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Stressed Wall Street titans splurging on lap dances, spas

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The Dow is tanking, the world is despairing, and, despite the financial Armageddon, a Manhattan strip club has rolled out a \$1,000 lap dance.

The thing is, there may actually be takers. New Yorkers, especially finance-industry types, are under so much stress that they're holding onto guilty -- and costly -- pleasures.

"In times of stress we're exceptionally vulnerable to excess whether it's overeating, smoking too much, drinking too much [or] spending too much to manage our feelings," said Brad Klontz, a financial psychologist and author of *The Financial Wisdom of Ebenezer Scrooge*.



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FIFTH THIRD BANK

A study by the American Psychological Association this week showed that New Yorkers are more likely than the American public to deal with stress by shopping, eating or going to a spa.

"I haven't changed anything," said Anthony, 27 of the Upper East Side, who works in trusts and estates and couldn't give his full name, and eats out seven days a week, three times a day. "Do I think the people of my generation who have only known excess will change? No."

The \$1,000 Lap Dance

The VIP Club, a gentleman's club in Chelsea, introduced the high-priced lap dance Wednesday.

"A beautiful woman is a good distraction from anything," said Joe Goncalves, general manager.

Hostess Mona Ricks said that more men have been streaming in recently despite the downturn in economy. "There are still people with a lot of money," Goncalves said. "For the men who come in it's a way for them to show off that they still have it."

Getting away from it all

Some Wall Streeters gave up one guilty pleasure but wouldn't let go of travel. A man who grabbed a drink with a friend on Stone Street Wednesday said he cut back on eating out but is heading to South Beach this week.

"It'll probably be expensive, but I'm still going," he said. "I travel extensively, and I'll still do that."

Federal statistics show air travel has kept up, at least in the first half of the year.

R&R

Gary Latawiec, owner of Tribeca Spa of Tranquility, said the past two weeks have been the busiest he's seen since he opened up shop about 17 months ago. Normally the spa has about 110 to 120 appointments, and one recent week saw 150.

"I was worried that people weren't going to spend money, but they did," he said.

Not-so-guilty pleasures

Sister Ann Whittaker, who serves at Trinity Church in the Financial District, has seen more people coming in.

"They're dressed up with white shirts and suit coats and have concerned looks on their faces and they sit quietly," she said.

Paul VanBuskirk, 42, a lawyer, said he made his second visit to Trinity this week.

"I find Trinity Church kind of calming so when I'm stressed I just go in there and it generally works," he said.

Danielle Sonnenberg contributed to this report

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