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USFK declares 29 bars off-limits

By [Jeremy Kirk](#), Stars and Stripes

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SEOUL — There's a mural of a Native American on a bucking mustang at Indian Joe's, a bar just a skip away from Itaewon's famed Hooker Hill.

It's amid a famed red-light stomping ground for thousands of rowdy young U.S. soldiers, many from Yongsan Garrison, the largest U.S. Army base in South Korea, about a half-mile way.

Inside Indian Joe's, you might find owner Pak Sung-bok deep in Christian meditation, with closed eyes murmuring the Lord's word — albeit unintelligibly. The gregarious woman storms into a soliloquy when asked why U.S. Forces Korea last week declared her bar — one of 29 — off-limits for U.S. servicemembers.

“Sex is just like food, but many people don't understand being single,” said Pak, who passes out religious fliers for her Yoido church. “They are hungry for sex. God told me sex is not evil, sex is not sin.”

Lt. Col. Steve Boylan, 8th Army public affairs officer, said the bars — with names such as Spanki's, Starbutts and Tiger Tavern — have been placed off-limits until further notice for one reason: prostitution.

Off-limits establishments in South Korea:

Itaewon, Seoul

- Angel Club
- Bar Starbutts
- Best Club
- Bridge
- Club Capital
- Cocktail Bar
- Coyote Ugly
- Dallas Club
- Dragon Club
- Dreams
- Forever Together Club
- Helios
- Isabella's
- Indian Joe's
- Kiss in the Dark
- Moulin Rouge
- Polly's Kettle II
- Number One
- Nymph
- Red Fox
- Royal
- Space Club
- Spanki Bar
- Sunny's Club
- Tae Pyung Hotel
- Texas Club
- Tiger Tavern
- Townhouse Dawn
- Yes Bar

The ban follows months of unwanted attention on the U.S. military in South Korea, with allegations the military supports a bawdy sex industry outside dozens of installations throughout the country. The Defense Department's Inspector General launched an investigation last year into whether U.S. military courtesy patrols provided de facto security for soldiers visiting prostitutes.

The Korean government also is studying whether foreign women — primarily from Russia and the Philippines — have been forced unwillingly into the sex trade outside U.S. bases.

Internal memos circulated to commanders on bases included pictures of the 29 bars, a detailed map and prices for various sexual services. A few bars were cited for other offenses, such as serving alcohol to minors and fire risks.

At the Royal Club along Hooker Hill, “anything goes” for 40,000 won — about \$33 — on or off the bar's premises, according to the USFK document. The bars listed ranged from 100,000 to 150,000 won for sex.

Citing fear of alerting bars to undercover inspection tactics, Boylan declined to say whether plainclothes soldiers went into the bars to gauge prices. But he said investigators found “enough credible belief that these establishments were engaging in prostitution.”

The bars' owners were notified with letters, Boylan said.

If the bars can demonstrate they don't allow or support prostitution, soldiers could resume going there, he said. Signs inside base gates warn soldiers of off-limits places, Boylan said.

The recent ban, several said, prompted a sharp drop-off in their business.

But owners had few comments about what was the cited reason for the ban — and what may be the main chunk of their trade: sex.

Instead, more than one barkeep contended that the ban would worsen U.S.-South Korean relations at a time of friction with North Korea and a looming war with Iraq.

Tongduchon city

Amazon Club
Glory Club
Sexy Club
What's Up Club

No bars are off-limits at Taegu, Osan or Kunsan, although traditional Korean prostitution districts — usually near train stations — as well as barber shops and tattoo parlors continue to be banned.

— *Source: U.S. military public affairs officials*

The ban “will make more problems,” said the manager of Moulin Rouge, who wanted only Choe, her family name, used. Koreans, she argued, “will think the USA is not good.”

The upstairs bar is on the banned list. On a recent evening, a young woman arrived for work in jeans but slipped into a slinky purple dress. An older woman who worked there explained the young woman was afraid her civilian boyfriend, who worked on the base, would not visit the bar anymore.

Overall, the Itaewon economy is terrible, Choe said. Business is way down and soldiers appear to be leaving base less, she said. But because soldiers live in South Korea, and Itaewon is linked to the military, the two communities “need each other,” she said.

Some bars also are being investigated in Taegu, home to a few small U.S. Army installations, said Dennis Bohannon, Korea Regional Office public affairs officer. None are off limits right now.

In Uijongbu — host to nine 2nd Infantry Division posts — no bars are off-limits, said Bill Kapaku, civilian executive assistant to the garrison commander. Recently, a few were excluded because of fire-safety concerns, but those bars made corrections, he said.

Two weeks ago, four clubs were put off-limits around Camp Casey in Tongduchon, said Antonio Vicente, civilian executive assistant to the garrison commander. About 80 bars are concentrated just outside Camp Casey’s main gates.

Those bars — many of which employ non-Korean women — were the subject of a Fox News investigation in May linking the U.S. military to a thriving illegal prostitution trade in which women were forced to surrender their passports and were held against their will.

At Osan Air Base, no bars are off limits, but places are reviewed continually, said Maj. Edwina Walton, public affairs officer. One bar — “The Boss” — is off-limits at Kunsan Air Base because the owner requested it, said Capt. Alisen Iversen, public affairs officer.

The U.S. military has had a consistent ban on prostitution districts, many of which traditionally are near train stations in South Korea. Tattoo parlors and barber shops always are off-limits — the military cites safety and cleanliness concerns.

Soldiers will ignore the ban on Itaewon bars, said Jung, a woman working at

Indian Joe's.

At Indian Joe's recently, a tall man with an American accent came in and asked "Is Mike here?"

"Yeah, he's here," Jung replied.

"Can I talk to him?" asked the man, who deflected a question about whether he was from the Army base.

"He's busy," Jung said. "He's very happy right now."

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