fill a void in someone's life. In this business, the host is the product. We pamper to a woman's every need - listen to her problems, tell her she's beautiful, act out her fantasies."

With harsher restrictions on opening hours, regular police checks and far less yakuza gangster involvement, the host business has cleaned up its **shady** image in recent years. But the promise of sex is still dangled as bait in a cutthroat industry, admits Ichijo. "Sex is not necessarily part of a host club's service," he said. "But it is part of trying to satisfy the customer's needs."