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NEWS HONG KONG CHARITY

Legendary Wan Chai pub offers last chance to go Bananas at the Hong Kong Sevens

Luard Road landmark returns for Hong Kong Sevens week to help raise money for charity

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Mourning the pub's closing with a drink in February. Photo: Sam Tsang

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Legendary Wan Chai watering hole Joe Bananas has reopened its doors just for the Hong Kong Sevens - and every drink sold will benefit an epilepsy charity.

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Hong Kong Sevens week began with a bang on Saturday night when the Luard Road landmark - rechristened Purple Sevens - threw open its doors again, much to the delight of regulars and visitors in town for the biggest party of the year. It will close down again next Monday, the day after the rugby tournament.

"This is amazing. I thought we had lost this celebrated Hong Kong attraction during the biggest sporting event in town," long-time Hong Kong resident Roger Taylor said.

Joe Bananas, opened in 1986 by expatriate Scots Laura McAllister and Andy Neilson, had the distinction of being one of Wan Chai's oldest bars, but put up its shutters on February 23 after the owners lost the lease.

A Thai visitor in town for Hong Kong Sevens week was thrilled. "We heard Joe Bananas had closed down and this is a huge surprise. We can party on this week," said the man, one of the first to arrive on Saturday.

The Rugby Football Union is supporting the new owners of the premises, JB Live, in their collaboration with Enlighten - Action For Epilepsy.

"Joe Bananas has got a long history with the Hong Kong Sevens and when we were approached by the people who said they had tied up with the charity run by Tom Smith, we were only too happy to support them," the union's Antony Phillips said.

The charity's co-founder, former British & Irish Lions and Scotland prop Tom Smith, will arrive today to head a few fundraising events. Smith, who himself suffers from epilepsy, has donated two playing strips worn by the Lions on their winning tour of Australia last year. These proudly adorn the wall behind the bar.

"It has been signed by all 38 players on that tour and will be up for auction later in the week," said Claudia Schlesinger, a mainstay behind the charity.

JB Live staff member Tekendra Dangi said: "We are very glad to be able to open the doors of Joe Bananas again."

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as Wan Chai pub offers last chance to go Bananas