

[EXTRACT]

## What's the score on World Cup travel?

England are through to the finals in South Africa, but the biggest challenge fans will face is getting there

By Simon Calder

'Soccer City': European contenders for that title include Manchester and Liverpool, Rome and Milan, Madrid and Barcelona. But beside Soweto Highway, well beyond the confines of football's "First World", the true Soccer City rises proud – halfway between South Africa's biggest metropolis, Johannesburg, and the sprawling township at the heart of the anti-Apartheid movement.

At 4pm local time on 11 June next year, South Africa will face as-yet-unknown opposition here, in front of nearly 100,000 fans. The match will mark the start of the first World Cup Finals to be staged in Africa. Exactly a month later, the greatest sporting event of 2010 will be settled, also at Soccer City.

Even nine months ahead, the passion across South Africa is tangible. And England fans find themselves in the unusual position of being ahead of the pack in fixing up trips to the Finals. The 5-1 defeat of Croatia made England sure of qualifying for the final stages. But supporters of other European teams, such as France, Germany and Portugal are still waiting to see if they will be making the trip to enjoy the greatest month on earth (at least from the football supporter's perspective).

Yet the tournament presents many logistical challenges: finding flights to the far end of Africa for perhaps 100,000 England fans; tracking down rooms when they get there; getting around a nation five times the size of Britain; and the repercussions on travellers who have no interest in football but merely want a safari or beach holiday elsewhere in Africa.

### The countdown

Few of the 24 finalists are settled; the remaining places will be decided by 14 November. The usual effect as soon as a country qualifies is for keen fans to book up flights as fast as possible, which has an impact on availability and fares.

The fortunes of North American and Asian nations may have a very modest effect on travel patterns from Britain; and most South American fans keen to attend will be looking at links across the South Atlantic, again having little impact on UK travellers. But when the European heavyweights start to come through, the price of flights is likely to soar.

The next issue is where, in this vast nation, each team will be playing in the initial round.

This will all become clear on 4 December when the draw to assign teams to groups takes place in Cape Town. It will immediately be clear who plays whom and where in the initial group stage.

Within minutes, tour operators and individual fans will be vying to snap up flights, hotel rooms and – the toughest part of all – tickets.

### **Package deals**

For people prepared to pay dearly for the privilege, buying a pre-arranged package with one of the four official UK tour operators is easily the best option. You can sign up now with Thomson Sport (0845 121 2018; [thomsonsport.com/Football](http://thomsonsport.com/Football)), Thomas Cook (020-8739 2360; [thomascooksport.com](http://thomascooksport.com)), Keith Prowse (0845 602 8900; [keithprorowse.co.uk](http://keithprorowse.co.uk)) or BAC Sport (020-7456 7100; [bacsport.co.uk](http://bacsport.co.uk)). The standard package includes flights (space is already reserved on a number of departures), hotels and match tickets – from one of England's three group matches, which are guaranteed, to the seven that is the maximum any team can play, including the final.

Both Thomson and Thomas Cook are using the "base-camp" idea. Fans will be staying at a single hotel in Cape Town or the Johannesburg area, and driven or flown to the England games. The starting price through Thomas Cook Sport is £2,499 for a seven-night trip to see the first of England's matches, with flights, accommodation, transfers and match ticket.

### **The venues**

Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Mangaung/ Bloemfontein, Nelson Mandela Bay/Port Elizabeth, Nelspruit, Polokwane, Rustenburg, Tshwane/Pretoria. The first three of those will be familiar to you, the rest perhaps not so. But as you can see on our map, most of the 10 venues are concentrated in the north-east of South Africa. Although Cape Town is an appealing gateway, and a semi-final host city along with multicultural Durban, Johannesburg is the heart of the action and has far better transport links than any other city in Southern Africa.

### **DIY trips**

The first item on the fan's shopping list is the flight. In any normal year you would be able to pick up flights in early June to Johannesburg for under £500 return (a little more to Cape Town), because it's low season. But demand from the media and supporters who have already booked have pushed up prices, so that departures for non-stop flights to Johannesburg just before the event begins on 11 June, returning just after the final, are selling for £1,250. British Airways is laying on an extra five 747s from Heathrow to Johannesburg every week to cope with (or, if you prefer, capitalise on) demand. Fares will rise still further once other big European nations qualify, especially for flights connecting at airports such as Frankfurt, Paris, Zurich and Lisbon. Many travellers will go via Dubai, because Emirates has good links from five English airports and frequent connections to Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban.

At present the lowest fares are via Nairobi with Kenya Airways, for around £800 return on many days. This will have an impact on people planning to head for East Africa in June/July, usually an excellent time to visit – many of the seats from Heathrow will be full, and prices on other airlines will increase.

Even though we're still 77 days away from knowing where and when England will be playing, the wisest strategy is to book a flight to Johannesburg and back. This will be the hub for domestic travel to the venues.

### **Accommodation**

Up to half-a-million fans are expected to travel to South Africa. Were they evenly spread, the country would probably have enough hotel beds. But while there will probably be a surplus of

accommodation on the Garden Route, elsewhere there will be a squeeze. However, some solutions will be found; the former Cunard line QE2 is likely to be moored at Cape Town for the duration.

In advance of the draw being made on 4 December, many hoteliers are keeping their room cards close to their chests. Even a powerful global website such as Hotels.com cannot offer much at present. The pleasant, friendly and relatively safe city of Pretoria is well placed for many of the venues. But when I searched for a double room for a 10-day stay from 10-20 June, all I was offered was a luxury B&B miles away in the Johannesburg suburb of Melville, for £477 a night.

### **Tickets please**

Good luck. The optimist will conclude that because South Africa is such a long way from the main competing nations, there is likely to be better availability than in any World Cup since the USA in 1994. But a look on fifa.com reveals the uphill struggle the fan faces – even before anyone knows where the games will be played. Of three million tickets available to the "general public", only a quarter – around 750,000 – are actually on sale to fans.

FIFA is using the concept of team-specific tickets (TSTs), where you say, "I'd like a ticket for all three England group matches" or, even better, "All seven matches – England's three, and those of whoever knocks England out, and whoever knocks them out, all the way up to the final." While these are still available for the majority of teams, those for England have all been snapped up at what looks like a bargain £1,700 for all seven (tickets for the final are reportedly already trading illicitly for £3,000). While members of the official England supporters' club have a special allocation, for everyone else the best plan is to enter at the next stage, on 5 December, which involves a lottery. Register at fifa.com.

### **And besides the football...**

Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban are great places to plan a beach holiday – but the World Cup will straddle the southern midwinter. So don't entertain ideas of relaxing on the beach. Instead, aim north. The game parks east of Johannesburg and Pretoria will attract plenty of visitors; you could even head into neighbouring Mozambique – now largely safe for tourists.

### **Travel essentials: Staying safe**

"The risk to visitors travelling to the main tourist destinations is low," says the current Foreign Office advice. But a lot of prospective visitors could be put off by South Africa's poor reputation for violent crime. The murder rate, with one homicide each year for every 2,000 people, is said to be second only to Colombia. This is something greatly concerning the South African authorities. They are deploying 41,000 police specifically to look after security for the World Cup.

In a travel magazine published last week, a security company has taken out a full-page ad aimed at football fans, offering everything from "pre-travel intelligence" to "security chaperone support" – in other words, a couple of minders to look after you. Contact Red24 at red24.com, or consult the latest Foreign Office information at tiny.cc/MHPSe. "If you are mugged or your car is hijacked you should remain calm, offer no resistance and hand over possessions without question," it advises. "Avoid eye contact."

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Source: Independent website (19 September 2009)  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/africa/whats-the-score-on-world-cup-travel-1789711.html>