August 17, 2015

Overview

The eighth Rugby World Cup will be held in the United Kingdom over the course of 44 days from September 18 to October 31. The 48-match Tournament is the biggest sporting event hosted in the UK since the Olympic Summer Games in 2012. Twenty rugby teams from around the world will participate, including teams from the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Wales, Japan, South Africa, Namibia, Argentina, Uruguay, France, Georgia, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Samoa, and Tonga.

As many as 2.3 million ticket holders are expected to attend Rugby World Cup tournaments, in addition to the thousands who are expected to watch the games from the Fanzones and various other establishments streaming them throughout the UK. A number of U.S. private-sector organizations will participate through sponsorships and coverage of the event. U.S. private-sector organizations with operations and travelers in Rugby World Cup cities may also be impacted by disruptions and security measures related to the Tournament. The following threat assessment provides an overview of security challenges surrounding the Rugby World Cup, including crime, terrorism, and protest activity.

Rugby World Cup Locations

The Rugby World Cup matches will be held at 13 stadiums in 11 cities: London, Birmingham, Brighton & Hove, Cardiff, Exeter, Gloucester, Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Milton Keynes, and Newcastle. These cities and the city of Rugby will also host 15 official Rugby World Cup Fanzones; the Fanzones will be pre-designated areas where the general public can view matches and participate in other Tournament-related events. In the lead up to the September 18 opening ceremony in London, the Webb Ellis Cup, the Rugby World Cup trophy, will travel through England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Ireland on a 100-day Trophy Tour. The Rugby World Cup website maintains a list of Trophy Tour stops and events.
London

Seventeen of the 48 Rugby World Cup games will be held in London across three venues: Wembley Stadium, Queen Elizabeth (QE) Olympic Park Stadium, and Twickenham Stadium. Twickenham Stadium will host the opening and closing ceremonies (September 18 and October 31), as well as matches on September 19, September 26, October 3, October 10, October 17-18, and October 24-25. Matches will be held at Wembley on September 20 and September 27 and at QE Olympic Park Stadium September 23, September 24, October 4, October 7, and October 30.

London will also host four official Rugby World Cup Fanzones in Wembley Park, QE Olympic Park Stadium, Old Deer Park, and Trafalgar Square. The Fanzone in Trafalgar Square will be open from October 24 through October 31.

The 2015 National Football League (NFL) Block Party will coincide with the Rugby World Cup. The NFL Block Party will be held on October 24 on Regent Street, between Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus. This world-famous stretch will be closed to traffic during the event. In prior years, the NFL block party drew over 500,000 attendees. In addition to the Block Party, the NFL will hold two games at Wembley Stadium during the Rugby World Cup, on October 4 and October 25.

Birmingham

Two Rugby World Cup matches, on September 26-27, will be held at Birmingham’s Villa Park stadium. A Fanzone will also operate at the city’s Eastside Park. The city is located approximately 110 miles northwest of London.

Brighton & Hove

Two Rugby World Cup matches, on September 19-20, will be held in Brighton & Hove’s Brighton Community Stadium. A Fanzone will also operate on the city’s Madeira Drive. The city is located approximately 50 miles south of London.

Cardiff

Eight Rugby World Cup matches, on September 19-20, and 23; October 1-2, and 11; and 17-18, will be held in Cardiff’s Millennium Stadium. A Fanzone will also operate in Cardiff Arms Park. The city is located approximately 150 miles west of London.

Exeter

Three Rugby World Cup matches, on September 29; and October 7 and 11, will be held in Exeter’s Sandy Park stadium. A Fanzone will also operate in the city’s Northernhay Gardens. The city is located approximately 170 miles west of London.
**Gloucester**

Four Rugby World Cup matches, on September 19, 23, and 25; and October 11, will be held in Gloucester’s Kingsholm Stadium. Fanzones will operate at the Gloucester Docks. The city is located approximately 100 miles northwest of London.

**Leeds**

Two Rugby World Cup matches, on September 26-27, will be held in the Leeds Elland Road Stadium. A Fanzone will also operate in the city’s Millennium Square. The city is located approximately 200 miles north of London.

**Leicester**

Three Rugby World Cup matches, on October 4, 6, and 11, will be held at the Leicester City Stadium. A Fanzone will also operate in the city’s Victoria Park. The city is located approximately 100 miles northwest of London.

**Manchester**

One Rugby World Cup match, on October 10, will be held at the Manchester City Stadium. A Fanzone will also operate in the city’s Albert Square. The city is located approximately 180 miles northwest of London.

**Milton Keynes**

Three Rugby World Cup matches, on October 1, 3, and 6, will be held at Milton Keynes’s Stadium MK. A Fanzone will also operate in the city’s Campbell Park. The city is located approximately 50 miles northwest of London.

**Newcastle**

Three Rugby World Cup matches, on October 3 and 9-10, will be held at Newcastle’s St. James’ Park stadium. A Fanzone will also operate in the city’s Science Central. The city is located approximately 275 miles north of London.

**Rugby**

A Fanzone will operate in Rugby’s Old Market Place. Though no matches will be held in Rugby, as the birthplace of the sport, it is being featured in Tournament programming, and may receive an influx of tourist interest during the event. The city is located approximately 80 miles northwest of London.

**Transportation**

Rail links exist between all of the Rugby World Cup host cities and London; rail travel is safe and efficient, and train travel times between London and all host cities except Newcastle, which is the host city located the farthest from London, are under three hours. All host cities are also
connected by a well-developed highway and road network; while road conditions are generally good in most locations in the UK, foreign drivers should be mindful that UK vehicular traffic travels on the left and that steering wheels are located on the right side of the car. Flights between most of the cities and London are also available. Transportation information for each host city has been made available on the Travel Information section of the Rugby World Cup website. A trip planner is also available for spectators and participants who will travel between host cities.

London and other large cities in the UK regularly experience traffic congestion. Traffic congestion is expected to be exacerbated during Rugby World Cup matches and events, especially in London, due to the influx of visitors, as well as some possible road closures and parking/traffic restrictions in the vicinity of Tournament venues and viewing areas. Tournament organizers are encouraging participants and spectators to use public transportation during the matches. In London, organizers plan to bolster some public-transportation routes by increasing frequency and operating hours of trains/buses. Additionally, shuttle buses will be chartered to transport spectators to tournament venues. U.S. Embassy London maintains guidance for using taxis in London.

Security has been boosted at the Folkestone Terminal (UK) and Calais Terminal (France) of the Channel Tunnel (aka the “Chunnel”). Recent security incidents related to attempts by illegal immigrants to cross the Channel Tunnel from France to the UK have resulted in brief rail service suspensions and disruptions. Travelers planning to transit via the Channel Tunnel should be mindful of the possibility of transportation delays and disruptions in the event of additional migrant-related incidents.

Crime

Overall, crime rates throughout the UK are generally low and violent crime is not expected to pose a significant concern for visitors. The most prevalent security concern for visitors is petty crime/theft, which occurs most frequently in crowded public areas, such as tourist attractions and public transportation. Petty criminals may take advantage of the influx of visitors to host cities, though crime data suggest that crime actually dropped in London during the Olympic Summer Games in 2012. Travelers can mitigate the risk of becoming victims of crime by practicing good situational awareness and taking common sense precautions with their valuables.

Per crime statistics maintained by UKCrimeStats, London has the highest crime rates in the UK, due to its status as a commercial, tourism, and population hub. Manchester has similar rates in most crime categories except for theft. UKCrimeStats offers a comprehensive look at the types of crimes occurring in a given location and can be drilled down to the street level. Police.uk, a website hosted by the Home Office, also allows users to view crime maps by location.

The London Metropolitan Police maintains a crime map for London. Crime rates are classified from Low to High and locations can be drilled down to the sub ward.
Crime rates surrounding Twickenham Stadium and Wembley Stadium are currently rated average, while crime rates around QE Olympic Park Stadium are currently rated high. Below are screen shots of June 2015 crime statistics for wards in which each stadium is located.

**Twickenham Stadium**

![Map of Twickenham](image)

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Wembley Stadium

QE Olympic Park Stadium

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Spectator violence surrounding sporting events occurs occasionally in the UK, most frequently during soccer matches. Though not as prevalent, spectator violence during rugby games has also occurred; it is possible during Rugby World Cup matches, especially those that involve UK teams. Hooligans linked to local organized crime and nationalist groups are often behind spectator violence in the UK. Violence can occur both at stadiums and outside the match venues, possibly at public establishments televising the games. Travelers should maintain distance from any fans exhibiting aggressive behavior and avoid confrontations. Violent spectator groups do not typically target the general public.

Ticket Sales

Tickets to the Rugby World Cup must be purchased from an authorized retailer or reseller. Visitors should be aware of scams, fake Tournament ticket websites, and unlicensed ticket retailers. The official ticketing website for the Rugby World Cup is https://tickets.rugbyworldcup.com/. An information campaign has been launched to inform ticket buyers of signs of ticket fraud. Tournament organizers have designed an “Official Checker” tool to help ticket buyers determine if vendors are authorized. Organizers urge ticket holders to report unauthorized sales to legal@england2015.com.

Terrorism

Transnational Terrorism

There are currently no known credible terrorist threats against the Rugby World Cup, its sponsors, or participating athletes. However, the high-profile nature of the event and the involvement of Western athletes and companies could make it an attractive target for terrorist groups who have demonstrated the intent to target Western Europe.

The terrorism threat in the UK was raised to “Severe,” the second highest level, at the end of August 2014, and it has remained unaltered since. “Severe” indicates that an attack is highly likely. “Critical” – the highest level – indicates that an attack is expected imminently. According to the UK Home Office, the decision to raise the alert level last August was based on “the developments in Syria and Iraq, where terrorist groups are planning attacks against the West.” This threat has arguably continued to grow as more British nationals travel to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters. According to some estimates, the UK has one of the highest numbers of foreign fighters of Western European countries. For more information on the ISIL threat, please see OSAC’s ISIL Outside Iraq and Syria: UK report.

In addition to foreign fighters, ISIL has made threats via social media and propaganda literature against the UK, likely in the hopes of inspiring lone-wolf attacks and homegrown supporters. The UK, along with several other countries, has been singled out in ISIL messaging, including in a call to arms that stated that “it is very important that attacks take place in every country that has entered into the alliance against the Islamic State, especially the U.S., UK, France, Australia, and Germany.” In May, the hashtag #LondonAttack was circulated on Twitter along with images of prominent landmarks and locations in London. Threats have also been made.
against major events, including commemorations of Victory Over Japan Day, Armed Forces Day, and Remembrance Day. These threats are concerning not because they indicate ISIL’s capability to directly carry out such attacks, but rather because they highlight the group’s intentions and may inspire a radicalized individual in-country to carry out an attack.

Lone-wolf and homegrown terrorists inspired by transnational terrorist organizations and with access to small arms are deemed to be the most acute threat to the Rugby World Cup. An attack during the Tournament may resemble those that have recently occurred in Western Europe. Most have involved a lone attacker armed with easily obtainable weapons and have been directed against military, law enforcement, and Jewish targets, as well as some media outlets that have published potentially offensive material related to Islam. A suspected Islamist extremist was charged in London in mid-July for planning to attack members of the U.S. military in the UK. British authorities are also preparing for these types of attack, as highlighted by a terror training drill that was held in London in June. The drill involved an active shooter rather than explosive devices or a suicide bomber.

British authorities are capable of detecting and deterring terrorist activity and have foiled a number of Islamist extremist plots in recent years and detained dozens of suspected Islamist extremists. Authorities have also increased counterterror legislation making it easier to track and prosecute extremists and have increased their preparedness levels for the Rugby World Cup. A testament to the capability of British law enforcement and security forces is that despite the numerous threats, there hasn’t been an Islamist terrorist attack in the UK since the May 22, 2013 murder of a British soldier in London, and authorities have successfully secured a number of major events, including most prominently the 2012 Olympic Summer Games.

While major events, such as the Rugby World Cup, may be attractive targets for terrorist groups, attacks against them would presumably require more organization and planning, therefore, making the perpetrators more susceptible to detection. An Islamist extremist inspired by transnational terrorists but with limited resources and support, would be more likely to pick a softer target than Tournament venues. Though there is no known specific and credible threat against the U.S. private sector in the UK at this time, the State Department’s Worldwide Caution warns that “current information suggests that ISIL, al-Qa’ida, its affiliated organizations, and other terrorist groups continue to plan terrorist attacks against U.S. and Western interests in Europe.”

Domestic Terrorism

Irish Republican dissident groups, including the Real IRA, Continuity IRA, and Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH) remain active in the UK. Authorities projected that dissident activity would surge ahead of the May general election and the upcoming centennial of the 1916 Rising, and that the groups’ capabilities have increased. Despite this, the threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorist groups in Great Britain is currently rated only as “Moderate,” which indicates that “an attack is possible but not likely.” It is ranked at “Severe” in Northern Ireland, where dissident groups mainly operate; Northern Ireland shares a border with Ireland but lies across the Irish Sea from mainland UK.
Irish Republican dissidents have not carried out an attack in mainland UK since August 2001, when they were linked to a car bomb that injured seven in London. In February 2014, dissidents were linked to seven letter bombs that were delivered to army recruitment offices in England. Dissident groups are regularly linked to security incidents in Northern Ireland, which often involve low-level improvised explosive devices. Due to these ongoing tensions, matches between Ireland and England could be potential flashpoints for unrest. Currently, the two are not scheduled to go head to head unless they end up in the semifinal or final rounds.

**Protest Activity**

There are currently no known protests planned against the Rugby World Cup, though disparate activist groups may take advantage of the Tournament to rally for their causes in its spotlight. Protests occur regularly in the UK, especially in London, and it is possible that some unrelated demonstrations may coincide with Tournament matches. Protests in the UK are generally peaceful but all protests and demonstrations should be avoided.

**Single-Issue Groups**

Single-issue groups, like environmentalist or animal rights groups, may organize demonstrations in the spotlight of the Rugby World Cup. Anti-badger cull groups are active in the UK and hold fairly regular demonstrations. The Badger Trust is organizing events in the UK on October 6 for National Badger Day and demonstrations are possible. Single-issue groups may also form umbrella organizations to coordinate activities and achieve greater impact. As of this writing, there are currently no known planned demonstrations by single-issue groups during the Tournament. Protests by these groups are generally peaceful and are unlikely to cause significant disruptions during the Rugby World Cup.

**Far-right**

Far-right groups, including most prominently the English Defense League (EDL) and the National Front, hold regular demonstrations throughout England and Wales. The groups are anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and Islamophobic and have been bolstered by recent attention drawn to the refugee crisis and the threat of Islamic terrorism in Western Europe. There is usually a heavy police presence at EDL and National Front protests, which are often countered by anti-fascist groups. Due to counter protests by opponents, far-right demonstrations may devolve into clashes and unrest and should always be avoided. Though there are currently no known protests planned by far-right groups during the Rugby World Cup, because these groups have some connections to soccer and rugby hooligans, there is a potential that members may be present at some matches.

**Labor Movement**

Labor strikes occur occasionally in the UK. Strikes are generally called by labor unions engaged in disputes over salaries, benefits, or layoffs and have the greatest impact on the public sector. Recent strikes have included several disruptive labor actions by London Underground drivers.
and some regional train operators. While there are currently no known labor strikes planned during the Rugby World Cup, strikes in the public transportation and aviation sectors during the Tournament could cause widespread travel disruptions.

Useful Links

Rugby World Cup Official website: http://www.rugbyworldcup.com/

Transport for London website: https://tfl.gov.uk/

National Rail website: http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/

Useful Contact Information

Emergency Services (police, fire, medical) can be reached by dialing 999.

The UK Anti-Terrorist Hotline, at 0800-789-321, is available for tips and confidential information about possible terrorist activity.

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http://london.usembassy.gov/index.html

RSO London: Tim Haley

HaleyTG@state.gov

+44-20-7894-0261

OSAC Duty Officer (for emergency situations only)

202-309-5056

OSAC_RISC@state.gov

Additional Resources

OSAC Crime and Safety Report for the United Kingdom

U.S. State Department Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

United Kingdom Country Specific Information Page – Bureau of Consular Affairs
For Further Information

OSAC will monitor the Rugby World Cup news and developments and provide assessments and updates as necessary in the OSAC Daily Newsletter. If you have additional questions regarding this report or the general security situation in the United Kingdom, please contact OSAC’s [Regional Analyst for Europe](mailto:).