
Japan's national football team will train for the World Cup in Saas-Fee

Some great reasons for training up high

The Japanese are an intelligent lot. That's why it's not surprising they've chosen Saas-Fee as their training camp in the run-up to this summer's World Cup in South Africa. Their choice is sure to benefit the team immensely.

Admittedly, Japan are not the obvious favourites to reach the World Cup final on 11 July. The team, like Switzerland, are outsiders among the 32 contenders for the title. However, people are bound to sit up and take notice when the Japanese team trains in Saas-Fee between 26 May and 5 June. Situated 1,800 metres above sea level, Saas-Fee is a clean, car-free village with fresh mountain air. Johannesburg lies at 1,700 metres above sea level, has excellent transport links and equally fresh mountain air. It is also the venue for the World Cup final.

Coincidence? Certainly not. In their choice of location for the training camp, those in charge of the Japanese team have considered more than just the need to acclimatise their players for a possible final and for other matches at high altitude, such as in Rustenburg (1,500 m) and Bloemfontein (1,400 m). They were also swayed by the fact that, since a landmark decision in 1951, Saas-Fee has been entirely car-free and over the past few years has pioneered various concepts and projects to protect the environment and promote sustainable development in the area. The Saas-Fee and Saas Valley authorities have always believed that keeping natural beauty and habitats intact is a top priority and basic condition for local tourism.

Ecological and sustainable development – a few examples

Saas-Fee has been designated an Energy Town for its above-average efforts in developing green municipal energy and transport policies. Saas-Fee is also a pilot community for the New Mobility project, which aims to reduce the energy consumed by tourist traffic in order to achieve sustainable mobility in tourism. This focuses on promoting the use of public transport as a means of getting to and from the area. In addition, Saas-Fee/Saas Valley Tourism was awarded the Valais Excellence title in the environment and safety categories. Saas Valley was the first holiday destination in the country to commit to maintaining high standards in tourism and created the Quality Club seal.

Altitude training & physical acclimatisation

Exercise x Altitude = Health. Dr Beat Villiger developed this formula and, in his capacity as medical advisor, helped the Greek national football team use it to their advantage to become European champions in 2004. His equation simply summed up the health effects of combining physical activity with a stay at medium altitudes of between 1,200 and 2,500 metres: the body gradually adapts to the changes in altitude and to reduced oxygen levels due to decreased air pressure at greater heights. After around a week of altitude training in Saas-Fee the Japanese players' bodies will gradually adapt to these conditions, thereby improving their overall performance. Saas-Fee therefore offers the perfect World Cup training conditions, as well as clean, fresh air and a temperate Mediterranean climate.

Care-free, stress-free and relaxing

As you can see, the Japanese have certainly got the right idea. Their players will reap the benefits of Saas-Fee's award-winning pioneering spirit while enjoying this charming rustic village's relaxed atmosphere and the top hotels, such as their trainings domicile, the hotel Schweizerhof Gourmet & SPA****. Car-free, stress-free and relaxing, this is the ideal place to prepare for a demanding experience on the footballing world stage. Thanks to the altitude training, their bodies will be perfectly trained for the World Cup conditions. Now if that isn't the best way to prepare to surprise everyone in South Africa... *sf/29.03.2010*

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