GREENHAUS STRATEGY SERIES

FIFA 2026:
A STRATEGIC GUIDE FOR DMO'S
WHERE THE REAL OPPORTUNITY IS
(and How to Define It for Your Destination)

The 2026 FIFA World Cup represents one of the most significant global travel moments the United States has ever hosted. Millions of visitors will arrive seeking a bucket-list experience.

For DMOs, this creates a genuine opportunity to engage domestic and global travelers — but that opportunity is more complex than it may appear.

> *"At Greenhaus, we do not view FIFA as a guaranteed win or even a mandatory marketing effort. We see it as a variable opportunity that can drive very different outcomes depending on where a destination is located, how accessible it is, and what the organization is ultimately trying to achieve."*

This guide is intentionally practical. It is designed to help DMOs think clearly about FIFA, identify where real opportunity exists, and translate that thinking into a realistic, actionable strategy.

IDENTIFYING YOUR REAL FIFA OPPORTUNITY

FIFA is big, but this potential scale does not necessarily determine its value to DMOs. The most effective FIFA strategies begin by clearly defining the destination's goals. For some, success looks like immediate visitation. For others, it's about building long-term brand equity.

> *"FIFA does not need to solve every challenge to be worth engaging with."*

In many cases, its value comes from supporting one or two specific objectives rather than trying to do everything at once. The key is alignment. When opportunity is aligned with organizational goals, it becomes easier to define your approach.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *What organizational goals could FIFA reasonably support over the next 1-3 years?*
- *Is success defined by immediate visitation, longer-term consideration, or future demand growth?*
- *Which KPIs would indicate FIFA is contributing meaningfully to those goals?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Step back from channels and tactics. Ask how FIFA could realistically support your broader tourism goals, not replace them. Clarify whether you are driving short-term visitation or long-term brand consideration, and let that answer guide every downstream decision.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Scale doesn't equal value. Success comes from aligning FIFA opportunities with specific organizational goals—whether that's immediate heads in beds or long-term brand building.

UNDERSTANDING THE FIFA TRAVELER IN PRACTICE

FIFA travelers are not typical leisure visitors. Their trips are anchored around match schedules, ticket availability, and transportation logistics, which significantly shape behavior. Most visitors arrive with tightly planned itineraries and are cost-conscious due to surging prices.

> *"Understanding this mindset does not limit opportunity. It clarifies what types of experiences are most likely to resonate."*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *How much flexibility do travelers realistically have to add experiences in your market?*
- *What friction exists in getting to your destination once travelers arrive?*
- *Are your most compelling experiences easy to understand and act on within a short window?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Assume limited flexibility. Design experiences that feel easy, rewarding, and additive rather than disruptive. The more seamlessly a destination fits into a traveler's existing plans, the more likely it is to be considered.

KEY TAKEAWAY

FIFA travelers are logistics-driven. Win them over by offering low-friction, additive experiences that fit seamlessly into their existing plans.

THE FIFA TIMELINE & OPPORTUNITY WINDOWS

FIFA unfolds across distinct phases, each with different traveler mindsets.

PRE-TRIP PLANNING

NOW — MAY 2026

The most influential phase. Travelers are booking flights and deciding how to structure their overall experience.

IN-MARKET EXPERIENCE

JUNE — JULY 2026

Schedules tighten. Travelers seek contrast, balance, or relief from the intensity of match days.

POST-TRIP RELATIONSHIP

ONGOING

Reinforcing familiarity and encouraging future travel rather than driving immediate conversion.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *During which phase are travelers most open to considering your destination?*
- *Do you have the resources to compete effectively in-market, or is pre-trip influence more realistic?*
- *How could post-trip engagement extend the value of exposure?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Rather than trying to be everywhere, identify which phase offers the greatest influence and concentrate efforts there. Competition is high; focus is critical.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Don't try to be everywhere at once. Identify the specific time window—Pre-Trip, In-Market, or Post-Trip—where your destination can wield the most influence.

DECIDING WHETHER AND HOW TO ENGAGE

THE ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

CONSIDER ENGAGEMENT IF...

- ✓ You are a host city or within reasonable proximity.
- ✓ You offer overflow lodging or pricing relief.
- ✓ You can clearly explain why a FIFA traveler would add your destination.
- ✓ You have defined success metrics beyond impressions.

PROCEED CAUTIOUSLY IF...

- ! Geographic relevance is limited or inconvenient.
- ! Your destination lacks a clear point of differentiation.
- ! Investment would displace higher-performing programs.
- ! Success is defined primarily by visibility rather than outcomes.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *What is the smallest level of FIFA engagement that could still deliver value?*
- *Where would restraint improve overall performance?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Use the checklist to shape participation, not restrict it. The objective is to right-size engagement so that FIFA activity complements existing strategy rather than overwhelming it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Right-size your engagement. Use our checklist to ensure your FIFA investment complements your existing strategy rather than overwhelming it.

HOST CITIES & SURROUNDING DESTINATIONS

Host cities and surrounding destinations play fundamentally different roles. While both can benefit, the nature of that opportunity—and how success should be defined—varies significantly.

Host Cities

STRATEGY: SHAPING EXPERIENCE

Host cities benefit from built-in demand. The strategic opportunity is not convincing visitors to choose the destination — it is shaping how they experience it. Success is about relevance, timing, and storytelling.

Surrounding Destinations

STRATEGY: EARNING INCLUSION

Visitation must be earned. These destinations succeed by offering contrast, balance, and added value (like pricing relief or restorative experiences) within a FIFA itinerary.

> *"Proximity matters, but purpose matters more. Travelers need a clear, compelling reason to deviate from their plans."*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *Are you operating from a position of built-in demand, or are you trying to earn a place in the itinerary?*
- *Where does reinforcing the host city experience create more value than competing with it?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Understanding whether your destination is primarily shaping experience or earning inclusion should guide every decision. This clarity helps align stakeholders and focus investment where it can realistically influence behavior.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Know your role. Host cities shape the experience; surrounding destinations must earn their place by offering contrast, relief, and value.

MEASURING VALUE BEYOND THE EVENT

FIFA's impact extends beyond the final match when measurement and follow-up are planned intentionally.

> *"Marketers should define success metrics that capture both short-term outcomes and long-term value."*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *Which audiences are most valuable to retain post-FIFA?*
- *How will data collected during FIFA be used later?*
- *What signals will indicate future visitation influence?*
- *How does FIFA measurement integrate with existing reporting frameworks?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

Ensure data strategies are in place before campaigns launch. Your DMO's goals (e.g., immediate visitation vs. long-term brand equity) will define your KPIs. If long-term goals are at play, custom KPIs may be required beyond standard room nights.

KEY TAKEAWAY

FIFA travelers are logistics-driven. Win them over by offering low-friction, additive experiences that fit seamlessly into their existing plans.

UNDERSTANDING AND TARGETING FIFA AUDIENCES

One of the biggest opportunities and challenges of FIFA World Cup 2026 is the diversity of audiences it attracts. There is no single "FIFA traveler." Instead, FIFA brings together multiple audience types, each with different motivations.

International Match Travelers

Value clarity and cultural relevance. Often represent long-term value rather than just immediate volume.

Domestic Out-of-Market

More flexible. Strong candidates for repeat visitation and short add-on experiences.

Drive-Market Visitors

Spontaneous. Seek tactical, short-term opportunities like half-day trips.

Non-Ticketed Fans

Engage through Fan Fests. Represents awareness and brand visibility opportunity.

> *"Trying to reach everyone often results in diluted impact and unclear outcomes."*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *Which FIFA audiences are most likely to consider your destination given location and accessibility?*
- *Are you optimizing for immediate visitation, future travel, or both?*
- *Which audiences can you realistically influence during pre-trip planning versus in-market?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

FIFA audience strategy should be intentional and prioritized. Marketers should identify which segments align most closely with their goals and focus investment accordingly. Clarity prevents overinvestment in low-return segments.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Pick your player. Identify the specific audience segment that aligns with your destination's strengths and ignore the rest to avoid diluted impact.

THE "ESCAPE FROM FIFA" AUDIENCE

When Locals Become the Opportunity

For many destinations — particularly those within driving distance of host cities — one of the most valuable audiences during FIFA may not be visitors arriving for the matches at all. It may be the host city locals themselves.

As FIFA intensifies, host cities become louder, more crowded, and logistically complex. For residents, the very elements that make FIFA exciting for visitors can create friction in everyday life. In those moments, familiar nearby destinations often become more attractive.

> *"FIFA can amplify existing demand patterns rather than introduce new ones."*

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *Is your destination already a known escape or feeder market for nearby host cities?*
- *Do you offer experiences that contrast with the intensity of FIFA environments (space, calm, nature, food, wellness)?*
- *Could FIFA weekends or peak match periods create incremental demand from local residents?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

For destinations within reasonable driving distance of host cities, FIFA should be viewed not only as an opportunity to drive incremental room nights but also as a high-return channel for communicating with familiar audiences.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Look closer to home. When the host city gets chaotic, locals will look for an escape. Be their solution.

WHY A CUSTOM APPROACH MATTERS

No two destinations share the same mix of geography, goals, budget, and competitive context.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR DESTINATION

- *What assumptions should be pressure-tested before committing resources?*
- *Where does customization create efficiency or clarity?*
- *How will this strategy evolve as new information emerges?*

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

For destinations within reasonable driving distance of host cities, FIFA should be viewed not only as an opportunity to drive incremental room nights but also as a high-return channel for communicating with familiar audiences.

THE GREENHAUS APPROACH

LEAD WITH STRATEGY, NOT JUST HOPE

We work with DMOs to clarify goals, assess fit, identify the most valuable opportunity windows, and design right-sized approaches that balance ambition with realism.

READY TO DEFINE YOUR 2026 STRATEGY?

Don't leave your opportunity to chance. Start with a Custom Opportunity Assessment.

schedule your assessment

contact our team

What We Will Uncover

- ✓ Where opportunity truly exists for you
- ✓ The exact role FIFA should play in your mix
- ✓ How to ground optimism in unique strengths

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