

Football

Beach view and plenty to do: England opt for Copacabana

Luxury awaits Roy Hodgson and his team if they reach the World Cup finals, writes Jonathan Watts in Rio

Nobody could ever accuse England of doing things by halves, particularly when it comes to choosing a base for a World Cup campaign.

Under Sven-Goran Eriksson in 2006, they opted for the cosy designer chic of Baden-Baden, where the boutique shopping of Victoria Beckham and other Wags caused more of a stir than anything the players did on the pitch. Having judged this a mistake and a distraction, the stricter regime of Fabio Capello pitched the 2010 camp in the isolated Royal Bafengk Sports Campus in Rustenburg, where the team seemed stifled.

Now, under the affable Roy Hodgson, the expectations for glory may have dimmed but the team are placed much closer to the heart of things. That was the case in Poland for Euro 2012 and for the Brazil World Cup next year it looks likely to be true again, because the England team have chosen as their base the biggest hotel on the most popular beach in the world's party capital, Rio de Janeiro.

England, of course, have not yet qualified. But they have an advance booking at the Windsor Atlantica hotel in Copacabana, which they will try out in June for their friendly with Brazil at the Maracana. The 37-floor hotel dominates the skyline, but the team will not have to themselves even if they do make it to the tournament. Unlike in previous campaigns, England will not commandeer the entire 545-bed hotel so privacy and security could be an issue. This means no easy escape from the inevitable hype and disappointment that comes with every World Cup since 1966. But the views from the hotel should put that in perspective, and perhaps even offer inspiration.

Steven Gerrard, Wayne Rooney and their team-mates can mull on upcoming games or lament missed penalties from the comfort of the rooftop pool, which takes in stunning views of Rio's most celebrated sights. Inland and upwards are the open arms of the Christ the Redeemer statue. To the east is Sugarloaf Mountain and Leme. West are the Two Brothers mountains and the Vidigal favela. Between them lies the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean and the golden sands of Copacabana.

In this exclusive setting, footballers are an exception, according to José Geraldo Filho, the avuncular commercial co-ordinator of the hotel. "We usually avoid football teams. They attract a lot of attention and most of our clients like privacy. The behaviour of some of the teams is also too much," says Filho, who believes England's etiquette will be different from the antics of local players.

VIP guests are given a champagne check-in at the hotel, which boasts one of the finest Italian restaurants in Rio, two bars, breakfast rooms offering sushi,

sashimi. Bahia cuisine and views of the beach and an adjacent swimming pool. It has its own hairdressers, sauna, steam room, gym and recently added an area for Pilates.

If the wives and girlfriends of the players want to emulate the epic shopping exploits of Baden-Baden, there are numerous boutiques in nearby Ipanema and upmarket Leblon, as well as malls in Botafogo and Flamengo. The hotel also hosts an outlet of H Stern, a high-end jeweller that sells gold and silver bracelets embedded with gemstones.

The former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton stayed here during last year's Rio+20 United Nations summit. The prime minister, David Cameron, brought a business delegation here soon after and Prince Harry also made this his base during a royal tour in which he played football in Flamengo.

If the players wander across the Avenida Atlântica on the beach – and they will surely want to watch, or try, futevolei (foot-volley) – they will have to mingle with the masses. Although the hotel provides security for its own area of umbrellas and chairs, the staff say they have no right to block it off from the public.

Security is a major concern. The headline of a recent Star article, "England World Cup Hotel is in Murder Central" may be overblown, but Rio's long-standing reputation for violent crime is no myth. A paramilitary police campaign to regain control of the favela slums that ring Rio has pushed the problem out of sight and improved safety levels in the wealthy districts of the city. However, murder and armed robbery remain at levels that would be considered alarming in Europe and theft is not uncommon in Copacabana, despite the heavy presence of tourist police.

The players will, of course, get their own protection, and the FA says the hotel's record speaks for itself. "As you know, the hotel has had some high-profile visitors in recent years. It will be very secure," said Adrian Bevington, the director of communications for the Football Association, who has visited three times.

While England have one of the best hotels, the quality of their training ground remains uncertain. This is important not just for the facilities, but for the potential stress of the commute if the team are allocated a distant site.

Roy Hodgson visited three possible sites during his fact-finding mission last summer including two associated with the Flamengo Sports Club. The nearest and oldest – which is on the western side of the lagoon – has one large pitch and two five-a-side grounds, as well as three swimming pools. This makes it a popular venue for locals as well as more than a dozen members of Brazil's Olympic swimming teams who train there. A camp here would be convenient, but could add to the goldfish bowl effect that will already be a factor given the crowds that throng near the hotel.

A higher degree of privacy and more advanced facilities are available at Fla-



Reflections on Rio England's luxury World Cup base, the Windsor Atlantica Hotel, is located right in the middle of Rio de Janeiro's famous – and busy – Copacabana beach and nightlife area
Pictures by Douglas Engle/Australfoto



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Capello and Scolari meet in the land that did not love them

Managerial heavyweights are back in London tonight as Russia take on Brazil, writes Barney Ronay

If there was anything illuminating to be taken from Fabio Capello's first professional appearance in London since his resignation as England manager in February last year it came perhaps in confirmation that he was not, it seems, just putting it on all that time.

Speaking ahead of an intriguing international friendly between Russia and Brazil at Stamford Bridge tonight, Capello was the same old endearingly familiar picture of anvil-headed opacity. There were perhaps one or two meagre smiles and even some bantering good-fellowship with his Italian translator but otherwise Capello played the familiar dead bat to pretty much everything thrown at him. Standing up to leave at the end, he was asked, with despairing persistence, if he had seen his previous charges play recently and what he had made of them. "We've finished the press conference. Sorry," came the reply, accompanied by a deliciously withering smile.

If Capello was familiarly Capello, his team promise a little more in the way of entertainment. There are signs even that in the Iron Sergeant Russia has finally found the man to chivy this most historically underwhelming of potential international heavyweights into competitive shape. Absent from the World Cup finals since 2002, and with the Andrey Arshavin-inspired semi-final at Euro 2008 a sole tournament high of the post-Soviet Union era, Russia have lost only one of their last 24 matches and

"Brazil's front four are very fast, very technical. We will need to be compact"

Fabio Capello



are striding away from the pack in World Cup qualifying Group F. Russia have four wins from four and no goals conceded, a record preserved by the postponement of Friday's qualifier in Belfast, on which subject there were diplomatic words here.

"It was impossible to play," Capello said. "There was snow and rain and the pitch was really wet." Was there an advantage for Russia in having

the match called off? Quite the opposite. "For this game Northern Ireland had two important players suspended. For the next game they will be OK. For us it is the same. No advantage."

In fact Russia's advantage in Group F is already palpable. Capello seems certain to be in Brazil next year, as of course does Luiz Felipe Scolari, three months and two defeats into the job as Brazil's firefighter-in-chief as preparations for that tantalising Hexa, or sixth World Cup, continue to fizzle along. In terms of sub-plots this friendly is, in its own way, a tale of two men whose paths have been oddly intertwined on Big Football's managerial carousel. Scolari almost took the England job but ended up at Chelsea a year later. Capello was talked up as a candidate for Chelsea's managerial ejection seat both before and after he ended up with England. Both are now in charge of future World Cup hosts, Capello with Russia, whose successful "cluster city" bid outgunned England's Willers-Becks-

beachfront and strip clubs in some of the back alleys, this is known by some as the Bermuda Triangle because once you go in, you are never sure if you will come out.

For the hotel this can sometimes be a problem when drunken guests bring back girls who subsequently slip them a sleeping potion and clean them out.

"We warn them, but when they've had their third caipirinha and come back with a lady, they forget all about security. Then they complain to us," said Filho.

Such problems, he says, are a sign that Brazil is a developing country that is still overcoming a historical legacy of dictatorship and slavery (the statue outside the hotel is of Princess Isabel, who made the proclamation that abolished the practice in 1888, making Brazil the largest major country in the world to do so).

The Windsor hotel group exemplifies the country's friendliness, *alegria da vida* (joy of life) and considerable efforts to raise living standards.

Transport will be a major issue, particularly given the vast distances that many teams will have to travel. Hodgson warned last year that the World Cup could pose "major logistical problems".

Brazil wants to use the upcoming mega events to accelerate development. The government is spending some €12bn in preparation for the World Cup alone. To spread the benefit, games will be played in a dozen stadiums spread across thousands of miles, from the tropical humidity of the Amazon region to the cool southern coastlines.

Many stadium projects have been plagued with delays as a result of strikes,

bad weather and poor planning. Rio's iconic Maracana – which is being extensively refurbished – has missed several completion deadlines. The latest date for an unveiling is 25 April, but contractors believe this is unrealistic and work may continue closer to the Brazil-England friendly on 2 June.

Brazil and Fifa say the stadiums will be ready in time for the World Cup. But there are still some concerns about whether they will be operational for this year's warm-up event, the Confederations Cup.

Clearly it is as much of a challenge for Brazil as for England to manage expectations distorted by endless hype and disappointment. But that won't stop both teams and their supporters from dreaming of a return to the Maracana for next year's final.

Black Caviar, Australia's unbeaten mare, could be sent on the holiday of a lifetime this summer. She is being lined up to be Royal Ascot's star turn followed by a date with the record-breaking colt Frankel, a prospective mating which has the international bloodstock industry salivating.

A foal from the mating – in Newmarket, possibly in August – would be feted as the progeny of the two best horses of the last half-century. An equine equivalent, perhaps, of Marilyn Monroe and Errol Flynn, or Penelope Cruz and Johnny Depp.

Peter Moody, who trains Black Caviar, said his mare could attempt a 2013 Ascot double – the King's Stand and the Diamond Jubilee. She seemed sure to be retired after scraping home in the Diamond Jubilee last June but the mare made a comeback in February and extended her unbeaten record to 24 at Moonee Valley on Friday.

"Australian racing really deserves her but the feeling I am getting from the owners is that they would very much like to come again [to Ascot]," said Moody.

Black Caviar's owners would have to pay £125,000 to be covered by Frankel, who retired to stud in Newmarket after a 14-race unbeaten run. Frankel's biggest successes came at a mile or 10 furlongs, while the mare is known as the best sprinter in the world.

"I joked about it previously but I don't think it would be a silly mating," Moody said. "Physically they are quite well matched and it would certainly create a lot of interest – a colt or a filly by Frankel out of Black Caviar."

Chris Cook's selections
Lingfield Park
2.10 Prince Of Burma 2.40 Tebbit
3.10 Valdwad (nb) 3.40 Red Larkspur (nap)
4.10 Mysterical 4.40 Cozy Tiger 5.10 Chrissycross

Dave offering at a time when Don Fabio himself was rather grouchy backing the claims of his ten employers.

Beyond this it is Capello and Russia who are in better fettle. Perhaps scenting a notable first victory over Brazil the Italian was relatively engaged on the subject of tonight's opposition. "I watched Brazil versus Italy on television," he said. "They suffered on the counter-attack but I have read that Thiago Silva will play [at Stamford Bridge], one of the fast-

'My time at Chelsea was not as bad as people say'

Luiz Felipe Scolari



est defenders in the world, so probably they will not be so vulnerable. Brazil's front four are very fast, very technical players on the counter-attack. We will need to be very compact."

Scolari appeared after an open training session in which Brazil, watched by a shivering mob of domestic media, strolled through their way through a set of cheerland enjoyably noisy drills; the noticeably slight and coltish Neymar, linked to Chelsea for the

past few years, drawing most attention from the photographers. Earlier Brazil's captain, David Luiz, had suggested Scolari had "great memories" of his time at Chelsea, where he was sacked after eight months, and that winning a friendly here would be "the cherry on top of the cake".

And Scolari, as ever, was similarly upbeat, even voicing a mild note of personal defiance over his time in west London. "It is really a joy to come back here. It was a time [at Chelsea] I really enjoyed. The only thing I didn't like is the cold. I had totally forgotten about that."

"I believe my time at Chelsea wasn't as bad as people say. I can't really say if my team might have won anything but the numbers don't lie. We were third in the Premier League, we had qualified for the next stage of the Champions League.

"Actually I want to thank Chelsea for the chance to come and work here. Living in London with my family was one of the greatest experiences of my life."

Sport

Torquay find the answer is practically Knill

Football League in focus

Interim manager gives Gulls a lift in League Two battle with York to avoid the drop, writes Jeremy Alexander

Not all interim managers are unwanted. Alan Knill brought Torquay United their second win in five days at Plainmoor when they beat York City 2-1 on Saturday as the scramble to stay in League Two grows ever more desperate. A week ago five clubs, including Torquay, were equal bottom on 40 points, with York on 41. Now York, with a newer but nominally more permanent manager in Nigel Worthington, are 23rd. Torquay engaged Knill last month after five successive defeats under Shaun Taylor, the first-team coach who himself was standing in for Martin Ling, absent on sick leave. The run extended to seven defeats – and 11 games without a win – before their victory over Chesterfield last Tuesday. Two away draws before that suggest Knill may have instilled the guts to survive.

York looked short in that area. They have not won in 15 games, 11 under Gary Mills and now four under Worthington that have yielded one point. "We need big characters to take responsibility and make things happen," he said. On New Year's Day, when they last won, they were 14th, six points from the play-off places and 12 from relegation, with Torquay 15th. Since then the Conference Spectre has haunted both in their descent. Parachutes here come not in cash but mental strength.

Both have been there, York escaping in May after eight seasons, Torquay in 2009 after two. Pity the Blue Square Premier, which in any sensible arrangement would be the fifth division instead of outer darkness. Almost half its clubs have been in the Premier League, whose omnipotence has crushed the Football League and a wealth (or perhaps poverty) of clubs that are heart and soul of the professional game with homegrown fanbases. Indeed the top few, with daily press conferences leading to a breakfast diet of puffed chaff,

seem determined to deny the majority the oxygen of publicity.

On Saturday they looked even to control the weather, thereby frustrating Leagues One and Two, but Torquay, with a local board of true fans who have invested generously, defied them and got their reward. It was almost a repeat of Tuesday's win. Elliot Benyon forced them ahead in a post-corner, pinball scramble and Ryan Jarvis, with a run and 25-yard shot after 23 minutes, made it comfortable until Josh Carson, a lively loanee from Ipswich, clear on goal, was brought down by Thomas Cruise – a red card for one – a penalty for Richard Cresswell, 20 minutes to go and regrets at 50 minutes' loss of focus.

Chris Smith, York's captain and self-appointed man over, roared upfield from central defence. In the end the proof of the pudding – and the pitch was certainly that – lay in the beating, which Torquay duly delivered, but their fans were put

through agonies of tension before the gulls swooped and squawked in celebration. And it could have been so different if York's Ashley Chambers had buried a header a minute after Benyon's opener.

Both managers are targeting 50 points, more than enough most years, but Worthington had better get cracking. He enjoyed a good spell at Norwich but York appear to have been attracted by his five-match stint in 2007, when he kept Leicester City in the Championship. Perhaps, when there are only five games left, he will emerge from his dug-out. Knill visibly urged his men on with regular knee-bending.

His appointment as manager is to the end of the season while Ling remains on the payroll as team manager. A year ago he took the club to the play-offs and they were almost living up to that until he succumbed to a stress-related illness. His popularity through the club is undimmed, though some fans prefer the current 4-4-2 to his 4-5-1. But until 27 April Torquay's motto is "Knill desperandum".



Alan Knill, interim manager, has been appointed to the end of the season and lifted Torquay to 19th place with successive wins

Black Caviar and Frankel lined up for blind date of the century

Racing
Chris Corrigan

Race of the day

4.10 Lingfield Fuel Communications Maiden Stakes (3yo, Class 5) 6f, £2,750
1 (5) 0020-2 Limit Up (10) M Johnston 9.5 J Fanning10
2 (4) 434- Mysterical (284,8F) R Hanson 9.5 R Hughes19
3 (1) 5- Clearing (159) Boyle 9.0 M Davies12
4 (1) 5- Spiritress (94) Miss Z Davson 9.0 J Keniry18
5 (2) 64- Uganda Glory (164) G Baker 9.0 A Cuthbert15
Setting 4-5 Mysterical, 2-1 Limit Up, 9-1 Uganda Glory, 16-1 Clearing, 20-5 Spiritress

Form guide Limit Up was inconsistent in four starts last term, running close at Ripon between heavy defeats the other three runs, but he was beaten just a neck in a three-runner affair at Ripon on his reappearance. The benefit of a recent run may give him the edge over Mysterical, who showed promise in all three starts as a juvenile and should enjoy the surface. Uganda Glory was beaten on soft ground at Bath but this surface may prove to her liking.

At The Curragh last night Aidan O'Brien worked a large force of his horses after racing. He galloped 68 in four groups. An absentee was Kingsbarns, who is recovering from a foot infection which could see him miss the 2,000 Guineas in early May.

With many of the participants difficult to identify, Camelot stood out from everything else – cruising up from the rear in his group to pass the post in front without being extended.

O'Brien said later that Mars would possibly run in the 2,000 Guineas, adding: "The three Henrys [sons of Henry then aviator] – Cristoforo Colombo, Pedro The Great and George Vancouver – all worked well. All three will also run in the 2,000 Guineas. George Vancouver went really well and he's one to have a fiver on each way in the Guineas.

"Snow Queen probably looked a filly for the 1,000 Guineas. I was very, very happy with Moth as well. Battle Of Marengo will probably start off in a Derby trial."

Chris Cook's selections

Lingfield Park
2.10 Prince Of Burma 2.40 Tebbit
3.10 Valdwad (nb) 3.40 Red Larkspur (nap)
4.10 Mysterical 4.40 Cozy Tiger 5.10 Chrissycross