

Do New York City, “Gangnam Style,” at a Koreatown Karaoke Bar

Are you a closet singer or a night owl? Then you need to explore the active karaoke scene happening in Koreatown. Centered on one block of W. 32nd Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues, Koreatown is filled with scores of nightclubs, where private karaoke rooms let you sing to your heart's content until the early hours of the morning. Unlike American karaoke, Korean karaoke is a much more personal affair, with bottle service at reasonable prices, Korean snacks and thousands of international songs to choose from. The clubs offer hourly rates, usually around \$30-\$50 per hour for a karaoke room for four people, with an additional per person charge. Larger rooms can generally hold between 20 and 40 people, starting at \$80 per room. Two microphones, comfortable seating and several screens with easy-to-follow lyrics and a background of Korean videos complete the setting. Most clubs open mid-afternoon and stay open until 4 am on weekends, and until 2 am or 3 am during the week. Reservations are accepted at many, either by phone or online.

It's easy to make a full night of your Koreatown music immersion. Start with a barbecue dinner at any of the quick cook-at-your-table dining spots like **Miss Korea**, **Kang Ho Dong Baekjeong** or **Jongro BBQ**; grab a coffee or bubble tea for fortification at French-Asian bakeries **Tous les Jours**, **Grace Street** or **Paris Baguette**; and pick your musical destination. Most of the karaoke clubs are located—almost hidden—in nondescript office buildings. You take an elevator up and exit into a world of laser lights, neon-decked bars and private rooms. A greeter will show you the ropes, so there's no need to feel intimidated.

Some of the clubs are fairly basic and are priced accordingly. **Gagopa Karaoke** (28 W. 32nd St., 212.967.5353) is BYOB, so you skip the bottle fee altogether. It's a good training ground if you're a little shy and don't want to spend a lot of money.

New kid on the block, **Karaoke City** (22 W. 32nd St., 646.791.8318) is also one of the largest with multiple private rooms so you can test your skills squirreled away before you go public in the “open” room. It's also a sports bar, if you decide not to sing.

Others have very loose themes, like **MK Karaoke** (11 W. 32nd St., 212.564.3436), which riffs on a “card” theme with aces and spades gracing doorways along with quirky Banksy-ish graffiti. Or, check out one of my favorites, space-agey **Chorus** (25 W. 32nd St., 212.967.2244), with its public karaoke lounge, a rarity in Koreatown. Music fans will love the Rolling Stones room at **Karaoke Wow!** (10 W. 32nd St., 646.454.1777) or the Beatles room at **Turntable LP Bar & Karaoke** (34-36 W. 32nd St., 212.594.4344), both filled with posters, records and other paraphernalia. Other hot spots are the techy and colorful **5 Bar Karaoke Lounge** (38 W. 32nd St., 212.594.6644) and **The Spot Karaoke & Lounge** (34 W. 32nd St., 212.564.6600).

With so many choices you can spend an evening moving from place to place. Or just drop anchor at the most spacious and airy karaoke bar of all, **Maru** (11 W. 32nd St., 212.273.3413), which expands from one floor with an extensive red and white lounge and private rooms to two floors on the weekend, with a live DJ and more party space.

Want a nightcap? **Space Karaoke Bar** (34 W. 32nd St., 646.756.4206) will keep those singing chops going late into the night. Stop off for a round of pool at sister venue one floor up, **Space Billiard Café** (212.239.4166), for some really late-night action. For well-deserved refreshment after your performances, a flavored soju (stronger than sake) and a bite at **Starry Night** (28 W. 33rd St., 212.868.3392)—open until 4 am on weekends and where images of Korean icon Psy (“Gangnam Style”) mingle with other kitschy artwork—will satisfy.

—Meryl Pearlstein

