

Express yourself

Everyone loves a singalong, but it was businessmen who first discovered how liberating karaoke can be



Stylish rooms (main picture) and state-of-the-art touchscreen technology are a highlight of the venue. 格調優雅的房間（主圖）內設以最先進的輕觸式屏幕裝置來操控的設備。

It began some years ago, when at the end of their working day, executives would get together in a bar or club to relax and share a few drinks. They found singing a great way of letting off steam, and as they passed around the microphone, accompanied by the music of pre-recorded pop songs, the businessmen felt themselves unwinding. They might not be professional singers, but the exhilaration felt the same as the participants took centre stage, clapped and cheered on by their colleagues. Amid the music and laughter, tension seemed to ebb away.

The idea spread, and more people began enjoying the special effect that karaoke can have in easing the pressures of their day. Participants say there is no better release from stress than singing to their heart's content, in the company of friends. Science supports this. When we sing, endorphins are released, creating a sense of tranquility and well-being.

Belting out a tune gives the lungs a good workout, helping oxygen flow to the blood system and brain. On an emotional level, singing is said to improve confidence and can even elevate mood. There is the joy that comes with participation, whether we are singing ourselves or watching others sing. As one regular participant notes, karaoke "is a refuge amongst friends".

The technology moved quickly, too. After the first karaoke machines came designated karaoke boxes, with screens where the songs' lyrics could be displayed. The original cassette tapes were replaced by compact discs, improving the sound quality. With the popularity of MTV, a video compact disc was invented to further enhance the singer's experience.



Themed hallways add to the fun, and a wine cellar (below) offers an exclusive touch. 大堂以各式趣味主題為裝潢，顧客還可享受酒窖（下圖）的各款美酒。



Today the technology is state-of-the-art. Wireless microphones, touch-screen song lists and high quality sound make everyone feel like a star. Singers can make their song selection by artist or title and have the words shown in their choice of language.

Karaoke venues have become far more sophisticated. The more upscale venues feel like a glamorous private club. Rooms are individually decorated, with comfortable lounges, widescreen TVs, internet access, online games, and surround sound.

Karaoke gives people a place to gather. At East Kowloon's flagship karaoke venue, CEO MegaBox, the fun continues non-stop from 11am to 6am daily. It seems that everyone wants to join in. Among them are housewives who sing during their free time in the afternoons, and those who come for karaoke "happy hour" at the end of their working day. There's the late-night party set who sing and play until dawn, and older retired folk who come to reminisce with the music from their youth. Such is the diversity of karaoke these days, there really is something for everyone. It has become known as "total entertainment", loved by people of all ages, from all walks of life.

It's also no longer just about singing, either. Karaoke now involves a meal or snack as well as drinks. People will come for dinner, and stay for the evening. They can order meals from the menu or enjoy the full buffet. Set prices make a karaoke outing an affordable entertainment option, especially when one considers that it provides, on average, three to five hours of fun.

A choice of rooms is available, depending on the size of your group. The smallest rooms cater for four or five people, although sometimes it will be just a couple who book a room to sing for each other. The larger rooms, some with full sea views, can host up to 50 guests. These are ideal for corporate gatherings or a fun way to host a meeting. Birthday parties and other special celebrations are popular, and these can be catered for complete with champagne and cake.

Neway Karaoke Box is an experienced operator of karaoke venues across Asia. Its executive director, Nicholas Wan, said the MegaBox location was chosen because it is one of the best facilitated shopping malls in Hong Kong. From its waterfront position, it also has a most outstanding view.

Every evening soon after sundown, Hong Kong dazzles with the Symphony of Lights, the world's largest permanent light and sound show. How romantic to savour those magical moments by serenading your loved one with a classic love song, watching the show from your own private karaoke room.



放聲高歌 開懷暢聚

卡拉OK可說是港人最愛的消遣之一。原來卡拉OK的出現，全靠不知多少年前的一班行政人員，於下班之後聚首酒吧或會所，幾輪豪飲之後，發現開懷高歌更能抒發悶氣，於是他們逐一手持麥克風，伴隨音樂唱起流行曲。雖然缺乏職業歌手的唱腔，但無阻他們的興致，台前高歌、台下拍掌助慶，在歌聲及笑聲中，除去一日的煩憂。

這種有趣的消遣方式逐漸於坊間不脛而走。卡拉OK的擁戴者稱，與一班好友一同引吭高歌是減壓良方，原來這亦不乏科學根據，有研究指唱歌時腦下垂體會分泌腦內啡，幫助我們放鬆心情，令心境平和。另外，唱歌亦有助肺部運動，加速氧份於血液系統及腦部的循環。至於情緒方面，唱歌亦有助加強自信心及放鬆情緒，與朋友唱歌玩樂，能增進友誼之餘，亦可將煩惱暫時拋諸腦後。

卡拉OK的設備亦隨時日不斷改進，最先出現的是播放卡式帶的卡拉OK機，CD的出現令卡拉OK的音響效果大為提高，之後再有連同可播放歌詞螢幕的卡拉OK機。當MTV逐漸流行，卡拉OK亦轉為播放錄像，聲畫齊備。時至今日，卡拉OK的設備更不可同日而語，無線麥克風，觸控螢幕選曲再加上優質音響，選單內設有歌手、歌曲及語言等選項，令選曲更為方便。

卡拉OK的場地亦越來越講究，有些高級場地儼如私人會所，每個房間均有不同設計，設有舒適座椅、闊螢幕電視、互聯網設施、網上遊戲及環迴立體聲等。

CEO MegaBox不僅是東九龍的旗艦卡拉OK店，亦是全港單層面積最大的卡拉OK店，每日營業時間由早上11時至早上6時，來唱歌作樂的包括於下午打發空閒時間的家庭主婦，下班來「歡樂時光」的上班族，於午夜來開唱歌派對的「夜蒲」客，以及唱老歌的退休人士等，可見不分年齡及行業的人都愛享受卡拉OK這種「綜合娛樂」。

到卡拉OK也不只限於唱歌，不少卡拉OK均提供美食及各式飲品。客人可於餐單自選各式食品或享用自助餐。他們來卡拉OK通常消遣三至五小時，因而令按人次收費的卡拉OK成為物超所值的娛樂。

另外，卡拉OK房亦可視乎人數而隨意選擇，最小的房間適合三五知己消閒娛樂或情侶情深對唱，有些大面積全海景的房間可容納50位客人，用來舉行企業消閒活動就最適合不過。若舉行生日派對，則更有香檳及生日蛋糕供應。

新時代卡拉OK於亞洲區擁有豐富營運經驗，執行董事溫國樑先生表示，選址在MegaBox因為這是全港設備最齊全的商場，其海旁位置亦提供難得的維港海景。

每晚8時，維港均上映全球最大的鐳射燈光音樂匯演「幻彩詠香江」，以此為背景，加上與愛侶相擁於私人卡拉OK房，唱上一曲經典情歌，何其浪漫！