

# World Cup email causing unnecessary panic

Recent email warnings from travel agents advising South Africans to “stay home” during the 2010 World Cup, from 11 June to 11 July 2010, because of overbooked hotels, unavailable car hire and impossible airports, are overstated warns Gillian Saunders of Strategic Solutions.

Saunders, director of Strategic Solutions at global audit, tax and specialist advisory services firm Grant Thornton South Africa, said: “The email communication is causing unnecessary panic. Visitors won't all be in South Africa in the same town all at once and, although there will be certain crunch peak periods, overall it shouldn't impact South Africans' daily schedules too dramatically.”

## Ongoing monitoring

Grant Thornton South Africa monitors on an ongoing basis the various important impacts that the 2010 FIFA World Cup will have on South Africa and its economy. The company's estimates indicate 483 000 tourists (151 000 from Africa) are expected to travel to South Africa for the World Cup, resulting in foreign spending of R8.5 billion.

“It is interesting to note that in our highest tourism month of the year South Africa already hosts almost 870 000 foreign tourists, so there's no doubt our nation and current tourism infrastructure can cope with the influx of additional visitors during the World Cup,” said Saunders.

## There will be peak periods

There certainly will be peak periods during the World Cup at host cities around South Africa, with large numbers of visitors impacting airports, car hire and hotel accommodation during scheduled games in these specific locations. But concerned citizens should remember that in any centre there are only matches on some of the 31 days (from four to eight days, except Johannesburg with 15 days). Including Friday evenings, 25 matches are at weekends and a further 13 are in the evenings - so only 26 matches are during working hours - over nine cities and 20 working days.

The peaks will be severe though. For example, at times when games are scheduled in the Gauteng region, there is expected to be a peak bed demand of anything from 110 000 to 185 000.

“Although this will be just for a couple of days,” said Saunders “the Gauteng region has an estimated tourist bed supply of some 72 000 and visitors will either stay elsewhere or use alternatives, such as home-stays and university accommodation. The peak will also put pressure on airports and transport termini, roads, restaurants and accommodation.”

## Good for tourism

But a high number of fans in our host cities is a good thing for tourism. When Germany hosted the 2006 World Cup, foreign overnight stays in host cities were 31 percent higher than during the same period the previous year.

Grant Thornton warns South Africans to pay attention to crunch times at airports. High international arrival congestion at airports can be expected to peak during pre-event arrivals with approximately 190 000 visitors predicted to be in the country by day three, i.e. by 13 June 2010. Fans will be starting to trickle into the country 14 days before this date, and the arrivals are expected to peak at 19 000 per day.

## **Peak departures**

“Then, at the end of the Group Phase, around 28-30 June, when group events are concluded and quarter-finals commence, we predict peak departures to reach about 17 000 people daily,” added Saunders.

Inter-city travel demands during the group phase will be huge and we can expect congestion at airports, particularly after games finish and after evening games, as many fans travel back to their bases.

## **Road congestion a given**

Road congestion is a given, but this too will depend on when host cities will feature key matches. The good news is that, in most cases, games have been planned out of peak traffic times, so that fans travelling to football matches shouldn't impact on regular South Africans on their way to work.

“The message is simple,” said Saunders. “South Africans will need to deal with accommodation demand spikes, increased road congestion at times, and arrival and departure peaks at airports.

“But the World Cup is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for our nation. We all need to look beyond the challenges, and start to focus on making our visitors feel welcome to ensure the World Cup counts as one of the best holidays these fans have ever had. Enjoy the fantastic spectacle and atmosphere. It's going to be phenomenal!”

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