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Unique Monthly Visitors: 2,361,783

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Is the World Cup helping small businesses in Miami? Check what fans are doing

A well-known bar in Little Havana almost ran out of booze as Scotland's Tartan Army marched through the area. In downtown Miami, a new burger spot near the FIFA Fan Festival has been getting waves of hungry fans, even on weekdays.

As local and visiting World Cup fans take over the town for fútbol fever, businesses are feeling it in several ways.

Some are benefiting big time, and others not so much — especially if their regular customers are staying away, feeling squeezed from the frenzy.

But one thing is for sure: More people on the streets means more potential business for South Florida entrepreneurs.

This week is the next test for South Florida businesses, as fans of Norway and England arrive ahead of their team's quarterfinal showdown on Saturday at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens.

"They call soccer the beautiful game for a reason," said Michael John Green, executive director of the Miami Downtown Development Authority. "For us, it connects people, communities and culture together."

Green's organization supports commerce in downtown Miami. He believes the FIFA Fan Festival in downtown Miami has boosted business in the area as local people descend on Bayfront Park for watch parties.

"Business is always important, but community is important," he said. "What this does and continues to do is connect the community to these businesses and vice versa. People are coming from Coconut Grove, Homestead, Hialeah and all over Miami-Dade County to come downtown."

Little Havana's Calle Ocho also is a hotspot for tourists, and has been even more popular during the World Cup.

Ball & Chain, a bar and restaurant on Calle Ocho, has stayed open until 4:30 a.m. because fans refuse to go home, said manager Yulissa Escobar. She estimates that sales have been up more than 50% during the World Cup.

"In the last week, we've been staying an hour or an hour and a half past closing time.," said Escobar, 27.

Escobar said that the visiting "Scots have been the best part of the World Cup" because of the energy with which they've ordered and downed mojitos, which she has noticed is their favorite beverage at Ball & Chain outside of beer, for which they didn't have a preference.

"They drink anything," Escobar said of the Tartan Army's taste in beer.

But World Cup fever hasn't spread to all parts of Calle Ocho, especially to businesses that don't sell beer.

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"We've seen more or less the same amount of people," Yamitka Torres said in Spanish.

Torres, who works at Casa del Tabaco, a Calle Ocho cigar shop, noticed that more Americans purchased items than tourists from other parts of the world. "They look, and they go," she said.

Across the street from Casa del Tabaco, Dayamis Hernandez of D&D Giftshop has had a similar experience.

Hernandez's gift shop sells souvenirs and trinkets, and she noted that Scotland's Tartan Army contributed to three days of shopping activity, but that was it.

"We thought it would be a lot more," she said. "I saw a lot of businesses doing better that sell beer."

The sales numbers at both stores paled in comparison to the gaudy numbers at local food and drink establishments.

Business has been booming at Disco Donkey in downtown Miami.

Restaurateur Leo Soto didn't expect his burger restaurant to be so successful in its first month.

"We have had weekend sales on weekdays," said Soto, 31.



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Disco Donkey sells burgers with global twists, and they've been a hit with hungry soccer fans who have taken over Miami during the World Cup.

Brian Van Hook, regional director of the Florida Small Business Development Center at Florida International University, said the World Cup tourism has been good for many businesses — although others are still reeling from a challenging economy.

"We're seeing big impacts in terms of summer slowdown for local small businesses across South Florida, whether retail or restaurants," he said "There are increased costs, rents have gone up, labor costs have gone up and there is difficulty in recruiting staff."

