



Who is the Highball drinker in South Korea's On Premise?

Recent consumer research conducted by CGA by NIQ, shows an increasing popularity of highball drinks in South Korea's On Premise sector. Client Solutions Director, Jaepil Sohn, analyses the data while examining its correlation with the growing number of visits to On Premise establishments, and provides insights into how suppliers can capitalise on this promising opportunity.



23%

of people in the South Korea On premise have purchased at least one Highball Drinks in the past month

According to CGA by NIQ's Consumer Pulse report*, a monthly survey that evaluates consumer behaviour across South Korea's On Premise establishments, highballs are becoming increasingly popular, as nearly a quarter (**23%**) have purchased at least one in the past month*. For almost half of these consumers, the appeal lies in the diverse array of flavours the category offers. This underscores the importance for suppliers to consistently provide operators and consumers with a broad selection of highball ingredients that can meet diverse taste preferences. At the same time, suppliers should pay attention to the nature of their products, prioritising options that boast a fresh and clean profile, aligning with the preferences of approximately **50%** of consumers who are attracted to highballs due to their refreshing characteristics.

This preference is substantiated by additional insights on the characteristics most commonly linked to these drinks. A noteworthy **55%** of On Premise users express that highballs are perceived as easy to drink, while a sizable **40%** associate with them the concept of a "light" drink. This trend is particularly evident in the category's seasonal consumption patterns, with consumers favouring them during the spring and summer rather than colder months (OPUS South Korea**). Yet, suppliers should recognise that the appeal of highballs extends beyond the mere

perception of lightness. The sessionability of these drinks influences people's preference too, with **21%** of South Korean drinkers opting for highballs due to their lower alcohol content compared to other beverages. Additionally, highballs also benefit from a positive lifestyle connotation, as nearly half of our respondents consider them "trendy", while over a third describe them as "sophisticated". In response to these findings, suppliers and operators should ensure that the messaging and presentation of highball drinks align with, and enhance, these consumer perceptions.



55%

of On Premise users express that highballs are perceived as easy to drink

The surge in popularity of highballs is in line with the growing preference for straightforward spirits and mixer drinks, contrasting with a somewhat declining trend in cocktail consumption. Under **30%** of patrons are opting for cocktails more frequently than they did six months ago, while a larger share (**33%**) are choosing spirits and mixer drinks during the same period. One of the primary drivers behind this shift is this category's perceived better value, especially when compared to cocktails. Once again, consumers also appreciate the extensive choices available within spirits and mixers when visiting On Premise venues: the availability of various brands at the bar, coupled with the consistent accessibility of spirits and mixer drinks, positions them as a reliable and versatile choice for Korean consumers.



25%

of patrons express
a sustained preference
for Whiskey



90%

of people enjoy Highball drinks
in everyday and mainstream
venues

Key categories and venues

While the broad category of spirits and mixer drinks thrives on diversity, suppliers can leverage more granular data to optimise sales by honing in on specific drink categories that demonstrate superior performance in the On Premise setting. This strategic approach increases the likelihood of such drinks being selected as part of a highball. For Korean On Premise users, beer remains the top-consumed alcoholic beverage, with a discernible preference for locally brewed beers of standard strength. Meanwhile, when it comes to spirits, Korea's own Soju maintains its position as the most consumed in the country. Beyond these two significant staples however, whisky emerges as the top spirits category traditionally employed in highball-style drinks. Over the past six months, it has solidified its position as the clear winner, with 10% of channel visitors indicating increased consumption, twice the rate of brandy and Cognac – the second most successful distillate. CGA's data further reveals that whisky is not just a short-term trend: **25%** of patrons express a sustained preference for it, outpacing other categories such as vodka, gin, and brandy itself, each garnering **18%** or less in popularity among drinkers.

The Consumer Pulse report also sheds light on the preferred venues for consuming highballs. The vast majority of drinkers, over **90%**, enjoy them in everyday and mainstream venues, with only a modest **14%** opting for them in premium or upmarket establishments. This trend indicates that most South Korean consumers associate highballs with a relaxed, laid-back atmosphere and with informal occasions: suppliers should tailor communication and branding strategies to resonate with this perception. It is however crucial for suppliers not to overlook the smaller, yet significant segment of drinkers committed to choosing highballs in higher-end venues. Their preferences stem from considerations such as the perceived atmosphere mismatch in mainstream venues, concerns about drink quality, or a simple preference for different beverages in less upscale locations. This presents suppliers with an opportunity to target this dedicated highball-drinking niche with a more premium offering, potentially leading to higher revenues.

Highballs in a growing On Premise market

Recognising the success of the highball category is key for suppliers who aim to effectively capitalise on the burgeoning On Premise market in South Korea. Indeed, the data underscores a significant consumer engagement with On Premise channels, primarily driven by food-focused visits. Notably, a huge **86%** of Korean consumers have dined out within the month, with Saturday being the most popular day for these visits. The data also reveals that approximately half of consumers have ventured out specifically for drinks. The frequency of On Premise visits has been noteworthy, with over half of users patronising bars and restaurants at least once or twice a week while, remarkably, **2%** of them indulge in On Premise outings up to five times weekly.

For those who continue to frequent On Premise establishments, there is an observable trend, with increased spending both per visit and on eating and drinking overall. Spending specifically during drink-led visits has reduced over the latest month. This is certainly an indication of rising costs in the food and beverage industry, but data shows that, in fact, consumers who are visiting the channel more frequently than usual, report a desire to treat themselves, experience new venues, or simply opt for higher-quality options. This signals a gradual shift towards premiumisation, a trend that suppliers should swiftly incorporate into their drink offerings to maximise sales.

Mirroring increased On Premise visits, highballs are clearly gaining pace, too, meaning that suppliers keen on capturing the On Premise opportunity should undoubtedly pay close attention to this category. A significant majority (**58%**) of consumers positively express that the popularity of highballs will persist for the foreseeable future. More specifically, a remarkable one-third of On Premise drinkers estimate that the current highball trend will continue for at least two years. And even more strikingly, **29%** anticipate it lasting up to five years, with an equal percentage believing it could endure even longer. This expectation clearly mirrors the adventurous nature of Korean drinkers and their



open-mindedness towards the influence of their peers. Indeed, **43%** of them cite the current popularity of highballs as a key factor in their choice of beverage. Additionally, CGA's research indicates that nearly a fifth of On Premise drinkers are eager to explore the category by sampling new brands, while a significant **12%** express interest in engaging with highballs through promotions. In a South Korean market where peer influence and an adventurous spirit play such pivotal roles, the current popularity of highballs is undoubtedly set to further strengthen.

As Korean consumers are expected to further enhance their engagement with the On Premise scene, suppliers must strategically focus on the highball category and the increasing popularity of spirits and mixers serves to seize this opportunity. The highball segment has proven to be an appealing and lucrative category, and with its anticipated continued growth in 2024, there is significant potential for both suppliers and operators to expand sales and market share. To capitalise on this opportunity however, it becomes paramount to discern the factors that attract consumers to different flavours, venues, and brands within the highball category. Identifying and understanding these preferences will be vital in tailoring offerings that resonate with drinkers' tastes, thereby ensuring a successful and sustained presence in the evolving landscape of the South Korean On Premise market.



CGA by NIQ's OPUS solution provides expert analysis of engagement with South Korea's On Premise and is the ideal single-source solution for both short-term gains in category and channel share and long-term strategic planning. Bespoke research is also available to explore trends and category dynamics in greater detail.

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