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Cape Town 2010: It's Finally Arrived

The sound from the city below is of a million bees humming...

As I write, on Sunday June 13, from our Cape Town home on the slopes of Table Mountain, the sound from the city below is of a million bees humming. Which means South Africa's already famed supporters are gearing up for the start of the day's football World Cup festivities by blowing their notorious, horn-like vuvuzelas.

There's no game in Cape Town today, but Algeria vs Slovenia in the bushveld city of Polokwane is on the big screen at the Fan Park outside the City Hall down below, just a 15 minute walk away. The Fan Park is just one element of how this football event has transformed Cape Town in particular into a truly visitor-friendly city.

Our introduction to this new face of Cape Town happened this past Friday, June 11 2010, when the World Cup officially started. Four hours after the opening game in Johannesburg, Cape Town's impressive new stadium was host to the second game of the tournament (Uruguay vs France). We'd bought tickets to the historic event, and decided on walking to the Fan Park before catching a shuttle-bus to the Stadium, a little over 2km away.

After Stacey the babysitter arrived at our house, tasked with the enviable job of minding our footballing Fynn of 15 months, we set off down the road.



Just to prove I was at the 2nd game of the World Cup. Altho' temporarily co-opted by the French ...



Vuvuzelas on the Fan Walk



Cape Town's slick new train station

Algeria vs Slovenia in the bushveld city of Polokwane is on the big screen at the Fan Park outside the city hall...



Performers teach fans the Waka-Waka Diski dance on the Fan Walk.



15 Month-old Fynn loves football. No pressure.

We ended up walking the whole way, following the Fan Walk from the city-centre to the stadium instead. Not because the bus had broken down, but rather because the Walk looked so appealing. The first of thousands were making their way to the stadium from the city, and with every bar and restaurant with a TV packed with patrons who've heard about nothing but the World Cup for the past four years, the atmosphere in the city was fantastic.

The Walk ended up being a 3km flat walk, lined with buskers, fire-dancers, bars, craft-traders and food stalls. It was difficult to walk 20 metres without stopping, with the crowd making its way to the stadium swelling by the minute. The suburb of Greenpoint, across the road from the stadium, had finally come into its own; at last done with the roadworks of the past two

years, it is now part of a beautiful new precinct.

And so the soccer came and went, an excellent, well-marshalled experience marred by little but the absurdly long refreshment queues (*thanks to FIFA regulations, not the city*). We walked back home, following the Fan Walk and buying and spending along the way.

It was turning out to be a sporting weekend of surprises. The next day saw France in action again, this time playing South Africa in a rugby test at Newlands stadium. For locals, driving to such games is automotive hell, requiring an hour in traffic from the city, after which starts the search for parking. *But not, if you catch the train...*

From the beautifully revamped Cape Town station – which is a stroll from any city hotel (and our house) – it's 15 minutes to Newlands station, right outside the stadium.

Which even allows time for a *boerevors* (local spicy sausage) roll and inevitably humorous chat with the vendors before the game starts.

With the route going around Table Mountain the view from the train is by definition beautiful, stopping off at the various suburbs and hopefully appreciated by the American and French tourists who had joined us locals in making the journey by rail. Added to the football on that opening Friday night, the train is another feather in Cape Town's holiday-destination cap, offering possibilities simply unavailable in the likes of Durban and Johannesburg (they have their own attractions).

Until the curtain comes down on South Africa's FIFA World Cup in a month's time, South Africans can *only* be positive. The football and the visitors are here, and

with them the type of good feeling that will likely not be experienced again in our lifetime.

Our already good infrastructure has been improved and the world, via TV, the internet and first-hand experience, will have learnt so much more about the country – the good and the bad. For us right now, Cape Town's wonderful Fan Walk is so much more important than questionable stadium-construction tenders and the fact that the government blithely overspent by over R11 billion in preparing for this event.

For now we have a country eager to host the world; a friendly population, wildlife and awesome landscapes. No matter what the expats say in Australasia, it's a destination very much waiting to happen.

