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Berlin brothel offers eco-friendly discount: Bike-riding customers pay less

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Berlin is now home to Germany's first eco-friendly brothel, which offers discounts to customers who arrive by bicycle or public transport. Patrons who show a bus or tram ticket, or a bike helmet or padlock key as proof that they didn't drive, receive a 5-euro (\$7.50) discount -- dropping the cost of a 30-minute tryst from 50 euros (\$75) to 45 euros (\$67). This kind of promotion "is something never seen before in this business in Berlin," brothel owner Thomas Goetz tells *DailyFinance*.



AFP/Getty Images

Goetz, who owns Maison d'Envie (House of Desire), hoped the promotion would boost business, which he says has been flaccid since the economic crisis began. Apparently, would-be customers have pared back discretionary spending in all areas, including sex. Goetz and his mother, Regina, who manages the business, bet that an environmentally friendly initiative would do the trick. "We have a problem with parking here, and it's better to come by tram, bicycle or foot," Regina Goetz explains. "And it's better for the environment."

German Brothels Pay Taxes

Prostitution is legal in Germany, where an estimated 400,000 prostitutes sell their wares, paying taxes and even joining unions. According to some statistics, [1.2 million people visit prostitutes each day](#) in Germany and annual revenues for the industry are estimated at 14 billion euros (\$18 billion), which brings much-needed tax money to the country. For some women, it's a way to earn extra money: they hold full-time jobs in other professions, working shifts as prostitutes at their convenience.

While women can work as freelancers, splitting the standard price of a session 50/50 with the proprietor, they keep the money they make for "extra" services and tips for themselves, explains Thomas Goetz. But for the brothel owners, there are many expenses involved in running the business. "The economic crisis is still here in Berlin and it's hard at the moment to pay all the costs and all the taxes," says Goetz. "We thought about how to improve our business, and after brainstorming, this was the result." Goetz claims the discount has paid off, driving business up 10% to 20%. They now have "several hundred customers" a month, he says.

Discounts Have Helped Business

Those taking advantage of the discount are typically first-time customers, who have seen Maison d'Envie's ads in newspapers. "They come from France and Spain -- from everywhere," says Madam Goetz. "Our regular customers don't use the special offer." About 10% of their clients ask for the discount, offering proof they have biked or taken the bus.

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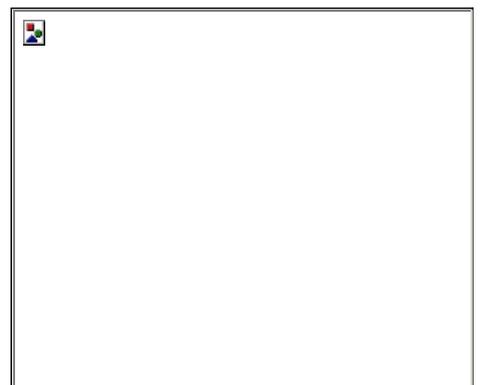
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Maison d'Envie is located in a fashionable area of Berlin called the Prenzlauer Berg, which was formerly part of East Germany. In the recent general election, 46% of the district's votes went to the Green party, so both mother and son had going green on their minds.

While Regina Goetz says it's a good promotion, it hasn't given them as strong a boost as she had hoped. "Business hasn't improved enough," she says. "We hoped it would be better."

Still, mother and son expect more lucrative times ahead once the recession lifts. "There are good signs that the economy will be better in the next month or 12 months," says Thomas Goetz. "But at the moment, it is really hard."

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Lauren Cooper is a writer, editor and producer based in London. She has worked on many documentaries, including "Betting on the Market" for Frontline and "America's War on Poverty," which won the duPont Silver Baton Award. She is also the creator and producer of Culturecubs, a bilingual children's DVD series that teaches Mandarin and English to kids...

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