

Austin earning favor of F1 visitors, if not vice versa (Slideshow)



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Don't expect the stampede of people moving to Austin to slow now that international audiences have had two years to enjoy the city's hospitality and cultural offerings. At a pair of parties on Saturday night, visitors from abroad said they've become big fans of Austin in its two years hosting the U.S. Grand Prix, and with that will come some new residents with really pronounced accents.

The most prominent Austin booster I talked to was [Michael Roche](#), a United Kingdom native who has lived all over the world and spent the last seven years in Singapore working as the executive director of the Singapore Grand Prix.

While getting settled at the Amber Lounge party at the Copper Tank Event Center off Fifth Street, Roche said racing fans visiting Austin are also aware of the city's music-focused culture and said it's natural that some will look to gradually relocate or buy vacation homes here as the Formula 1 race becomes more enmeshed in the city's fabric.

There were big names aplenty at parties all over town during F1 weekend, with [Gerard Butler](#), [Adrian Grenier](#), [Jennie Garth](#), chef [Gordon Ramsey](#) and more on hand during the two nights of Amber Lounge.

To find those looking to handle business while they were on the party scene, the good bet was to look away from the plush couches and tables under flashing dance lights. Instead, sections of rented venues that afforded a chance to have a conversation or make a few phone calls were the places to be.

At Amber Lounge, that was out on the quiet and calm smoking patio where folks like [Dean Scott](#), COO of All Roads Entertainment, talked about business prospects with partners. Scott, whose company provides business management services for companies in the live music industry, was making his first trip to Austin and was hoping to learn as much as possible about how local concert and festival titan C3 Presents operates.

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Across town at the My Yacht party at [Ballet Austin](#) on Third Street, a Patron-sponsored lounge area away from the nightclub atmosphere one room over let small groups and couples have easy conversations with business guests or partners. Many of those I talked to on Saturday night were out with business-related friends or associates and the night out was a chance for them to unwind and, in the process, firm up their business relationships, if not scout out new opportunities.


One other observation from party hopping was that as many visitors as the race brought to Austin, the somewhat infamous horde of Saturday night bar-goers on Sixth Street appeared to have roughly the same concentration of people as a typical weekend. Police on the scene backed up that assessment, saying the crowd was a typical size for a fall football weekend with favorable weather.

With a large number of non-U.S. visitors in that mix — you could tell from the accents and motorsports-sponsored clothing — that means that at least a portion of a typical weekend customer base chose to stay home instead of mingling.

Compare that to the packed-to-the-gills crowds in the popular bar district during the Friday and Saturday nights of this year's South By Southwest, and it shows that F1 still has a way to go before it becomes an accepted part of the Austin cultural scene.

Because as enthused as visitors seem to be becoming about Austin, it looks like the locals are keeping a distance and taking a wait-and-see approach. That means there's some real marketing and PR work that needs to be done in the coming year if the event is going to live up to its full business potential.




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The 10 Golden Girls pose with two bottles of the Comte de Mazeray champagne served over the weekend at My Yacht Club Formula 1 party inside Ballet Austin. Click on the image to launch a slideshow of party photos taken this weekend.



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