

FAN'S GUIDE

# UNDER A YEAR TO GO, HERE'S WHAT TO KNOW

**T**he Club World Cup – this summer’s international soccer tournament – gave Seattle a taste of what’s to come.

The early summer showcase, which brought six matches to Lumen Field in June, was a low-key primer for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, says Michael Woody, chief strategy officer of Visit Seattle.

According to data from ESPN, the six Club World Cup matches at Lumen averaged almost 35,800 fans per match at the 68,740-seat stadium. The most attended match was the June 19 tilt between the Seattle Sounders and Atlético Madrid, which drew 51,636 fans.

“We certainly saw some of that because there was some really great energy and excitement around Seattle with fans of teams cheering outside of hotels.



**BY RICK MORGAN**  
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They have their flags and really some great energy,” Woody says.

To be sure, the Club World Cup hardly compares to what is regarded as the most popular sporting event in the world. Next summer’s World Cup matches figure to be a game-changer for Seattle. But just how big?

The 2026 World Cup is forecasted to generate at least \$929 million for King County, according to a report from Visit Seattle. That includes more than \$100 million in state and local tax revenue.

Here are eight things you need to know before the 2026 World Cup comes to Seattle:

## What cities are hosting fan zones?

Seattle Center will host an official fan celebration hub that is expected to draw up to 20,000 fans during World Cup matches. It will broadcast all six of the matches hosted at Lumen Field, and it will offer entertainment, educational displays, food and drinks. It will also establish a business opportunity zone for small and minority-owned businesses. ¶ The other Washington cities hosting fan zones for the World Cup are Bellingham, Bremerton, Everett, Olympia/Lacey, Tri-Cities, Spokane, Tacoma, Vancouver and Yakima. ¶ Renton and Spokane have been chosen as potential “base camps” for national teams to train and rest next summer, namely at the Sounders’ Providence Swedish Performance Center and Clubhouse and Gonzaga University, respectively.

**9** Cities plan to host fan zones in Washington, in addition to the celebration hub at Seattle Center

## Is Lumen Field a World Cup-ready facility?

Fans, players and coaches alike will be paying especially close attention to the turf, as the playing surfaces during the Club World Cup came up repeatedly during the tournament. ¶ “In Europe, the ball bounces almost like it were jumping around like a rabbit, and now it’s not,” Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said through a translator after the team’s June 23 win against the Sounders. “Of course they did water it, they did irrigate it during halftime. For us, it’s not a problem. We’re not going to be using this as any type of excuse. ... This is something FIFA does need to bear in mind.” ¶ FIFA has stressed that next year it will have more time to install the turf. At Lumen, for example, installation will start after the upcoming NFL season, which ends in early 2026.



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## Are there any World Cup investments that will last after the tournament?

Seattle Sports Commission CEO Beth Knox says a major focus moving forward is legacy projects that will remain after the World Cup ends. One such example is the Unity Loop, a planned 4.25-mile walking trail that will stretch from Lumen Field to Seattle Center and back. ¶ SeattleFWC26, the organizing committee for Seattle’s World Cup bid, is also planning more than 110 murals throughout the city. ¶ The Sounders and the Reign are working with SeattleFWC26 to construct 52 mini soccer pitches in Washington by 2026. The clubs initially planned to construct 26 but hit that goal in September of 2024, so they doubled down. ¶ In total, Knox says, there are 40 planned legacy projects for the region.

<b>4.25</b> Unity Loop trail, in miles	<b>52</b> Mini soccer pitches	<b>110+</b> Murals planned	<b>40</b> Legacy projects
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## Has Washington relaxed its rules around public alcohol consumption?

Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson in May signed into law a bill that makes it easier for cities and businesses to host free-ranging drinking zones. ¶ The law, which runs until the end of 2027 as a trial for now, allows governments to ask the state Liquor and Cannabis Board for businesses to have expanded outdoor alcohol service in public spaces and civic campuses such as Seattle Center. There is also a provision for June and July of 2026 for businesses to have expanded alcohol service in public spaces during multiday events in designated fan zones or host cities. ¶ Under the new law, businesses can share outdoor alcohol service areas. This would mean, for example, multiple bars next door to one another could have one combined outdoor space where patrons could roam freely.



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**\$19M**

## How is Seattle funding the preparations for the 2026 World Cup?

In May, state lawmakers set aside \$46.6 million for World Cup preparations in Washington’s budget. ¶ Lumen Field will receive \$19.4 million, largely to replace the artificial turf with stitched natural grass and maintain its upkeep. FIFA also requires all stadium seats to have backs, so the Hawks Nest in the north end zone, which has bench seating, will have individual seats with backs installed. The upgraded seats will remain after the World Cup. ¶ Of the remaining \$27.2 million, \$22.6 million is for transportation, with \$22 million going to the Washington State Department of Transportation and \$600,000 going to the State Patrol.

## What World Cup matches will Lumen Field host?

FIFA will reveal the schedule of matches in December. Lumen Field will host four group-stage matches and two knockout-round matches for the World Cup. For those matches, FIFA requires the facility to go by the name Seattle Stadium. **More on page 18**

**750K**



The tournament is expected to draw 750,000 visitors to Seattle, roughly equal to the city’s population. ¶ Woody says the occupancy rate for downtown Seattle hotels in June and July hovers around 85%, and it was 84% this past June. That’s down slightly from 87% in June 2024. As for occupancy expectations next summer, Woody says that is hard to predict before teams are placed into pools in December.

**\$26K**

Although certain luxury ticket packages are on sale already, regular ticket sales begin in October. The luxury option, however, is pricey. The cost for one person to watch all six matches at Lumen Field next summer as part of the “Pitchside Lounge Standard+” package, the most expensive option, is \$26,000. ¶ FIFA will release the first phase of tickets through a lottery for Visa cardholders, and fans can register from Sept. 10 through Sept. 19. Winners will be assigned a time in October to log in and buy tickets, subject to availability.