

International travel to turn FIFA World Cup into '10 Super Bowls'

Fans from Argentina, Brazil, England, France and Portugal predicted to boost metrics



One FIFA World Cup group-stage match whetting the anticipation of European soccer fans is France versus Norway, which will see superstars Kylian Mbappé (left) and Erling Haaland meet up. Pictured is a matchup between the two on Feb. 11, 2025, in a UEFA Champions League match between Mbappé's Real Madrid and Haaland's Manchester City. (Getty Images)

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The majority of the 48 national soccer sides competing in this summer 2026's U.S.-Canada-Mexico FIFA World Cup have booked their transport and hotels, and the legions of European fans set to come to the Americas is putting hoteliers there into a frenzy.

A 50% increase in the number of teams competing has added to the upcoming competition on the pitches and in hotel markets.

The draw for the group stages was held on Dec. 5, and hoteliers now know which teams are coming to their cities for the first part of the tournament.

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At a webinar titled “The World Cup effect: US host city hotels and overseas visits forecast to surge” hosted by Tourism Economics, Laura Baxter, a Canada-based economist at Tourism Economics, said the 78 out of the 104 games to be played in the U.S. will result in a predicted \$900 million in hotel revenue.

“That is comparable to that of roughly 10 Super Bowls within six weeks,” she said, referencing the dates of the games between June 11 and July 19.

One all-European game in the group stages putting fans in a frenzy is France versus Norway on June 26 in Boston. The match will see France’s superstar Kylian Mbappé — who plays club soccer for Real Madrid — face Norway’s superstar Erling Haaland of Manchester City.

Aran Ryan, director of industry studies at Tourism Economics, said he expects international visitors to occupy 40% of the seats at games, or 1.24 million people, “of which, 724,000, about 50%, will be incremental visitors.”

“In June, we think there will be a 10% boost to international travel inbound to the U.S., relative to what we’d see without the World Cup,” he said, “and a 2% boost to July inbound. ... overall, a 1.1% contribution to growth year over year.”

Evidently, as the rounds of the games end, fewer teams will remain, and fewer fans.

There is an expectation that international visitors will take the opportunity of being in another continent to extend trips to other destinations.

“It is really just rare to see this magnitude of impact to the international inbound figures from an event,” Ryan said,

The 2026 FIFA World Cup should provide a notable demand boost to the U.S. next year, following what has been a challenging year for U.S. hoteliers with negative sentiment hurting inbound travel, which is down 6.3% year over year.

Baxter predicted all the tournament’s host cities and hotels will see benefits.

“In the month of June, when the majority of matches take place ... the incremental room revenue impact is expected to be in the range of 7% through 25%. On match days and surrounding [days] we expect that uplift to be stronger, but on an annual basis, the uplift translates to between 1% and 5% across host markets,” she said.

Uneven pitches

Some markets that host World Cup matches will benefit more than others.

“Mexico City; New York City/New Jersey; Kansas City, and Los Angeles have a particularly favorable mix of factors pointing to strong hotel performance,” she added.

Apart from those cities either hosting the home nations or hosting more games than other cities, or both, other factors will see added interest from international visitors, she said.

Smaller host cities will see their hotels post increased revenue per available room, while larger cities that host large events and a high number of leisure visitors every year will see gains in in average daily rate and revenue.

Kansas City, for instance, might not leap out as an international destination, but it has scored highly in predictions due to its “match quantity and stage,” Baxter said.

“It will host six matches, one of which is a quarterfinal,” she said.

World Cup fans from Argentina, Brazil, England, France and Portugal are all expected to have an “above-average impact on hotel performance,” Baxter added.

But there are still concerns about the U.S. visa application process and if fans need to cross borders, and cross back, depending on their teams’ journey through the event, Ryan said.

The nations that have qualified are, in alphabetical order: Algeria; Argentina; Australia; Austria; Belgium; Brazil; Cabo Verde; Canada (co-host); Colombia; Croatia; Curaçao; Ecuador; England; Egypt; France; Germany; Ghana; Haiti; Iran; Ivory Coast; Japan; Jordan; Mexico (co-host); Morocco; The Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Panama; Paraguay; Portugal; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Scotland; Senegal; Spain; South Africa; South Korea; Switzerland; Tunisia; Uruguay; USA (co-host), and Uzbekistan.

Curaçao is the smallest nation by population to have ever reached the FIFA World Cup. According to Worldometer, its population of 185,494 is 0.053% of the U.S. population of nearly 348 million.

Six other nations will qualify via play-in matches that will be held in March.

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