

SA sees tourism booming

Cape Town - Halfway through the World Cup, tourism officials say football fans have already brought an economic windfall that looks set to keep rolling as a raft of big countries play in the second round. Business is booming with foreign fans at bars and restaurants, which are also boosted by plenty of local support for big guns like England, Portugal and Brazil after hosts South Africa bowed out. Cape Town's dockside V&A Waterfront shopping and entertainment complex has proved a magnet for fans ahead of every match at the nearby Green Point stadium, where Portugal plays Spain on Tuesday in a game sure to pack in fans of all stripes.

"On a daily basis it's more or less in the figure of 100 000 coming through with spikes on match day," said Waterfront spokesperson Annemie Liebenberg.

"These loyal supporters travel with their teams. It's absolutely fantastic to have the big guys still."

Good for business

South African Tourism head Thandiwe January-McLean admitted this week that the industry wanted the world's tourism giants to stay in the tournament.

"For us Germany and England and those countries are important because they have been core markets in which we have been working," she said.

"Seeing them qualify is, from a touristic point of view, in our interest, if truth be told." Gillian Saunders of Grant Thornton consultancy said South Africa looked on track to earn about R8.8bn from tourism during the World Cup. That's just a slice of the R93bn that the games are expected to have generated for the economy. Most of that amount was construction spending by government to build stadiums and overhaul the transport system over the last four years.

Less visitors

South Africa had to scale down its initially rosy expectations for 450 000 foreign visitors over the four weeks, lowering the number last month to 300 000. But coming during the winter months that are normally low season for tourism, the football fans have given South Africa a second peak season with numbers that match its busy summer travel months. The country spent about R100m on its World Cup marketing campaign, but January-McLean said the marketing benefits were invaluable from hosting one of the world's most-watched sporting events.

"From a touristic point of view this has been a fabulous opportunity, just given the exposure that South Africa has received all over the world."

Hotels are around 85% full in Johannesburg, the most convenient jumping-off point for most stadiums, according to SA Tourism.

Hotels booked

Cape Town says on average its hotels have been at 40% over the last two weeks, but accommodation closest to the stadium is booked solid and tour operators report a 20% jump in business against last June. For normally quiet towns like the central city

of Bloemfontein, where England and Germany face off on Sunday, bars, restaurants and hotels have seen swarms of visitors around games. Even Port Elizabeth, one of the most distant host cities, has revelled in the flood of visitors.

"It was absolute chaos! From 10 past six until quarter to four this morning, we were upside down, inside out," said Sandy Nel, owner of News Cafe in Port Elizabeth, where England secured its second round entry on Wednesday.

The outlet saw a 200% turnover rise and sold 3 135 units of beer, said Nel.

"We sold the most beer we've ever sold in the nine years we've been in existence."

Niall Wilkins
First Secretary Political
South African High Commission
Trafalgar Square
London WC2N 5DP

Tel: 0207 451 7240

Fax: 0207 451 7283