

WORLD

features

WC fans flock to party in 'street of lights'



Nikolskaya street has become the most hangout place of the World Cup fans

The 700-metre-long street with elegant stucco facades is packed to bursting

Moscow

A quiet pedestrian street leading off from Red Square, Moscow's Nikolskaya Street has unexpectedly become the party zone of choice for thousands of international World Cup fans, to the bemusement of locals.

During the day but even more so at night, the 700-metre-long street with elegant stucco facades is packed to bursting.

Walking through, a passerby has to squeeze past ubiquitous groups of Argentinian supporters, pass a cafe taken over entirely by Tunisians and shake hands with innumerable Mexican fans, all of them wearing sombreros.

"Normally, Nikolskaya Street is very quiet," said Armen, an Armenian student living in Moscow who was watching highlights of the Croatia-Argentina match.

The street is usually more of a shopping destination with some luxury boutiques, especially since it was pedestrianised five years ago. But for some reason, fans have chosen this particular street as their main hangout.

Colombian Harold Castillo, a 22-year-old student, puts its popularity down to the spectacular curtain of lights that hangs over the street.

"I came here by chance. I've been walking all over Moscow using TripAdvisor and I just saw the lights. There are other pedestrian streets but it's wonderful here."

Multiple garlands of lights hang over most of the street, giving it a festive air as soon as night falls. Even before the World Cup kicked off, Iranian fans were rubbing shoulders with Saudis here and flag-draped fans from each South American country colonised a part of the street.

Fans are travelling great distances across Russia to follow

teams -- the Peruvians went to see their team lose to France in Yekaterinburg in the Urals and the Tunisians have left for southern Volgograd to watch Saturday's game with Belgium. Yet while fans come and go, Nikolskaya has retained its vibrancy.

'A Tower of Babel'

"This is the fans' street," said

Mohamed Chaaben, a 28-year-old Tunisian engineer sitting on the terrace of a cafe with his friends, a national flag wrapped round his shoulders.

"It has the best atmosphere, it's a pedestrian street and it feels safe, there's no risk."

He and his friends were amused at the interest from locals in their national Tunisian headgear, round red caps with tassels known as chechias.

Plenty of Russians are coming to stroll on Nikolskaya Street too, eyeing the exuberant fans with a mixture of surprise and amusement. Argentinians have nicknamed the party-zone street the "house of lights," said Santiago Saltiva from Argentina's city of Cordoba. He said that's how he was directed there by a WhatsApp group of Argentinian fans as soon as he landed in Moscow, while he has not heard of the street's real name.

"They told us that all the Argentinians were here on this street," the 42-year-old businessman said.

"This street is like a Tower of Babel," he said. "Every nationality is here, every country is represented, everyone is speaking a



Multiple garlands of lights hang over most of the street, giving it a festive air as soon as night falls

different language."

The fans' choice of Nikolskaya Street as their main base caught the city authorities by surprise and they had to make some rapid changes. Public toilet cubicles were brought in and barriers removed. The crowds of fans have been great news for local traders, many of whom have opted to remain open for 24 hours.

"We've had to bring in staff from other branches," said Maria Kuzina, manager of a cafe that is part of a large Moscow chain.



Mexican fans pose at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow

Manicures in World Cup designs hit the nail on the head

Reuters | Samara

"I love to make nails beautiful," says manicurist Natalia, as she applies the finishing touches to a World Cup soccer ball design on her friend's nail in her home in Samara.

Natalia, who chose not to give her real name, certainly does brighten up any room with her smile and character, as well as her football-themed nail painting. Living close to the Samara Arena, which plays host to six World Cup matches during Russia 2018, Natalia is using the tournament as inspiration.



Russian woman Katya watches as her friend and manicurist Natalia paints her nails with flags of teams and themes



"It gives you a lot of fun because you get to be creative. You can use different colours, materials, whatever you want so that your soul is fulfilled," she told Reuters on Saturday.

Natalia works mainly as a babysitter but in her spare time she likes to paint beautiful and extravagant designs onto her friends' nails.

For the World Cup, Natalia is basing her designs around soccer balls, goal netting and of course national team flags.

"I find the design for this World Cup really interesting," she said whilst painting Uruguayan and Russian flags in preparation for their encounter.