

The 2026 FIFA World Cup is coming to Atlanta!

By Charles Gowdie

Introduction

The FIFA World Cup, arguably the biggest sporting event in the world, is coming to Atlanta in 2026! Despite only being held every four years, the level of excitement and drama that comes with the competition captures the attention of not only soccer fans, but people worldwide. According to the pledge sports website, "Since the 1998 staging of the FIFA World Cup, the event has averaged 3 billion views throughout the tournament, with the 2018 World Cup topping 3.5 billion viewers" (The 7 biggest sporting events in the World: Ultimate list, 2022). The tournament promotes healthy rivalry, while providing a platform for countries to show off their soccer skills, their culture, their history, and passion for the game.



Credit: The Official FIFA Website (FIFA, 2023)

The Last Time the USA hosted a World Cup

Cup

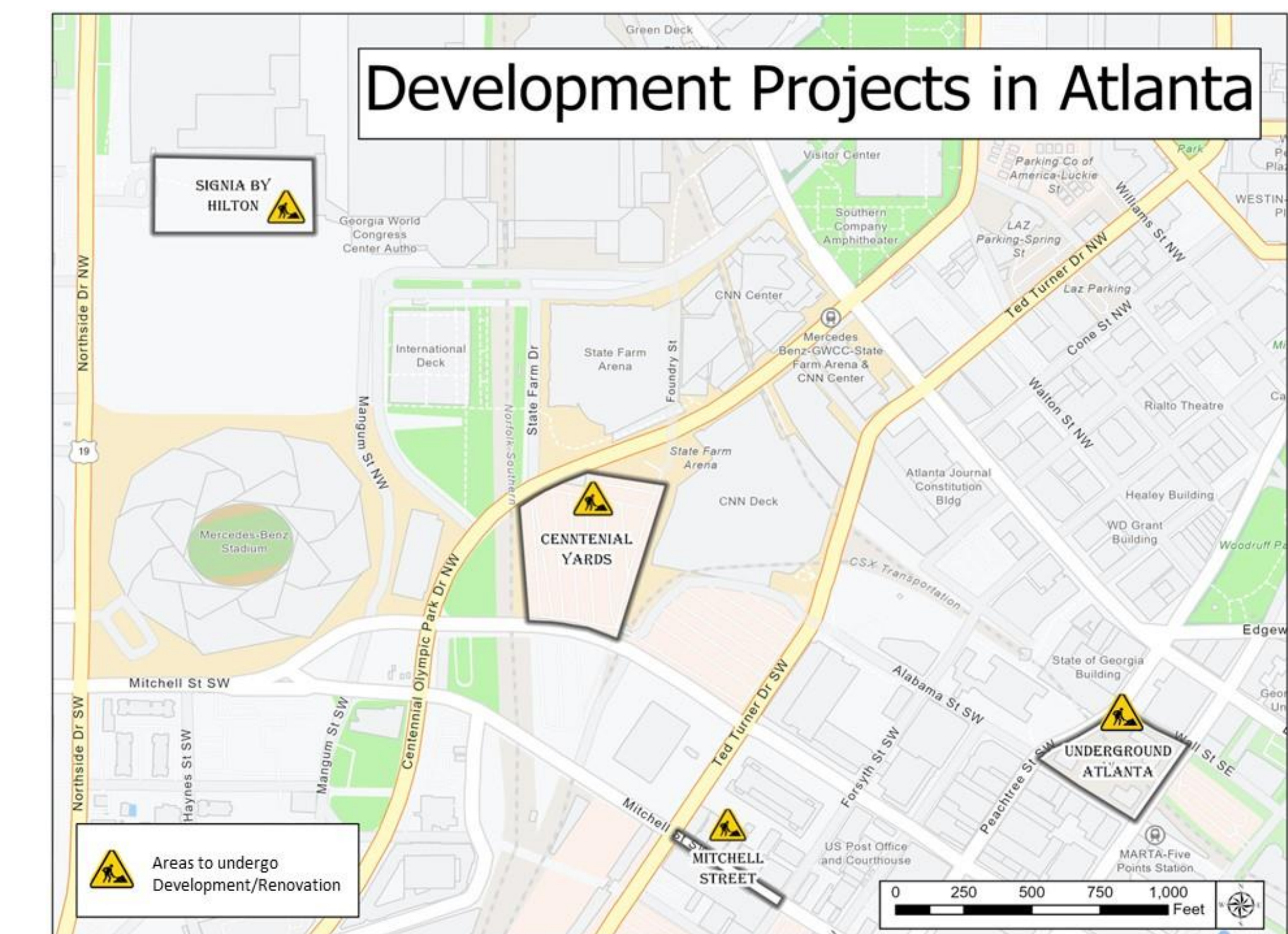


Credit: Getty Images (Hudson, 2010)

The soccer power houses of the world were shocked when the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), decided to give hosting privileges for the 1994 staging of the World Cup to the USA. Before the decision, the USA's soccer culture was in a free fall. The North American Soccer league had folded in 1984, and other sports such as football and baseball were much more popular in the USA. Giving host privileges to the USA, was a way for FIFA to help revive soccer in America. The USA took this opportunity and embraced the world's most popular sport, with the 1994 World cup being a massive success. According to the US soccer website, "The cumulative attendance of 3,587,538 broke the previous record by more than 1 million, and the average attendance for the 52-game tournament (68,991) also established a new record." (US Soccer, 2023). The USA's eye-catching performances throughout the tournament captured the attention all over the country, as they went on to qualify for the round of 16 stage (Knockout stage) for the first time since 1930, before losing to eventual champions Brazil. Approximately 11 million Americans were tuned in to that match, an all-time high for soccer in the United States (US Soccer, 2023).

Preparation for the World Cup

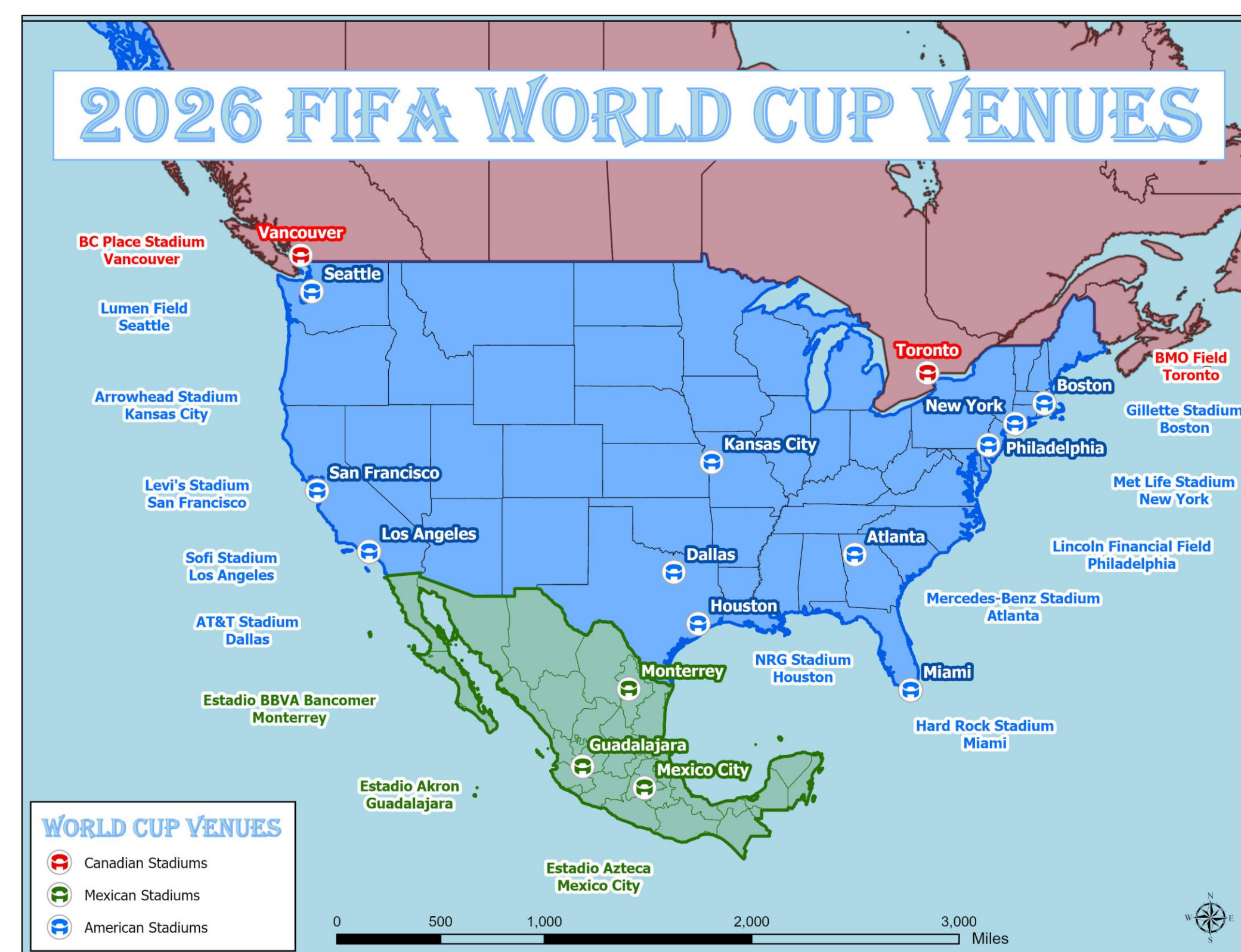
FIFA doesn't just give the largest sporting event in the world to just anybody, strict guidelines must be followed, and requirements must be met. Countries are expected to have high-quality stadiums, and enough hotels and temporary housing options to host players and large crowds visiting the country. Atlanta has many projects in the pipeline that are set to be complete in time for the World Cup. According to the ajc website, "Ahead of the 2026 World Cup, downtown Atlanta is poised for the largest investments in its history" (Hansen & Capelouto, 2022). New projects such as the Signia by Hilton, which will offer signature dining and top-notch accommodations, is set to open by 2024 and the Centennial Yards (The Gulch) which is set to be developed to include 4 million square feet for residences, and 4 million square feet in commercial spaces, (retail stores, restaurants and a hotel) are exciting developments around the stadium. There are also renovations in the pipeline as well, as Underground Atlanta is expected to undergo a \$150 million renovation project to include housing, restaurants and a hotel, while the Mitchell Street renovation project is expected to see dozens of historic buildings be redeveloped into offices, restaurants, retail, and housing (Hansen & Capelouto, 2022).



The 2026 FIFA World Cup

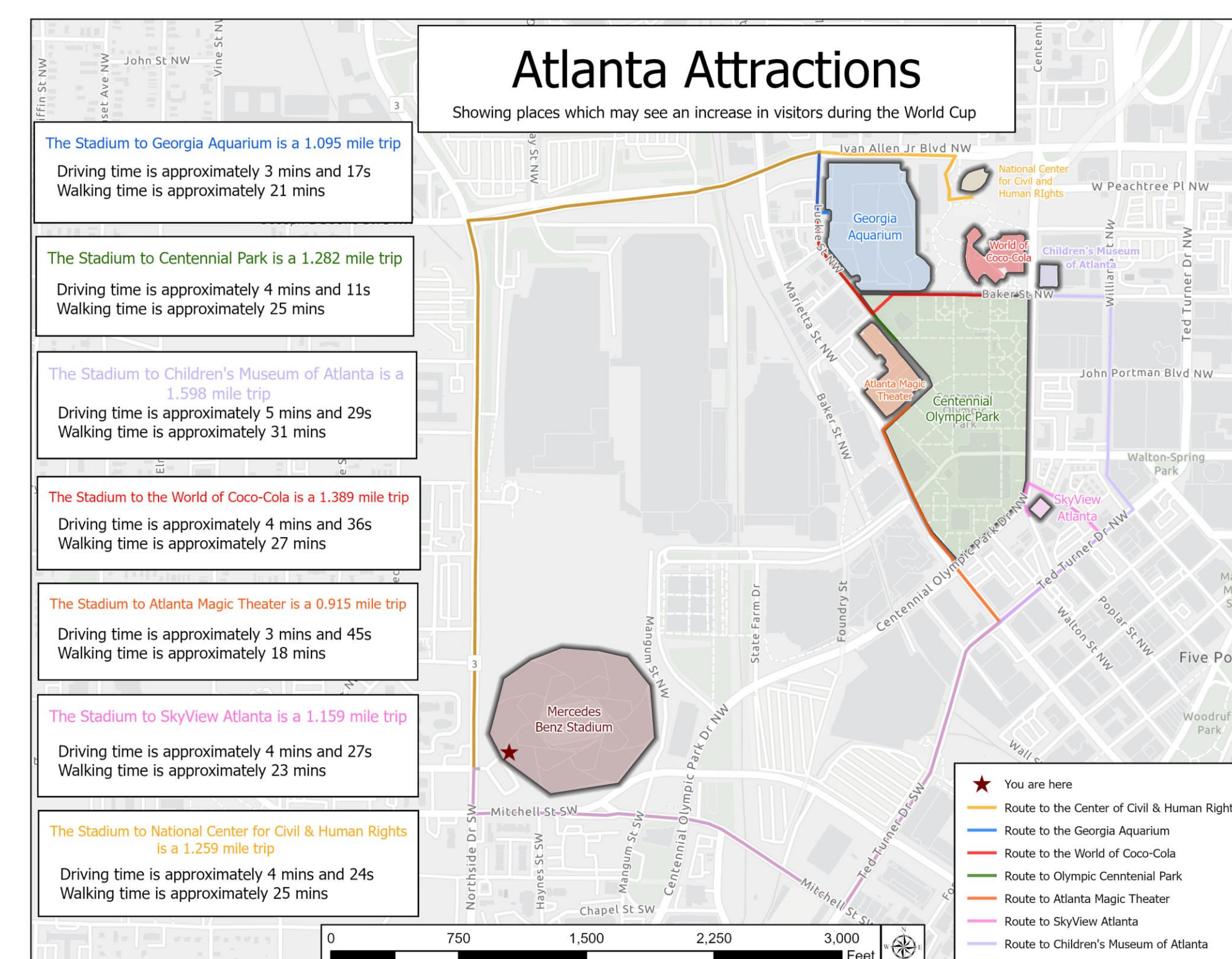
The 2026 staging of the competition will see hosting duties shared between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Specific match locations have yet to be confirmed, but what has been confirmed is that Atlanta will be one of 16 host cities in North America to host World Cup Matches!

Atlanta is certainly no stranger to hosting big sporting events, as it has played host to events such the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, the Super Bowl three times (1993, 2000 and 2019) and major international soccer events such as the Concacaf Gold Cup quarterfinals (2013) and semi-finals (2015) as well as the MLS All-Star Game in 2018. All massive events, however, the World Cup is set to be the biggest event Atlanta has ever seen and will put a global spotlight on the city for the whole world to see.



How the 2026 World Cup might affect Atlanta

One of the major impacts of hosting a world cup is an increase in tourism. The attraction of the world cup will bring people from all over the world to the city. While tourists are here, they'll be utilizing local businesses, renting vehicles, using public transportation, eating at restaurants, staying in local hotels etc. all of which will boost the economy. Some may argue that this boost in tourism will only occur during the tournament, however, studies have shown that events of this magnitude can have massive implications on tourism for years to come. According to an article by Bizcommunity, after Germany hosted the 2006 World Cup, tourist world cup goers were polled about the probability of recommending Germany as a tourist destination to their peers back home. It was determined that "88% of world cup visitors were positive about returning, 9% remained undecided, while only 2% stated they would rather not and 1% replied with certainly not. It is estimated that for each visitor to the world cup, another 150 will be indirectly influenced in their perceptions about the host country, through word of mouth initiated by the visitors when they return home" (Eberl, 2010).



During the World Cup matches in Atlanta, tourists are bound to go explore the city. This map shows places near the stadium that may see an increase in visitors due to their proximity to the Mercedes-Benz stadium. All these places are around a 5-minute drive (30 mins walk) from the stadium making them the perfect after-match city adventure!

Conclusion

The 1994 World Cup left a lasting impression on US Soccer. The memories of that World Cup have led to changes all across the country such as an increased interest in the sport, the development of new youth programs, improved training facilities and renovated stadiums. As a blossoming soccer city, with one of the most innovative and state-of-the-art stadiums in the country, Atlanta is ready for the step up to the world's biggest soccer event. As a host of the FIFA World Cup 2026, Atlanta has an opportunity to further promote the game, as well as use the revenue and attention gained during the tournament, to further develop and to highlight the greatness of the city, as we aim to push US soccer to new levels.

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