

Credit card fraudsters take aim at World Cup

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About 300,000 foreign visitors are expected at the World Cup, bringing a boost in spending that has "the potential of presenting criminals with more opportunities to commit fraud", said the South African Banking Risk Information Centre.

Jean-Pierre arrived on his South African holiday, withdrew some money from a cash machine, and hours later received a call from his bank to say that 300 euros had suddenly been charged to him.

It's a scenario that banking officials worry could repeat itself throughout the four-week [World Cup](#), which like any major global event, is an irresistible target for fraudsters.

"My bank called on my cell phone to ask where I was, because my account had been debited four times on the same day," the 59-year-old Frenchman said.

"I immediately opposed the charges, but if my bank adviser hadn't been so attentive, that party would have continued until the end of my stay."

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Jean-Pierre was caught in a clever scheme that let criminals copy his card's magnetic strip and his PIN code, but sometimes a card's details can simply be copied while customers make payments at a restaurant or a car hire.

Unsolicited offers that seem too good to be true often are. FIFA has warned against emails and text messages promising match tickets or lottery winnings in exchange for a user's bank details.

"In South Africa, I would say it is a relatively high-risk country in the ability to use skimming devices," said Jackie Barwell, financial crime manager at Actimize, an international fraud prevention firm.

Magnetic strips are widely used in Africa's biggest economy, though banks are replacing those cards with more secure models to prevent [credit card](#) fraud.

Credit card scams totalled nine million rands (1.1 million dollars, 962,000 euros) in the year to March 2010, about half the level of the previous year, according to South African bank FNB.

"The newer chip and PIN cards function with a PIN and not a signature, which makes all transactions significantly more secure," said Henk Vermeulen, FNB's [credit card fraud](#) specialist.

During the World Cup, banks will watch transactions more closely for any suspicious purchases. Customers are urged to inform their banks if they plan to travel to South Africa.

And normal precautions apply: Contact the bank if a card is lost or stolen; confirm purchases on the account; keep the PIN code secret; and avoid flashing the card when making payments.

Actimize warns such measures need to continue well after the World Cup, saying Asian [banks](#) are still catching scams linked to the Beijing Olympics two years ago.

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