

WINNING GOLD

UK tourism industry plans for \$1.8bn London Olympics bonanza

Britain's tourism industry is planning a London Olympic Games period that will avoid price gouging and disperse visitors throughout the regions. And it sees long term opportunities to leverage the Games to sell UK holidays for years to come. JENNY BURNS reports from London.

WITH just 10 months to the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games on July 27, 2012, tourism and games officials are confident of an event and legacy to remember.

Tickets have been allocated with seemingly few problems (apart from many Brits upset they were unable to get tickets). The construction of major venues is on time with many completed and in use, including the Olympic Stadium and Aquatics Centre.

VisitBritain and other local tourism marketing organisations have the plans in place to ensure they take full advantage of the games. And while the jury is out on the tourism benefits to the host nation during the time the

Olympics and Paralympics are staged, the long term benefits of hosting the Games are undeniable. These benefits include the regeneration of London's East and the construction of new infrastructure including new stadiums.

There's also the belief many of the estimated television audience of 4.7 billion will add the UK to their holiday wish list especially given many of London's most iconic buildings, parks and landscapes will feature during the game.

Buildings to be used for Olympic events include Wimbledon, Wembley, Lords, Hampden Park and the Millennium Stadium while landscapes and parks to feature include the Jurassic Coast at Weymouth,

Greenwich, Windsor and Eton, Hyde Park and Horse Guards Parade.

A report prepared by Oxford Economics on the value of the Games to UK tourism suggests that for the post-Games period (2013-17) the legacy effect is worth £1.27bn (about \$1.84bn) for the UK and £0.88bn (about \$1.35bn) for London.

These gains are generated largely by higher numbers of visitors from emerging markets for the UK primarily China, India and Russia who decide to visit as a result of the publicity associated with the Games.

In terms of relative importance, the pre-Games period is responsible for 15 per cent of the estimated total tourism benefits for the UK as a whole; the

Games themselves account for 31 per cent, and the remaining 54 per cent is to be generated after the Games.

Interestingly however, the same study forecasts tourism numbers could fall during the Games period as a result of the "displacement theory".

The "stay-away factor" or "displacement" is common to many host countries and cities of major sporting events and occurs when concerns around pricing, overcrowding, safety and general disruption keep normal, leisure visitors away or displaces them to other areas.

While acknowledging there could be some displacement during the Games, VisitBritain's head of the 2012 Games Unit, Chris Foy, believes tourism numbers will rise during the year.

"The report from Oxford Economics suggests in 2012 there will be around three per cent more inbound visitors than we would receive without the games being held," he said.

"Looking at current annual volumes this would be consistent with about 900,000 extra visitors over the course of the year."

VisitBritain, Visit London, European Tour Operators Association and UK Inbound are collectively tackling the displacement issue. They have established an action group to counteract any short-term impact caused by displacement.

Ensuring those visitors who do come for the Olympics don't just spend time in London is a priority for Visit Britain.

Indeed one of the organisation's three objectives for the Games is to maximise the economic benefits for tourism across the UK. (The other two are to enhance the image of the UK as a visitor destination and to deliver a world-class welcome to visitors in 2012 and beyond.)

"The Olympics is a great opportunity for the whole of the country and we will be doing all we can to ensure that all of the UK benefits," Foy said.

"We believe that hosting the 2012 Games will have a positive impact on how we are perceived by overseas visitors and we are committed to ensuring the tourism benefits are felt right across the country – before, during and after the main event."

The staging of a number of Olympic events outside of London and the expected high demand for accommodation in regional cities with good transport links to London are expected to assist with the organisation's objective of ensuring tourism benefits are experienced across the UK.

Events to be held in regional areas include football in Coventry, Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and Cardiff, rowing in Eton Dorney (near Windsor

Castle), mountain biking in Essex and sailing in Weymouth and Portland Harbour, Dorset.

"We are expecting many visitors to stay out of London and then use public transport to come to events. Cambridge for example, is only an hour or so from London by train and here you have all the colleges which will offer Olympic accommodation," Foy said.

The 40,000 beds on offer in UK universities are expected to play a major role in providing Games accommodation. In London over 140,000 rooms will be available including hotel rooms, self-catering establishments and university accommodation.

Hotel offerings are being boosted by the 20,000 new beds which are or have already come on line since the announcement of London's successful hosting of the games – a 12 per cent increase.

All of England has a known accommodation stock of 1,201,376 bed spaces [593,000 rooms] from simple and comfortable through to luxury options.

While admitting governments have no control over pricing Foy believes rates will remain at reasonable levels during the Games. He is confident the industry-led Fair Pricing and Practice Charter and London Visitor Charter will ensure price gouging doesn't occur.

Both voluntary charters provide a platform for businesses to commit to reasonable and fair trading terms. "It is widely recognised by the UK tourism industry that over-inflated pricing and/or inappropriate trading practices during 2012, and specifically during the period of the 2012 Games, could do long-term damage to the international reputation of London and the UK as a destination, undermine the huge potential for

positive messages about the country and deter potential visitors and business," Foy said.

"The Fair Pricing Charter is something no World Cup or Olympic host has tried before. Prices do tend to go up when there is a big sporting event, it happened during the World Cup in South Africa last summer.

"But we've been talking to people from South Africa and people from Canada (which hosted the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics) and their advice to hotels in the UK has been to think about the next ten years.

"Clearly we want to present a very positive view of Britain and while the market does tend to put prices up a bit there's a big difference between that and a 400-500 per cent increase in rates."

The Fair Pricing and Practice Charter was introduced by Visit London in 2008 and while initially aimed at the events industry it has since been adapted to suit the wider industry.

Signatories agree that their pricing from June 1 to September 30 2012 will be fair and reasonable.

They also agree not to enter into any cartel or similar arrangement to artificially inflate pricing levels for any good or services. Currently around 600 companies have signed up. (The list of signatories is available at www.tourism2012games.org/fair-pricing-practice-charter/).

The London Visitor Charter launched in July this year covers a range of London attractions, travel providers, bars, restaurants and museums.

All signatories promise "to act in a fair and reasonable way during the Games period, working ethically and sustainably and not artificially inflating prices." (Signatories are listed on www.visitlondon.com/tag/london-visitor-charter).

Foy said the Olympics was just a

part of an overall strategy aimed at promoting the UK.

"The focus for us is the long term uplift in visitor numbers which will benefit all our tourism partners," he said.

As part of that strategy VisitBritain has launched its biggest tourism marketing program for 10 years with the first phase of *Great Britain You're Invited*.

The £100 million campaign will run over four years and has the delivery targets of £1 billion in additional PR

There are a number of major events planned for 2012 as well as the Olympics and Paralympics. They include the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

for Britain, four million extra visitors, £2 billion extra visitor spend in the UK and a measurable increase in the desire to visit Britain in core target markets.

An advertising campaign featuring renowned British celebrities including Dame Judi Dench, Dev Patel, Twiggy, Rupert Everett and Jamie Oliver started in June.

Television advertisements shot all around Britain are being shown on BBC Worldwide covering international TV and digital platforms. VisitBritain is also the first advertising partner on BBC Worldwide's global iPlayer pilot. Advertisements will appear on the service to be launched as an app on Apple's iPad later this year.

The advertising is complemented by short films from each celebrity – their personal invitation to Britain, filmed at a location of their choice. These films are being shown on VisitBritain's websites VisitBritain.com and VisitBritain.tv, and on third-party

websites such as YouTube, ensuring that the invitation can be seen across digital channels by a global audience.

This campaign will play a major role in promoting the many other major events being held during 2012.

"There are a number of great events happening in 2012 as well as the Olympics and Paralympics including the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee," Foy said. "The Cultural Olympiad is a four-year celebration designed to showcase the UK's arts and culture.

A program of spectacular events is planned for the beginning of 2012 to give a taste of what is to come."

The London 2012 Festival will be the finale of the Cultural Olympiad and will run from June 21 to September 9 (the final day of the London 2012 Paralympic Games). Organisers are promising that the 12 week program will include commissions from some of "the globe's finest artists from the world of music, film, visual arts, fashion, theatre, circus, opera and digital innovation".

Australians who find themselves in London during the Games but without event tickets should be advised that several events, including the marathon, triathlon and road cycling, do not require tickets.

Alternatively, visitors can join locals at any one of 18 "Live Sites" from Edinburgh to Plymouth. "These will not only be a magnet for watching sporting events on big screens, but an integral part of the Olympic experience," Foy said.

Travel agents – you're invited to cash in on the selling opportunities

AUSTRALIANS have already fallen in love with the London 2012 Olympics. According to CoSport all of the individual tickets allocated to the Australian market have been sold.

Appointed by the Australian Olympic Committee and the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games Ltd, CoSport is the only approved Authorised Ticket Reseller of Olympic tickets and hospitality packages in Australia.

"Interest in the Olympic Games is very high in Australia," said CoSport president Bob Long. "The Australian Olympic team is expected to perform very well in London plus there is a close connection between many Australians and London. As a result the stand-alone tickets we had for sale were snapped up very quickly.

"While we can't make any guarantees we are working to try and obtain more tickets for future sales."

Long said travel agents who had clients who wanted to attend London Olympic events should consider CoSport's ticket and hospitality packages which include tickets and accommodation.

"People can also register on the CoSport website (www.cosport.com.au) at no cost and receive updates about any potential sales of stand-alone tickets in the future," he said.

For Australian retail agents the once lucrative business of selling packages with Olympics ticket inclusions has been largely lost to the internet. But VisitBritain is going all out to ensure agents share in the additional travel generated around the Games.

A new BritAgent online training program has been launched to help agents showcase the thousands of events happening throughout 2012 as well as during the period of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Developed by VisitBritain *Great Britain You're Invited – 2012* aims to give agents specialised product and destination knowledge, and help them to sell Britain as a great place to visit in 2012.

"BritAgent will increase productivity and maximise sales by arming the travel trade with the necessary tools needed to meet their clients' needs and expectations," said VisitBritain head of 2012 Games Unit, Chris Foy.

Along with signposting details of all the Olympic events taking place, the program covers topics such as where to find accommodation and transport during the Games.

It also provide inspirational ideas for things to see and do across the UK, as well as information and planning for other events and occasions taking place next year, such as the Diamond Jubilee.

"We hope that the *Great Britain You're*

Invited – 2012 training program will become a vital tool to help our travel partners manage the visitor demand we anticipate over the coming years and that it will help increase the level of service they can provide," Foy said.

Visit Britain has also produced the document *Great Reasons to Sell Britain in 2012*.

"This is designed for tour operators and travel agents to cite both inspirational and reassuring messages for their clients," Foy said.

"The document outlines 10 compelling facts to help you sell Britain with confidence as a leisure and business destination throughout the whole of 2012. It also dispels many of the myths surrounding the period of the Games."

This, and a number of other tools to help agents can be found on the Olympic 2012 section added to VisitBritain's travel industry website www.visitbritaintrade.com/en/GB/.