

World Cup fever

As the World Cup kicks off in South Africa, many economists are asking the question: 'Is it really worth hosting the tournament?'

1 Who will win the 2010 World Cup? Discuss your answer with partner. You can use one of the prompts below.

'I think will win!'

'Either....., or maybe

'I don't really care - I don't like football!'

2 Practise saying the following numbers aloud.

75.1 million	373,000	715.1 million
\$4,000	\$4 billion	\$6 billion

3 Scan the article and replace the missing numbers (1-5). Use the numbers from exercise 2. There is one extra figure.

Football. Love it or hate it, you cannot deny how popular the beautiful game is. More people on the planet watch the World Cup than any other sporting event - the 2006 final in Germany was watched by an estimated (1) _____ people. Surely, there can only be benefits for any nation which hosts this great sporting occasion. Not at all. As World Cup fever builds, many economists are arguing about whether holding the 2010 event will benefit the host nation, South Africa.

Hosting the World Cup could be a golden opportunity to redefine the image of the country from that of a poor place, with a high crime rate, similar in many ways to the image of Brazil, the next host nation. The government of South Africa is said to have invested around (2) _____ in the event. It has created many jobs, initiating programmes to expand the airports, roads and stadiums, ready to service the thousands of international fans heading there. Around (3) _____ visitors are expected to go to South Africa during the tournament, each spending (4) _____ on average. The income generated from tourism is a clear benefit to a country which is already famous for its extraordinary beauty.

However, critics point out that many jobs created are only temporary. Tourist numbers are reported to be disappointing. The increase in retail spending during the tournament is short-lived. Many local traders who have long sold food and drinks to fans near football stadiums will not be allowed to operate, unless they pay a large fee. These restrictions are demanded by FIFA, the governing body of international football, who wish to protect the official tournament sponsors. It is FIFA who, at the end of the day, are likely to benefit the most financially from the games, not the host nation. One estimate suggests that FIFA will make well over (5) _____ from the event.

So, will football be the overall winner? Whatever the pros and cons of hosting the World Cup, most neutrals simply want to enjoy the passion of the beautiful game. Whether they can, against a backdrop of spiralling transfer fees and players' salaries, suspected bribery of referees, sponsorship deals and vast profits, remains to be seen. Is it finally time to recognise that football is no longer just about sport, but mainly about money? With all eyes on South Africa for the next few weeks, only time will tell if football wins in the end.

4 Read the article. Why do some feel that hosting the event will benefit South Africa? Why do others disagree?

5 Decide if the following are red three, two or one-star, or black no-star, according to frequency.

pros and cons	deal (n)	image	referee
salary	stadium	spiralling	tourism
benefit (v)	sponsor (v)	economist	estimated (adj)

*** - very frequent
 ** - quite frequent
 * - frequent
 No star - less frequent

[Macmillan English Dictionary]

6 Work in small groups to discuss the questions. Be ready to report back to the class.

- (a) What do you think South Africa could do to get long-term benefits from hosting the World Cup?
- (b) If your country bid for the 2018 World Cup, would you support the bid or not? Why / why not?
- (c) Do you think 'the beautiful game' is still mainly about sport, or more about money? Justify your answer.