

In Focus: Air Partner

Adapting To Changing Travel Needs

As football's appeal grows across the globe so too do club and national team travel commitments. Clive Chalmers, Air Partner's Trading Director discusses the changing needs of football's travellers and how charter flights meet those needs ahead of the World Cup in Russia next year.

How have team travel requirements changed with the evolution of football over the last 10 years?

For me, team travel requirements have changed in line with the growth in the football industry as a whole. There is more investment coming into the sport and this has led to more requirements for international travel for clubs and supporters.

Pre-season tours are longer and further afield than they were 10 years ago and the benefits of aircraft charter are being realised by more and more teams. Flexibility, the security of only having your own passengers on board, and comfort are probably the three most important aspects that teams now expect as standard when travelling by aircraft charter. This will be no different to the expectations of national teams and associations when travelling into and around Russia for their World Cup games next year. Looking ahead, from 2026 there will be 48 teams in the finals instead of 32 so this further proves that the demand will evolve even further.

How has Air Partner adapted to these changes?

We have invested in experienced individuals that have direct knowledge and relationships with clubs and travel management companies in the football industry. This adds to the experience we already have and allows us to evolve our service to both existing and new customers in this field. Experience is key – knowing what the most suitable airports are to use in relation to the stadium, opening hours of airports if departing after an evening game, which private terminals are more suited to the size of the group you are transporting are all examples of what the club would expect you to know in order to make their planning a lot easier. Also, knowing the expectations of teams and their specific preferences is built up over time so this enables us to



offer the aircraft that are most suited to the team's expectations. This gives Air Partner the credibility you need in this industry to be able to demonstrate first hand that we have proven ability to deliver in the most high profile of circumstances.

Have you seen a growth in corporate guests at these larger events and do they have differing expectations?

Yes we have. Taking the incentive travel industry as a whole, in the UK we have seen a 51% growth in this business over the last 3 years and these requirements are more often than not linked to a large event such as a major football tournament. We definitely expect that there will be demand from corporate companies, sponsors, and event agencies to provide not just commercial aircraft charter, but also private jets to transport senior executives and high net worth individuals throughout the tournament.

There are definitely differences in expectations from corporate companies when it comes to chartering

aircraft for a specific event. With these charters, the event often starts from the moment they arrive at the airport as opposed to when you arrive at the stadium for the game itself. Through our ServicePLUS team here at Air Partner, we have the ability to really create a 'wow factor' from arriving at the airport or private terminal, right through to the boarding actual aircraft itself. Branded items such as headrest covers, drinks coasters and branded water bottles are all cost effective ways of promoting the customer's brand or the event. We can also arrange more eye catching branding such as promoting the company's logo on the exterior of the aircraft.

Looking ahead to the World Cup in Russia next year, what logistical challenges do you anticipate for national teams?

We anticipate that securing the necessary permits, aircraft handling and aircraft parking will be more of a challenge in Russia than we are used to in mainland Europe, for example. There may also be differing procedures when it comes to customs clearance for the kit and equipment from airport-to-airport so all of these need to be factored in when setting itineraries and timelines. Part of the value we add is assisting our customers with all of the logistical arrangements so we will be there to guide them throughout the whole set up process.

What advice can you give to associations making travel arrangements for the tournament next year?

Choose your suppliers carefully – make sure you carry out your 'due diligence' on the suppliers that you are utilising whether it be from an aircraft charter perspective or otherwise. We get a lot of business through recommendations and referrals so if you can find suppliers that have a proven track record and endorsements for the service they deliver, that is always a consideration to take into account. Air Partner will also be carrying out our own research on the various operators, airports, private terminals, opening hours, permit procedures etc. so that we are well prepared ahead of the draw for the finals on 1 December 2017.

