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

Final preparations underway for JFA training camp

The clock is ticking. In about a week it will be time for Saas-Fee to welcome the Japanese national football team to the beautiful glacier village. The final preparations are currently underway to make sure everything is perfect for them.

The Japanese team confirmed at the start of winter that Saas-Fee would be their training camp for the World Cup in South Africa. The team will stay in the village from 26 May to 5 June, meaning their arrival in the Valais is now only a little more than a week away. The excitement is mounting as the village works hard to make sure everything is ready on time.

After months of preparation behind the scenes, evidence of this hard work is becoming clear for all to see. In late April, work began on a FIFA-sized football pitch at Kalbermatten sports ground. Existing sports facilities such as the skate park and the synthetic turf, basketball and volleyball pitches have temporarily had to make way, and the field has also been enlarged using extra soil covered with sand, fleece and, of course, a layer of "sacred" turf. The tiny village of Saas-Fee can now boast a world-class football field, and anyone interested can follow everything taking place on it via the webcam on the Saas-Fee/Saastal website (www.saas-fee.ch/en/livecam). While the turf gets on with binding to the soil, more construction work is being carried out around the pitch. A 2.5 metre high fence will soon be erected around the field and a press tent is being constructed for the visiting media representatives, among them an estimated 60 from Japan. The tent will be equipped with everything the journalists need including high-speed wireless internet access from Valaiscom. Spectator stands for people attending the open training sessions are also being set up at the edge of the pitch. There is still a lot of work ahead in the coming days.

Behind the scenes other preparations are also underway, including preparations for a reception to welcome the Japanese Football Association (JFA) on 26 May and for the daily activities programme for journalists – when they are not busy interviewing the footballers. Those who sign up for the programme will get a taste of the amazing variety of the Saas Valley by participating in excursions, tours of the village and

museum visits. The programme will also feature a special evening event where the visiting journalists, organisers and officials can meet and socialise in a relaxed atmosphere. Other tasks a lot of people are busy with include general planning, allocating contact personnel, producing visitor information in Japanese, fielding questions from media representatives and organising advance visits to the training camp. One thing is for sure, this year May will not be a quiet month when nothing happens in Saas-Fee.

Open training sessions – watching the Japanese work their magic

Little information has been released about the open training sessions so far, but it now seems that three will take place for sure: one on Wednesday 26 in the afternoon (around 17:00h) and two on Thursday 27 May - one in the morning (around 10:00h) and one in the afternoon (around 16:00h). Other open sessions may be announced by the JFA during the camp. During the different closed training sessions the last 15 minutes will be always open for public. After almost each session (open and closed) journalists will have the opportunity to meet members of the team and carry out interviews in the "mix area".

Those who want to see the Japanese in action but cannot make it to one of their open training sessions will have another chance to see them at one of their two friendly matches. On 30 May Japan will play against England in Graz and on 4 June against the Ivory Coast in Sion. Saas-Fee/Saastal has organised extra buses to take spectators to the matches. If you would like one of the limited places on these buses, please e-mail the Saas-Fee/Saastal tourist office at mice@saas-fee.com. Seats must be booked at least two days in advance.

Japanese Ambassador in Saas-Fee

To the delight of the organisers, Ichiro Komatsu the Japanese ambassador to Switzerland has confirmed that he will travel from Bern to greet the Japanese team in Saas-Fee on 26 May. Representatives of the Saas-Fee community, Saas-Fee/Saastal Tourism and Switzerland Tourism in Tokyo will all be present to hear him make a short speech to welcome the team and the other Japanese guests to the glacier village. The event will also receive the enthusiastic support of 110 primary school pupils from Saas-Fee, who will paint banners welcoming our far-eastern guests and entertain them with local songs. Further musical entertainment will be provided by musicians in traditional dress from the group "Alphornfreunde vom Gletscherdorf" (means: alphorn friends from the glacier village). After a general reception on the post square, the Japanese team will take the Allalino train to Hotel Schweizerhof Gourmet

& Spa, where they will live exclusive for the duration of the training camp.

Other hotels providing special accommodation for our Japanese guests are the Best Western Metropol Grand Hotel, which will welcome about 60 Japanese journalists, and the Hotel Ferienart Resort & Spa, which will host other journalists and officials. During their stay, the hotel's restaurant Del Ponte will complement its usual menu with a range of Japanese specialities. Lots of other hotels and restaurants will also open early at the end of May to welcome our guests. Everyone in the area is committed to making sure Saas-Fee rises to the occasion and is looking its very best for our Japanese guests.
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