

# 飲み、緩めなさい (Drink and Relax)

Tokyo nights mellow as  
lounge bars hit the scene

**Nihon Keizai Shimbun**  
Staff Writer

**L**ounge parties are the latest thing in Tokyo. Unlike nightclubs, where people dance to deafeningly loud music, lounge parties offer more choices: some people dance to the music, some sit and have drinks, others stand around and talk, while still others sit on the floor laughing.

One new venue, Supper Lounge Obi in Tokyo's trendy Shibuya district features a screen that hangs from the ceiling as a light projects all the colors of the spectrum at varying intensities. At the center of a sofa are musicians chatting away. A woman in a fancy outfit, who works for a foreign firm in Tokyo, holds a glass of champagne in one hand as she laughs at a joke from a Frenchman. At the bar, a man sways to the music, impatiently awaiting the start of the live band. His friends finally arrive and they shake hands.

On a recent Sunday night at the Obi, people gather to check out the art, listen to the music and just relax. The lounge, which opened in June, is the brainchild of Soulmate, a group known for organizing parties for big fashion brands and embassy-hosted gala events.

The beauty of the lounge is that it offers a place where one can have a drink, relax and chat with people with varying interests — design, fashion, music and literature, said Stephane Goron, who works for a



A lounge singer entertains the crowd at Supper Lounge Obi.

Photo by Bruce Wei





Manager Yashami Sakami prepares to open the Neo lounge for the night.  
Photo by Katsuimi Yoshida

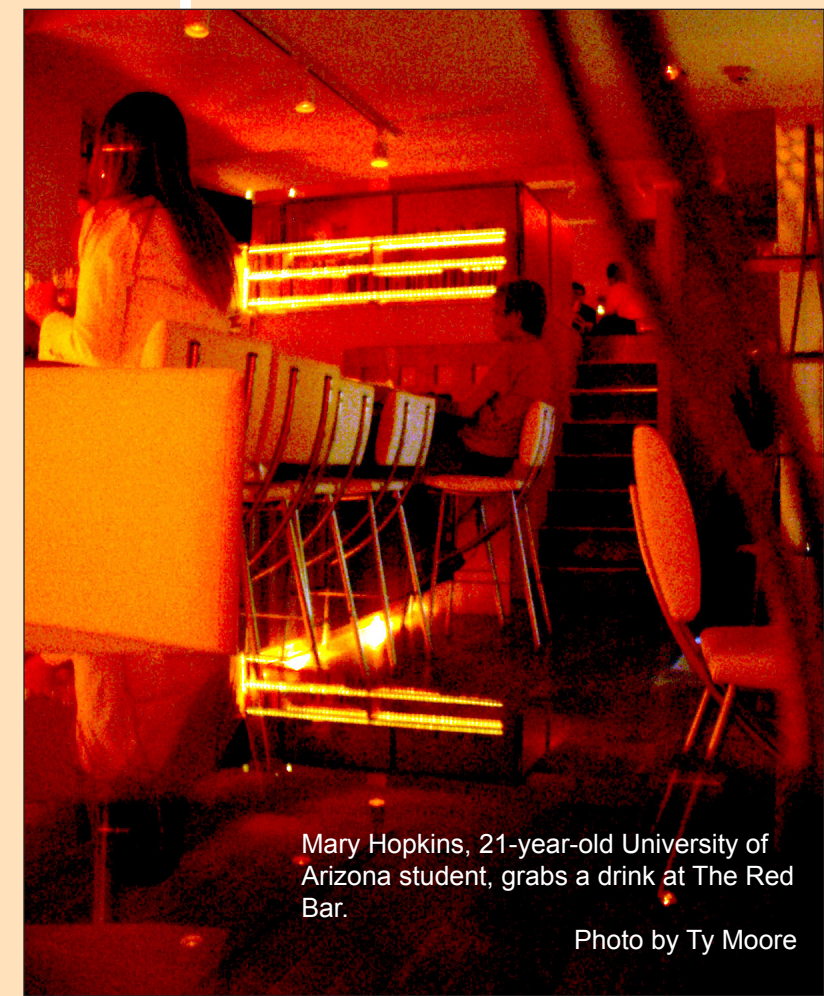
foreign firm in Tokyo. He also takes on the new role of disc jockey at the Obi on week nights.

In Europe, having a meal while listening to music, known as “fooding,” has come into vogue since the mid-1990s. The DJs at these joints play lounge music, defined as laid-back, comfortable music of no specific genre.

For the past few years in New York, people who have tired of loud noise and dark spaces have been flocking to social venues where conversation is possible, like restaurants and bars with disc jockeys. The trend has swept into Tokyo. The city is witnessing the birth of many places that stress the lounge concept.

Lounge O in Aoyama, which opened in July, is a Chinese restaurant run by Yokohama Chinatown’s Shofukumon by day. At midnight, the music and visual entertainment begin, transforming the dim sum restaurant into a lounge. It also houses a club downstairs. The lounge has held parties featuring live performances by artists from different fields, such as a collaboration between a photographer and a DJ.

At a party hosted by a fashion magazine, 23-year-old artist Manbo was furiously drawing portraits of passers-by. The lounge



Mary Hopkins, 21-year-old University of Arizona student, grabs a drink at The Red Bar.

Photo by Ty Moore



is a place with a nice decor where adults with good taste can come to have fun, the artist said.

The Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill at Roppongi Hills becomes a lounge every Friday after midnight in a party dubbed "The Morning After." The lounge came about after one of the grill's customers, DJ Kevin Clone, approached the restaurant about creating a space where people of all professions, from business to creative types, could socialize. Typical of Roppongi, the place is crammed with many foreign businesspeople who work for foreign firms.

Osamu Toda, a 28-year-old employee of an advertising agency, said, "It's nice to be able to relax completely." He said he has even done business deals with a designer he met there.

Some of the lounge bars have taken on a diverse role and have begun offering something for everyone in the community, regardless of age.

The lounge is planning events to inject the space with some playfulness, such as requiring its guests to appear in costume or rabbit ears, giving it more of house party ambience.

Club Asia, one of the older establishments in Shibuya, opened Lounge Neo in a building across the street. Entering this lounge is like stepping inside an egg because of the concave walls. Lights form pictures on the ceiling, while below, visitors seated on a bench talk cheerfully.

Some of the lounge bars have taken on a diverse role, offering something for everyone in the community, regardless of age. On tango nights, sixty-somethings come here to dance, said Neo manager Masashi Sakamaki. Lately, people have come here to rent out the space for after-wedding parties, and people with ambitions to become disc jockeys have put on performances there. DJ Robert Harris, who has planned events here regularly, said, "They've probably discovered the joy of performing."

A growing number of people in Tokyo say they are too shy to go to a club and too tired to dance. But they don't want to completely abandon the spirit of having fun. The lounges may be just the ticket, as they bring a mellow mood to the party scene.

## Top lounge bars in Tokyo

### Lounge O

*Location: Aoyama*

The alcohol starts flowing at midnight.

### Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill

*Location: Roppongi Hills*

Restaurant becomes a bar for the weekend.

### Supper Lounge Obi

*Location: Shibuya District*

Sofas provide an ideal atmosphere to relax.



## Ice cold Tokyo nights



Photo by Jacyn Connor

Cups made out of ice hold various mixed drinks at the new Swedish Absolut Ice Bar in Tokyo.

### By Cindy Chung

Japan may be shivering from its coldest winter in two decades, but Sweden's Icehotel is betting Tokyoites love alcohol so much they will drink surrounded by ice.

Sweden's Absolut Vodka and Icehotel — the hotel made of ice — teamed up to open a bar made of ice blocks in a stylish district of Tokyo's Nishi-Azabu.

This Icebar is the first outside of Europe, but the fourth in the world, joining London, Milan and the original in Stockholm.

The operator shipped ice blocks to Tokyo directly from Sweden's Torne River, the same method used for the Stockholm bar, and keeps the room at a freezing minus five degrees Celsius (23 degrees Fahrenheit).

Although the original Icebar in Sweden melts away in spring, the Tokyo one will welcome customers to the ice world year-round.

"I'm looking forward to seeing people's faces when they come here and have drinks in ice glasses in the summer," said one of the waiters, Hideaki Shimada, 23. "This is a totally different space created in the middle of Nishi-Azabu."