

Is 2012 good for visitor numbers?

When London first won the right to stage the 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, the city anticipated a major boost to sports tourism based revenue as a result. However, claims of failures to exploit these opportunities have recently been levelled at the Government.

Chief Executive of Travelodge, Grant Hearn, has accused the Government of 'incredible apathy' in the promotion of the London 2012 Games. Hearn believes too little is being done to fulfil promises to use the Olympics to boost tourism.



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Hearn's fears are based on an independent research study undertaken for Travelodge soon after the rights to stage the Games were awarded to London. The study found that whilst Olympic host countries achieved average tourism growth rates of 2.3% in the four years prior to the Games, tourism revenue for London has, worryingly, fallen continuously since Summer 2008.

But is Hearn being unfair? After all, the economic crisis of 2008, sparked by spiralling falls in the value of Credit Default Obligations (essentially bundles of subprime mortgage debt) triggered a worldwide recession that affected virtually all industries. It could be argued that tourism sector

was affected notably by the recession, and it would be understandable if the Government had subsequently cut back on some commitments as a result.

A Once in an Era Opportunity

Mr Hearn believes that Tony Blair's call for the 2012 Games to be a "once-in-an-era opportunity for British tourism" appears to have fallen on deaf ears: "With just two years to go we should be doing all we can to exploit the fact we are hosting the Games yet nothing appears to be happening...the Government is showing incredible apathy."

It is perhaps concerning that Visit Britain, the UK's central tourism agency, had its annual government funding cut by £9 million between 2007 and the 2010/11 financial year, and may be set to receive a further 20% cut in revenue. But again, the effects of the economic crisis that began in 2008 cannot be underestimated in terms of its contribution to this cut in funding.

Official figures similarly echo a fall in tourism revenue, with a 7% drop in the number of international visitors to Britain in the last three months of 2009. This represents the worst performance for London-based tourist revenue since 2004.

START THE DISCUSSION

- Do you think that Hearn's fears are well founded?
- Do you feel that the Government has not met tourism commitments as much as it could, as a result of the economic crisis?

- What is the structure and role of Visit Britain and how is it funded?
- What can be done to ensure that London does not experience a reduction in visitor numbers after 2012 (as all host cities have done since 1988)?

FIND OUT MORE

Britain's Official Travel & Tourism Guide

<http://www.visitbritain.com/>

VisitBritain Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2009

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc0607/hc07/0751/0751.asp>

VisitBritain Corporate Publication

<http://www.visitbritain.org/aboutus/corporatepublications/index.aspx>

CREDITS

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