hklife

ars and pubs across Hong Bar on Wanchai Road, in the base-Kong have quickly caught on to the popularity of the English Premier League and the growing number of organized

Some bars work with football fan clubs, they agree to give priority viewing for their team's games and discounts on drinks in return for the supporters making the venue their designated home bar for each match.

Guaranteed revenue from thirsty supporters and increased sponsorship from television and beverage companies has translated into more of these exclusivity deals. This year has seen new enterprises develop, specifically the Liverpool boys and go to the Spurs loon. After all, it's not every football devoted to catering to even the most hardcore footie fan.

In the city's infamous Wan Chai district, Delaney's Irish Pub straddles the corner of Jaffe and Luard roads. It is known as the home of Tottenham Hotspurs followers, TottenhamHK - as bartender Regina knows only too well.

"It's starting again this Saturday? Oh! Here we go again," said the 42year-old Filipina with a rueful smile, as preparations are made Thursday, League season commences.

Having served the "Spurs" fans for over five years, Regina has seen a noticeable increase in customer numbers in recent times.

"When I first began working here five years ago, I thought it was just a pool and its football team. private members club," she said. "But now, particularly the last two years, I have seen the numbers increasing a lot, everyone wearing their Tottenham shirts, and we're starting to make more money, which we weren't

Delaney's itself is a classic "Irish pub" decorated in old-world style with a liberal use of dark wood and vintage-looking posters and photo-

The first floor is exclusive on match days for Tottenham supporters, with several large flags hauled out emblazoned with "THFC Hong Kong" and "Spurs In Hong Kong". A signed shirt, photos of the supporters' football team and other paraphernalia are also present around the bar.

Despite the unsavory reputation that football fans can bring with them, Regina is not overly concerned and, if anything, wishes she could take part herself.

"Ok, yes it can be a bit tougher. They seem more aggressive if they're losing, lots of swearing," she admits. "But I know them; I know how to deal with them. And if they make a goal - wow! All the jumping around and singing, it's really fun and exciting." She added that if only she knew the

words to the songs sung, she would join in as well and it's clear that the relationship between the pub and the supporters is one that is mutually appreciated. "The end of the last season was

really nice, and they (the fans) got everyone to do a whip round and provide tips to the staff. That was the first time I'd ever seen that in Delaney's," she said.

Someone who may not always be as keen for his hosted team to win is Stew Bannister, manager of Champs

ment floor of the Charterhouse Causeway Bay Hotel.

Champs was known previously as an Arsenal F.C. supporters bar, then the home of China HK Blues, a Chelsea F.C. group; and now Anfield's 12th, a Liverpool fans association. The only problem is that football-mad Bannister is none of those: his true love is Tottenham Hotspur.

"It's not too bad, but if it was still a bar for Arsenal (Tottenham's great rivals), then I wouldn't be here!" Bannister asserts. "As it is, if it's Liverpool versus Spurs, I won't be here, I'll put on my Spurs shirt, shake hands with

Unlike Delaney's, Champs is a genuine sports bar and set out accordingly: Three projectors, nine LCD screens and the capability to simultaneously provide Cantonese and English commentary to different areas of the bar allows them to cater to both sets of fans, local and

This bar, home of the local "Reds" community, is covered wall-to-wall in football memorabilia and mementwo days before the new Premier tos, including contributions from Anfield's 12th and also Standard Chartered, which is this season's sponsor of Liverpool F.C. Even the exit door has been painted in the team's colors and decorated with a huge Liver bird, the symbol of Liver- a far cry from the traditional English

Supporters clubs are a good thing, the Premier League is well followed here, and if you go to any office on a amongst the trendy bars in SOHO or weekday - aside from talking about Lan Kwai Fong. However, at its core, the wife or girlfriend giving you grief it too is a shrine to football. - the biggest topic is football," said

The bar manager claims the fans bring in a guaranteed minimum revenue throughout the football season. Despite a poor campaign last season, of Liverpool supporters attending increased this year and had taken a

least HK\$5,000 per game, Bannister claims. Even for minor games he would expect around 50 members

often associated with high-profile Premier League clashes, but very rarely applied to the low-key bars showing the games. However, this is not the case with the Manchester United Restaurant Bar recently opened on Lock Road in Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowpub that can boast an executive chef like Philip Chong, with a Michelinstarred restaurant on his C.V.

This up-market establishment is clearly targeting higher-income and more discerning football fans. Boasting a modern and hip vibe with atmospheric low lighting, designer furniture and a large range of imported British ales and gourmet dining that includes Iberian pork on the menu, it's footie pub.

In truth, the Manchester United restaurant would not look out of place

The walls of the low-ceilinged venue are covered with photos of team's stars and quotes from the club's legendary manager, Sir Alex Ferguson. And the restaurant is completely filled with more than a dozen screens, including Bannister said that the numbers a large projector in the rear and even

"We are focusing on a total



Champ's match-day takings are at of Anfield's 12th, whereas upwards of 100 fans could be expected for grudge matches or prestigious Euro-

Prestige and glamour are attributes

"It's a more cultured experience, and there's no swearing or drunken people here," says the Hong Kong outlet's 32-year-old Canadian-educated business development manager, who opened the restaurant-bar with his partner in May 2010 and asked that his name be undisclosed.

LCDs in the men's bathroom.



PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Manchester United Bar Restaurant in Tsim Sha Tsui targets higherincome and more discerning football fans.



and then watch the game - the whole package," said the general manager, Wilson Leung.

Leung said that the popularity of the team was a crucial factor in the bar's opening and as such they are currently associated with the local supporters group, Manchester United Network. Not only a football club, it is an international brand with unarguably the most fans in Asia. Hong Kong is no exception.

The new enterprise has already established connections with "over 40 core local fans who come to every game, happy hour, and birthday celebration". They are now targeting western Manchester United followers as well and have started looking at more English-language media and PR.

While more supporters clubs are striking deals with bars, they can also bring problems, according to Jonny Porteous, manager of Wan Chai district's White Stag pub formerly known as an Arsenal F.C. venue.

"It attracts every drunken idiot ... in Wan Chai," he said. "If they walk past and see you have shirts and flags from one team up, they will stop and give abuse - I couldn't be bothered with that hassle anymore."

Despite no longer actively encourging football groups from attending,

Supporters clubs are a good thing, the Premier League is well followed here, and if you go to any office on a weekday - aside from talking about the wife or girlfriend giving you grief - the biggest topic is football."

STEW BANNISTER, CHAMPS BAR MANAGER



and with the Arsenal adherents now bemoaning the poor finishing and in other locations, the lure of the guarbad luck. As the halftime whistle anteed revenue could prove to be too blew, the fans descended the stairs,

"For this Saturday's game, around coming by to watch," he admitted.

heaved with boisterous Tottenham smiled broadly: devotees cheering on their team and

grumbling and chatting amongst themselves. Regina headed towards 15-20 Manchester City fans will be the main bar on the ground floor

When Saturday came, Delaney's She paused, turned around, and

"It's great to have everyone back."

greater interest in personalizing the dining experience: have a drink, As Premier League football kicks off, bar with their own collectibles and a dinner with high quality food, supporter groups get ready to Liverpool goalkeeper Pepe Reina (2nd left) fumbles the ball into his own goal for Arsenal to score an mix it up at their home pubs, writes Daniel Pordes. Reserved Tonight at 🎎 njoy a Pint & Smoke at our hai Biggest Outdoor Beer Garde



Chelsea's French midfielder Florent Malouda (up) celebrates scoring the opening goal with teammates during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and West Bromwich Albion on August 14, 2010.

One team, two styles of cheering

FOR CHINA DAILY

It's Saturday evening, just one hour before the first kick-off of the English Premier League season, and hardcore football fan, Kinson Leung is getting

While the regular three-month off-season break - from mid-May to mid-August - has been mitigated somewhat by this year's World Cup, English football season. it still leaves Premier League fans suffering withdrawal.

It's not just the clash between up in it I am," said Anson Mui, chairpotential top four rivals - Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester City - that has him worked up, but a return to HK Blues. the community with whom he'll

favourite team play. Kong excited about the return of the

Chelsea - so you can see how mixed

"I get to see many friends and fel- "The Blues" takes priority over any Champs, is heavily involved in the on the raucous terraces of stadiums LCD Television, talking amongst joined the Westerners at Tottenhamlow fans I haven't seen in a while. It's other social engagement. been several months since we were Supporters clubs have sprung Champs was previously associated is not something that can always be Christer Leung, a bilingual of the team" after being impressed together," the 28-year-old Hong Kong up all over the city in recent years, with the China HK Blues. native said. "I can't wait to feel the catering to dislocated expatriates and "They have also been to Amici to porters native to Hong Kong.

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A supporter for over 15 years, Kinson watches every game at any and all to London to make the pilgrimage to integration of the two communities. can be more aggressive and they pre- Kong Island, share the match day the bar where the expatriates White Hart Lane stadium to watch his

"I named my 1-year-old daughter

Anson has been loyal to Chelsea for bar, on Wanchai Road.

In many cases, Hong Kong support- fer to stand up, rather than sit down." experience with locals or allow their were stationed. "Both ers clubs have two separate groups, Cultural divisions in supporting a groups to integrate. Kinson is by no stretch of the one for Western fans and one for Premier League team are exacerbated imagination the only person in Hong the local Chinese. The monolingual by language difficulties. The Western sea and Manchester United last websites of each are clearly tailored to fans rarely speak any Cantonese, and season, the separation was evident. with Chinese, Westerners their target market. The Hong Kong the local Chinese supporters can be In the main area of the Trafalgar hang out with Westerners -

supporters, attend matches at Amici when watching football.

atmosphere and sing football songs local Hongkongers who have been watch games with the Hong Kong These "veteran" fans can at times there were deeper problems than just "I am adventurous," he said with a attending bars before joining in with I can shout and sing and express my they wouldn't come out to watch the overcome."

with them again - I have missed it irrevocably sucked in by the global Reds, but it's just not the same for be intolerant and unwelcoming of the language barrier. Despite the universal language of Westerners often focus on negative their stripes". Some expatriates are on their own," he said, hours, and recently made his first trip football, there are problems in the aspects of rival teams. The support unwilling to go outside of Hong gesturing to their corner of

soccer match.

Poster outside Trafalagar Bar in

Wan Chai promotes the weekend

Reds, an association of Liverpool dev-shy about using their English, and Bar in Wan Chai, a horde of China there isn't a close bonding." otees, populated mainly with Western often prefer Cantonese commentary HK Blues members were gathered Despite these differences,

porters Club in Hong Kong, China parts, Anfield's 12th, choose instead ate the atmosphere - the songs, ban- in the corner of the bar, in an enclave divided by football. to watch the games in Champ's sports ter and swearing at the referee - that hidden from sight and cut-off from Hong Kong supporters' networks. in London, Manchester or Liverpool themselves.

phenomenon that is the English top them," he said. "Unlike the local sup- what they see as new, often younger, "It could definitely be porters, the songs that are sung by Chinese fans who haven't "earned better. They usually sit

communities have their During a match between Chel- problems, they're segregated already, Chinese hang out

together watching the game on a it's not always the case that man of the official Chelsea F.C. Sup- bar in Wan Chai. Their local counter- Many expatriates will try to recre- large projector screen. Meanwhile, the different nationalities are so Kinson was also initially a member they've grown up with supporting the main action, a small group of of a local Chinese Tottenham sup-

over 13 years. He also confessed that Stew Bannister, manager of their team. The experience of being Western Chelsea fans sat around a porters club, HK Spurs. However, he easily understood or related to by sup- Canadian-Chinese supporter, who by the atmosphere generated by the also watched the game, reckoned more vocal fans.



Delaney's Pub is known as the home of Tottenham Hotspurs followers. smile. "I am not afraid to speak Eng- the Spurs supporters, he is a now a love for the club with people who feel games at all. Win or lose we share the

lish or make new friends." He has also regular at all the match day gatherembraced the Western football cul- ings ture, singing and chanting along with "Culturally there are a lot of new those who choose to show their supthe others. "It makes me involved in things for me to learn, like when I port differently. the team; we're like the 12th man. watched at home, I used to sit still HK, to gain "a better understanding I feel like part of Tottenham," he said. and be quiet but now supporting my are quite conservative in expressing Chinese, English, Indians, Singapor-



Kinson Leung has been a Tottenham supporter for over 15 years.

the same way. I enjoy it very much." James is more open-minded about

same emotions." "Football can bring different com-

munities and nationalities together," James added. "In our supporters "Most local Hong Kong people group we have members who are James Yeung is a fellow Hong- team is a very different experience," he their support. They are not used to eans, New Zealanders and more. All konger and TottenhamHK member. said. "I can now get my feelings out; singing, but deep down they love the are genuine supporters and there is A teetotaler who never considered the passion for Spurs is not just inside. team too," he said. "If they didn't, then no cultural difference that we cannot