



Insight by Zonal, Powered by NIQ

Game On: How Hospitality Can Win at the World Cup

Exclusive Zonal and NIQ insights into consumers' habits at big sporting occasions and the opportunities for pubs, bars and more

Zonal **NIQ**

GO Technology Report, [June 2026](#)



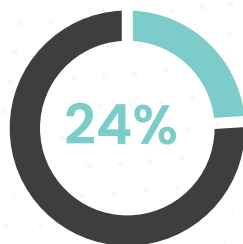
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The World Cup and hospitality: Key numbers

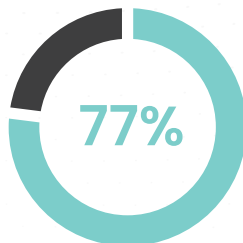
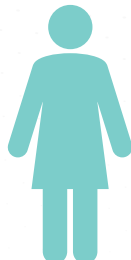
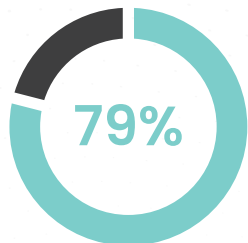
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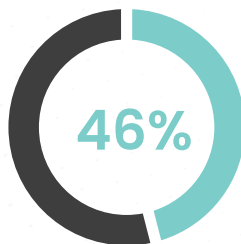
Estimated number of consumers **planning to watch the World Cup in a hospitality venue**



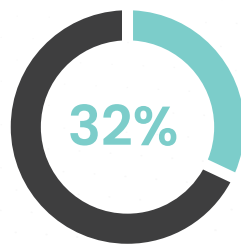
Think watching in a venue is the **next best thing to being in the stadium**



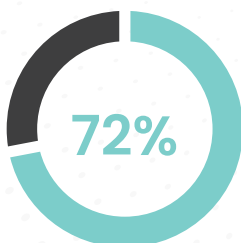
79% of men and **77%** of women would consider **watching the Final in a hospitality venue**



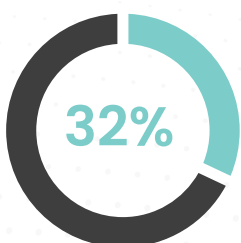
Of those who plan to watch in a hospitality venue say the **atmosphere is better than at home**



Of those who won't consider watching a game in hospitality say it's because venues **will be too busy**



of consumers watching in hospitality venues **expect to be in a group of four or more people**



Of those who plan to watch World Cup in hospitality say the ability to **book a table** would **make them more likely to visit**



All to play for: The World Cup opportunity

Big sporting occasions have long brought lucrative opportunities for hospitality. The 2026 FIFA World Cup is no exception – but competition for viewers will be tougher than ever before.

The headline figure from the latest GO Technology research is that nearly ten million people plan to watch at least one game in a pub, bar or similar venue. It's an enormous market that could deliver a much-needed boost to the sector in June and July, especially as fans tend to spend freely, plan to stay longer and spend more in hospitality

A quarter (**25%**) of those who plan to go out for games say they are likely to order more drinks than usual, while similar numbers will arrive well before a game (**27%**) and / or stay after the final whistle (**23%**).

One negative for the UK's hospitality sector at the 2026 World Cup is the time zone (see page 5). Potential late kick-offs are one reason why half (**50%**) of the population say they will be watching at home rather than going out. Smaller numbers will be either following at large-scale organised screenings in fan parks and other places (**9%**), or flying out to see games in-person (**3%**), while well over a third (**37%**) won't be watching matches at all.

Why hospitality wins

Why do you plan to watch the World Cup in a pub, bar or similar venue?

1. It's a good social occasion (**50%**)
2. The atmosphere is better than at home (**46%**)
3. I want to buy drinks while watching (**38%**)
4. I want to support my team (**31%**)
5. I like to make the most of big sporting occasions (**26%**)

While recognising the reasons why some consumers prefer to stay at home for big events (see page 5), there are many compelling reasons why they should enjoy these occasions in the special environment of a pub or bar (see box). While it's not easy to tempt people off their sofas, operators and suppliers that can convey these unique benefits can look forward to a profitable World Cup.

The tournament at the tills

NIQ's EPOS data emphasises the difference that big sporting events can make to sales. At the last major men's football tournament, the Euros in 2024, England's three group stage games saw pubs and bars increase their takings by between **25%** and **44%** from the equivalent dates the previous year.

Spikes tend to be even bigger if home nations progress deep into competitions. Average sales soared by **48%** during England's Euros semi-final in 2024, and by **59%** on the day of the final against Spain. Similar uplifts are far from guaranteed during this tournament, but strong starts by England and Scotland could build important sales momentum.



Who's watching?

There's a common picture of the sports fan in hospitality: young, male and a regular pub-goer. Those demographics will be out in force for the World Cup, but the potential audience may be broader than some think.

While one in five (20%) men plan to watch games in hospitality venues, the figure for women (14%) isn't too far behind. Generation-wise, 22% of Gen Z (18 to 29) intend to go out for matches, but Millennials (30 to 45) and Gen X (46 to 61) are only slightly less likely to do so at 19% and 17% respectively. There's a big drop-off with age, as only 10% of those in the Boomer bracket (62 to 80) plan to go out.

On a day-to-day basis, young men watch live sport in pubs much more frequently than women and older age groups. However, the World Cup is a very different proposition to competitions like the Premier League, and previous tournaments have attracted a much wider demographic.

For less frequent visitors, the appeal of going out to watch games grows as the tournament progresses. During the group stage, 63% of men but only 42% of women would consider watching a game in a hospitality venue. However, when it comes to the final, these two figures are virtually level at 79% and 77% respectively. It's another reason why operators as well as fans will be keeping everything crossed for a successful tournament for England and Scotland.

Apps have shaken up engagement in hospitality, and their use continues to evolve. A fifth (21%) say they are using them to pay more frequently than three years ago—slightly more than the 16% who are using them less. These figures are very similar for website- or QR-based payments.

Venue choices

Pubs have long been the favoured destination for sports fans, and they continue to have the edge on sports bars. Asked about venue types, three in five (59%) consumers say they would choose a pub or bar with screens, while 45% cite pubs or bars that bring in screens for the occasion. Both figures are higher than for dedicated sports bars that specialise in live games (36%) or other venue types like restaurants and cafes that install screens (16%). Men are much more likely to be attracted to sports bars than women.

NIQ's data suggests that pubs are also being prioritised for many occasions beyond football. The NIQ RSM Hospitality Business Tracker has shown that managed pubs have outpaced restaurants for like-for-like sales growth in 11 of the last 12 months – and the World Cup means that run is likely to continue.

North and south

Across Britain, operators will be hoping for progress at the tournament for England and Scotland. However, NIQ research reveals how allegiances are divided. While two thirds (63%) of those in England who plan to watch the World Cup in hospitality say they are likely to watch an England game, this number is much lower at 25% in Scotland. Unsurprisingly, people north of the border will be mainly focused on backing Scotland, but there's a cohort of supporters for England too.

Three ways operators can break down barriers to World Cup visits

What stops consumers from watching big sporting events in hospitality? Here are three key challenges flagged by GO Technology research, and how operators and suppliers might turn them into opportunities.

1. Crowds

The busy nature of pubs and bars on big matchdays is an attraction to those who want a communal experience, but it's a turnoff for others. Among those who aren't considering watching the World Cup out-of-home, a third (**32%**) say it's because venues will be too busy. One in seven (**15%**) cites the difficulty of finding a good seat or a decent view of the screen.

Crowds are inevitable during major tournaments. Making it easy to reserve space and pre-order food and drink at tables (see page 6) could help to alleviate concerns about overcrowding and missing parts of matches when queueing at bars – though bookings come with the risk of no-shows or alienating spontaneous visitors.

2. Costs

Spending is squeezed for millions of consumers at the moment, so the expense of drinking out is a concern. Three in ten (**29%**) of those who won't go out for the World Cup say it's because they are trying to save money. Smaller but significant numbers are put off because the drink (**18%**) or food (**12%**) are too expensive.

With worries mounting about energy prices, inflation and interest rates as a result of the war in the Middle East, pressure on spending is likely to grow further, leading many to stay at home for the tournament. Hospitality's costs are soaring too, so it isn't easy to mitigate these concerns. However, targeted discounts and deals might tempt some cost-conscious consumers out.

3. Timings

When World Cups take place outside of Europe, the timing of games can cause issues for consumers and operators alike. England's early games kick off at 9pm or 10pm, which will suit many venues, but some of Scotland's fixtures and other group-stage matches are pushed into the early hours. Of those who aren't considering going out for games, **23%** cite inconvenient times like these.

This is frustrating for operators. However, late openings and creative promotions might help some to turn off-peak matches into sales opportunities – especially among younger adults, who are more inclined to stay out late. Efforts on this front have been boosted by the UK government's move to extend licensing hours and the announcement by Scotland's First Minister that Monday 15 June will be a national bank holiday to coincide with a key fixture.

Group sizes

While live sport in pubs and bars is associated with big groups of fans, those group sizes are smaller than might be imagined. Around two in five (**38%**) consumers say their preferred group size for a World Cup match is three to five people. A similar proportion want to watch with one (**18%**) or two (**21%**) others. One in eight (**13%**) typically watches matches solo.

This means just one in nine (**11%**) consumers prefers to watch in groups of six or more people. However, this number is significantly higher among younger adults, and since big groups are much more likely to arrive early, stay late and buy more drinks, they are particularly attractive to pubs and bars. For operators, gauging group sizes is crucial, as it helps to optimise the use of space and plan promotions like multi-buy deals.



Five plays for tech in tournaments

The convenience of technology can give venue operators a competitive edge during busy sporting occasions in pubs and bars – especially among younger adults. Here are five key roles revealed by GO Technology research.

1. Booking tables

Around a third (32%) of those who plan to watch games in hospitality say the ability to book a table would increase their likelihood of visiting a venue. With space often at a premium, providing online bookings can be a quick win.

2. At-table ordering

Nearly as many hospitality viewers (31%) would be attracted by the chance to order food and drinks from their table. This solution can be another valuable time-saver when bars are packed, cutting down on queues, freeing up staff for fulfilment and enabling fans to watch more of a game.

3. Loyalty schemes

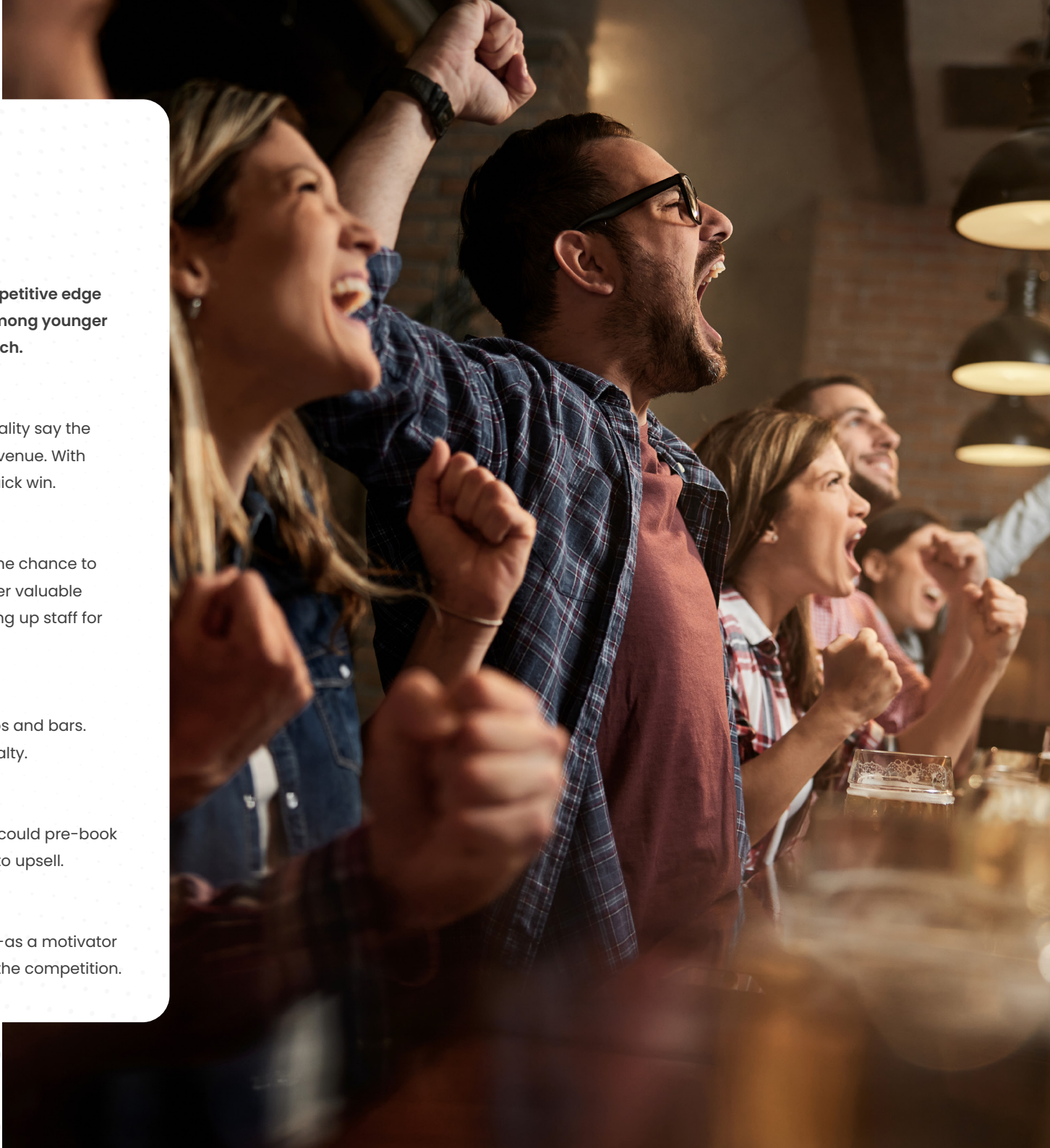
These act as an incentive to 22% of those watching games in pubs and bars. Big communal occasions can be excellent moments to foster loyalty.

4. Pre-orders

Just over a fifth (21%) would be more likely to visit a venue if they could pre-book food or drinks. These advance orders can be great opportunities to upsell.

5. Personalised offers

One in six (17%) cite a personalised offer – possible through tech – as a motivator to visit. Tailored drinks deals can help to distinguish venues from the competition.





The view from NIQ

"World Cups can be bonanzas for hospitality operators and drinks suppliers. But as is the case for England and Scotland on the pitch, success is far from guaranteed. Tempting people out of their homes won't be easy, especially when so many are feeling the financial pinch, and there's intense competition for footfall this summer.

To win, businesses need to know exactly who is going out and what they want. But above all it's vital to understand why people swap the sofa for pubs and bars. Hospitality provides a unique way to experience big occasions with others, and the challenge is to show people that this is where the best memories of landmark events like the World Cup can be made."

Karl Chessell, Director - Hospitality Operators and Food, EMEA, NIQ



The view from Zonal

"Major sporting tournaments like the World Cup are a huge opportunity for hospitality operators. Our survey shows that people want to make the most of the atmosphere and food and drink on offer, not stand in queues waiting for tables or hanging around the bar waiting to be served. Whether it's securing a table before arrival with a booking, or ordering food and drink direct to their tables so they don't miss out on any of the action, operators with robust tech systems in place will be best placed to deliver the seamless experiences World Cup watchers expect."

Tim Chapman, Chief Commercial Officer, Zonal



About the report

This report is based on figures from Zonal and NIQ's exclusive GO Technology survey of 5,000 nationally representative British consumers in April 2026.

For more information about the research, please contact info@zonal.co.uk