

Welcome to Madrid

AFP, Madrid

The label-conscious England captain David Beckham and his pop star wife Victoria will have no problems replenishing their wardrobe after he formally signs for Real Madrid on July 2.

The Spanish capital does not quite yet have the reputation of Milan as being a global fashion centre - one of the reasons why Beckham was linked with clubs in the Italian city for several months - but it is rapidly catching up with its rival from across the Mediterranean.

The Beckhams left London on Tuesday, for a promotional tour of Japan, clad in Gucci and Calvin Klein and both designers have boutiques just a few metres away from each other on the swanky Calle de Jose Ortega y Gasset in the heart of Madrid's upmarket Barrio Salamanca.

Eating will also not prove to be a problem, despite the AAA Europe Travel Book warning, "Local specialities such as offal, blood sausage and pig's ear are usually unpopular with visitors."

Madrid boasts numerous first class restaurants - and a few English and Irish pubs if Beckham fancies returning to his roots - although Real Madrid's celebratory lunches often take place in one of two Basque restaurants near the club's Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Alternatively, Beckham could take some advice from his former colleague in the England team Steve McManaman, who has been at Real Madrid for four seasons.

"The Hotel Ritz is my favourite place to go for a drink or afternoon coffee," said McManaman recently.

McManaman had few problems adjusting to life in Spain, "Although all of a sudden a bunch of fans will approach me and start talking. My mind goes a complete blank. The field though I can understand and there are one or two lads who can speak some English if I need some help."

Beckham and McManaman are likely to be neighbours, albeit briefly as the former Liverpool player is likely to be moving during the summer, in the upper-class suburb of La Moraleja which is the favourite location for many Real Madrid players.

Spanish newspapers reported on Wednesday that Real Madrid had already reserved places at an exclusive nursery in La Moraleja for the Beckhams' two infants Brooklyn and Romeo.

For relaxation on rare days off from playing or promotional commitments, Beckham might consider a traditional Spanish outing of attending a bullfight.

Madrid boasts of the Plaza de Toros Monumental de las Ventas, proudly described by the city council's own publications as, "considered the Cathedral of bullfighting by those in the know."

Bullfighting's popularity may be in decline but Ventas is still the place to be seen for many of Madrid's good and the great.

Real Madrid striker Raul is a regular feature in Ventas' best seats, especially during the three week-long Feria de San Isidro in May, which commemorates Madrid's patron saint, as the guest of politicians and celebrities.



CONSTELLATION COMPLETE? (Clockwise) Ronaldo, David Beckham, Luis Figo, Raul, Roberto Carlos and Zinedine Zidane.

Tokyo gone crazy!

Football

AFP, Tokyo

Hundreds of screaming fans greeted footballing superstar David Beckham and his popstar wife Victoria as they arrived in Japan Wednesday, and the England captain declared himself happy to be moving to Real Madrid.

The Beckhams landed at Tokyo's Narita airport shortly before 3:30 pm (0630 GMT), hours after the midfield star agreed to move from Manchester United to the giant Spanish club in a deal worth up to 35 million euros (41.25 million US dollars).

Posing only briefly for photographs in front of dozens of cameras, the smartly dressed celebrity couple whisked past their fans without stopping as they began the first leg of an Asian promotional tour.

Asked by waiting reporters if he was happy to be moving to Spain, Beckham, who was wearing a white v-necked shirt, dark blazer and jeans with his hair tied in two small ponytails, told waiting reporters: "Yes I am."

The superstar drew frantic screams from around 500 fans, many of whom had been waiting since early in the morning and surged forward as the couple was led to a waiting Mercedes, surrounded by burly security men.

"I came here with my husband and daughter at 10 this morning - today is my best day ever," gushed

Miki Ozaki, aged 26. "I was so happy to see him," said Mari, aged 30, wiping tears from her eyes.

"I've been travelling since last night to get here, but it was well worth it," said the woman from Hyogo prefecture, 450 kilometres (280 miles) west of Tokyo, who gave no name.

One group of five schoolboys, all aged 15, said they had been at the airport since early morning, more than nine hours before Beckham was scheduled to land, but had waited in vain.

"We're really upset we did not get to see him, he went past too quickly," lamented a dejected Koson Nakajima.

The glamour boy of football said he was also delighted to be back in Japan where he attained iconic status during last summer's World Cup final jointly hosted by Japan and South Korea.

"Yes, I'm very pleased (to be back in Japan). I really like Japan," a beaming Beckham said.

"Yeah, I love it here," added Victoria, whose fame as a Spice Girl and role as a glamorous mother of two has ensured her her own large fan base here as well as a share in a fortune in advertising contracts.

The Beckhams' carefully stage-managed public appearances during their three-day stay in Japan will mainly be to promote the goods of the footballer's main Japanese sponsors, including beauty product and clinic operator TBC and confectioner Meiji Seika Kaisha.

Beckham and Victoria made

their world-first promotional appearance together in an advert for TBC, where they combine cuddling up in front of the camera with playful pillow fights.

The two-year contracts with the two companies are estimated to be worth some 500 million yen (4.2 million dollars) each, "probably a record fee for a commercial performance," in Japan, an advertising industry source who declined to be named told AFP.

The footballer's face stares out from billboards, television screens and flyers in train carriages across the country, advertising a range of goods from chocolate-coated almonds to mobile phones.

"He is one of the top names you can think of for an advertisement board," said Reiko Suzuki, research director at Dentsu Communications Institute, a consumer and lifestyle research firm owned by advertising giant Dentsu.

"He is handsome and good at sport... Japanese people also like the fact he looks after his wife and children, plus he has money. He basically has everything."

Not everyone at the airport was bowled over by the Beckham magic, however.

"What are all these people doing here?" asked a bemused Bryon Mack a US military official based in Japan.

"I've never heard of David Beckham," said the 30 year old from Virginia who was at the airport to meet his family.

'DB07' lives

AFP, London

Marks and Spencer has no plans to re-brand its David Beckham-endorsed "DB07" children's clothing range, although the player is set to lose his treasured number seven shirt at Real Madrid, the British retail chain said Wednesday.

Beckham has long worn number seven for both Manchester United and England, but the shirt is already taken at Real Madrid, to whom he is being transferred in a deal worth 24.5 million pounds (35 million euros, 40 million dollars).

Spanish international striker Raul already wears seven at Real - and even has a clause written into his contract guaranteeing that squad number.

Thus while Beckham will still sport his old shirt for England, at Real he might have to make do with number 11, expected to be vacated this summer by Brazilian striker Ronaldo, who is finally being allowed his first-choice number nine with the departure of Fernando Morientes to Italian giants AS Roma

However Marks and Spencer said they would stick with the name of its successful line.

"Absolutely no way, no," a spokeswoman said when asked whether a change of number might be required.

"It's now a well established and popular brand so people know the brand for what it is," she insisted.

"A lot of the merchandise is also labelled Beckham rather than DB07 so I really don't think it will cause a problem at all, especially with the England connection."

Beckham is currently in the second year of a three year deal with Marks that reportedly pays him around one million pounds a year.

Money, the final word

Football

AFP, London

Selling David Beckham might provoke an outcry from fans but for Manchester United it's just business.

Beckham is the club's best-known asset. He is used to sell everything from chocolate in Asia to mobile telephones in Europe and earns more than 10 million pounds (17 million dollars) a year from sponsorship deals.

That may be dwarfed by deals struck in US sport where LeBron James, an 18-year-old basketball sensation last month signed a 90-million-dollar, seven-year deal with Nike.

Still less than the five-year, 100-million-dollar contract American golfer Tiger Woods signed with Nike in September 2000.

Reports suggested Beckham would be earning six million euros a year in wages at Madrid. His endorsement deals come on top of that.

For Manchester United plc, the Beckham sale immediately paid off when the club's shares, listed on the London Stock Exchange, rose 3.45 percent to 150 pence in early trading.

United has a market capitalisation of 395 million pounds and pre-tax profits for the six months to January 31 of 20.3 million pounds.

As a home-bred player, Beckham's 24.5 million pound (35 million euro) sale was pure profit.

And Beckham's market value was depreciating because under

the European law which regulates the movement of footballers between clubs, players can leave for nothing when their contracts expire.

Beckham's contract was due to run out in two years.

United might sell fewer replica shirts now but they have a 13-year merchandising deal with Nike which guarantees more than 20 million pounds a year. The club receives the money regardless of the number of shirts sold.

Manchester United sell out their Old Trafford stadium whenever they play and, with a long waiting list for season tickets, selling of Beckham will not affect gate receipts.

However it could have an effect on the size of television audiences for Manchester United matches screened outside Britain.

The club's media rights deals in Britain and overseas are currently agreed collectively, with revenues shared equally with the club's English rivals.

United expect to take control of their overseas media rights in the next two years - by which time Beckham will have been replaced by another star, such as Brazil's World Cup winner Ronaldinho whom manager Alex Ferguson is trying to buy from French side Paris St Germain.

Real Madrid have more to gain from international rights. They are negotiating how their media rights would be sold overseas and if they agree to sell rights individually then Beckham's arrival will boost revenue.

"When Real Madrid bought Zinedine Zidane they agreed to pay him 5.4 million pounds a year in return for the right to exploit his

image," said Tim Crow, director of consulting at Karen Earl Sponsorship, which advises Wilkinson Sword, one of Manchester United's biggest sponsors.

"A year after buying him they'd sold an additional 480,000 shirts with his name on, worth something like 14 million pounds," Crow told the Financial Times.

In Ronaldo, Luis Figo and Zinedine Zidane, Real not only have the world's finest footballers but a marketing trio that all but sweeps up the European and South American markets.

The Spanish club will be hoping that Beckham will play an important role in opening up the Asian market.

His phenomenal popularity in Japan and South Korea was demonstrated at last year's World Cup. Real will be hoping Asian fans will follow Beckham to Madrid. Their first opportunity to test this will come with a tour of China in August.

Beckham's market value might be demonstrated but how well he actually does on the playing field is another matter.

Several of their recent big signings, including the Brazilian striker Ronaldo and the French midfielder Zinedine Zidane, initially struggled to make an impact at the club. Former Arsenal star Nicolas Anelka stayed just one season at Real but could not handle the pressure.

United manager Ferguson, defeated by a Champions League defeat to Real Madrid in April that he needed to rebuild his team, can now use the 35 million euros Real agreed to pay to fund future investments.

Only news in Spain

Football

REUTERS/AFP, Madrid

Move over Juan Carlos! Spain prepared to crown a new king on Wednesday as Real Madrid's agreement to sign England captain David Beckham sent the soccer mad country's media into a frenzy.

"God save the new king!" enthused one excited television



A man reading popular Spanish sport newspaper As with its front page announcing that England captain David Beckham has agreed to sign for Real Madrid in front of the club's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Only the Barcelona-based sports papers gave Laporta any respite from his humiliation, barely a week after the 40-year-old lawyer had told the Catalan club's supporters that he had reached an agreement with Manchester United to sign Beckham, a key factor in his landslide victory ahead of five other candidates on Sunday.

"Beckham escapes, but Laporta has other options," said the pro-Barca daily Sport.

Sport speculated that Laporta might go after Arsenal's Thierry Henry or Paris St Germain's unsettled Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldinho in a bid to restore his credibility.

Spanish sports daily As just simply said, "Superstar," above a full-page photo of the 28-year-old

would be coming to the Spanish capital rather than Catalonia.

"We told you, and he's here," said Spain's biggest selling sports paper.

Despite the fact that all parties have confirmed that Beckham will sign on the dotted line for Real on July 2, a four-year contract reported to be worth around six million euros a year in salary alone, two issues remain unresolved.

Firstly, his shirt will not be Manchester United number 7 he wore at Manchester United, but there has been no indication what will be on his back apart from the notoriously fickle and critical Real Madrid fans if he fails to live up to expectations.

Beckham has an affinity with the number, so much so that the Marks and Spencer's sportswear line he endorses is called DB07, but Real's home-grown star Raul has it written into his contract that he has the rights to the number.

Speculation was rife on Wednesday that Beckham will be wearing 77 next season although that would require the Spanish Professional League to bend their rules as they currently allow senior professionals only to wear numbers up to 25.

The second thorny issue is, will Beckham be allowed to take the free kicks?

The world might be seeing a lot less of Beckham's memorable thunderbolt efforts from 20 metres or more, one of which helped United beat Real 4-3 in their Champions League quarter-finals second leg encounter earlier this season.

"I might let him take a few free kicks," said Real's current dead ball specialist Roberto Carlos on Wednesday.

"But only a few, not all of them. And he's not just in competition with me but also Figo, Zidane and Hierro," added the Brazilian.

Life goes on

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United captain Roy Keane is confident the English champions can survive without David Beckham after the England captain agreed a four-year deal with Real Madrid.

Keane believes manager Alex Ferguson, who has delivered eight Premiership trophies in 11 years, knows what he is doing.

"It's sad to see him leave but all I know is that our manager does what's best for Manchester United," Keane told Sky Sports.

Ferguson is believed to have

made his mind up after the Champions League quarter-final defeat to Real in April he needed to change his tactics and he no longer saw a role for Beckham.

Now he is planning to buy Brazil World Cup star Ronaldinho from French side Paris St Germain.

Also in the frame are Leeds United's Australian forward Harry Kewell and their goalkeeper Paul Robinson, as a replacement for French keeper Fabien Barthez.

French Under-21 international full-back Julien Escudé, who plays for Rennes, and Sporting Lisbon's 19-year-old Ricardo Quaresma are other players who have been linked with United.

"I'm sure the same will happen to me one day. We'll miss him but as but as a player you maybe have to look at yourself. That's football. It's unfortunate when a player leaves a club but players come and go."

Ferguson tried to sign the four million pound (six million dollar) rated Escudé last August.

The five million pound-rated Quaresma is said to be the best thing to come out of Portugal since Luis Figo.

His chances of coming to Old Trafford were rated good because of United coach Carlos