

The reason they're not coming is flat

The real reason that people aren't coming to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in their droves can be found in a box, and, yes, it is flat.

 By Daryl Ilbury 23 Apr 2010



There have been so many reasons thrown around as to why the expected number of overseas visitors to the world cup is dramatically down on what was originally expected, and most of them have been negative. But the real reason is actually quite encouraging, especially if you're in the media, specifically television.

When Sepp Blatter pulled South Africa's name out of the envelope at that famous media conference back May 2004, the country erupted in whoops of joy as it watched the drama unfold on their TVs. If you were part of that audience, the chances are the TV you were watching was a standard cathode ray tube TV - a bulky creature by today's standards.

The stuff of dreams

Back in those days, LCD and plasma flat screen TVs did exist, but they were horribly expensive, and were only found in the homes of the fabulously wealthy. Also, HD or high definition TV was really only the stuff of dreams. What definitely didn't exist were hard-drive based satellite receivers. Anyone who wanted to record a football match, had to use a video-machine, be a dab hand at programming and nimble-fingered with the remote.

So, when FIFA and the LOC estimated the numbers of people who would rush to South Africa to enjoy all the football action, it was fashioned around the mind-frame of the costs and limitations of the audiovisual technology of the time; as well as the assumption that if people wanted to capture all the visual and audio excitement of the world cup, they would have to do so sitting in the stands (a wonderful oxymoron, by the way).

Of course nowadays, flat screen LCD, LED and HD are virtual standards for anyone buying a TV; and for the extra grand or so you can hook up a surround sound system and, hey presto, you have a home theatre system. You can then completely immerse yourself in the FIFA World Cup experience, pause the action while you grab another beer from the fridge, and record all the matches on your satellite receiver while you pop over to your mother-in-law's simplex to unblock her toilet.

Cheap cost, unfortunate timing

But are these developments alone sufficient to keep people in Europe away from our fair shores? No, but the cheap cost of it all and the unfortunate timing of the world cup are.

The 2010 World Cup takes place from early June to late July - our winter and the European summer. For

most countries in Europe, the school academic year starts in September, at the end of summer; and so most people take their annual holiday in late July early August. For many Europeans, especially the Brits, this means lazing on the beach at any one of the myriad resorts that litter the Spanish coastline.

Stay with me, because this is when things get really interesting.

Should a Brit pick up a newspaper today showing the cost of FIFA World Cup packages (they're still available), they will see that for £3999 they can fly to South Africa return and watch three England Group Stage matches against the US, Algeria and Slovenia. The price includes transfers and accommodation.

Later on in the same newspaper, they may see an advert from Currys (a leading appliance retailer) showing that they can buy a 107cm full HD LCD TV for £550, and a top brand Blu-Ray home theatre system for £400. Another advert will offer them the full Sky HD package, including unlimited high-speed broadband and calls for about £60 a month. The satellite receiver comes free.

But wait, there's more

But wait, there's more. Later on in the same newspaper, they may also see a wonderful promotion for a seven-night, all-inclusive holiday at the Costa del Sol in Spain for £645 per person.

You do the maths: for slightly more than half the cost of a short holiday in SA to watch only three group stage matches, an Englishman can watch all the matches in crystal clear HD on a huge screen with mind-thumping surround sound, pause the action, rewind and record at his leisure; and, after the world cup, still go on holiday to Spain where he can drink warm beer, eat fish and chips, and score a tan (or at least go all red and blistered).

More importantly he gets to keep the TV, Blu-Ray and home theatre system forever. Get the picture?

A recent Carte Blanche exposé, on the gluttonous glee with which the SA tourism and hospitality industries welcomed the 2010 World Cup, underlined how dangerously blind they were to the effects of technological advancement. Things have changed dramatically in the world of electronic media.

FIFA may be FIFA, but advances in TV technology and the associated tumbling costs have changed the game; and unfortunately SA is paying the price.

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