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Olympic Games 2004 and Athens

a bird's eye view

Athens will be the host of the 2004 Olympics.

For all countries hosting the Olympic Games, their preparation, organisation and execution is a huge challenge. More so for Greece, which is the smallest country ever to have undertaken the hosting of the Olympic Games.

For tourism related activities in particular, the challenge and the opportunities are even greater. Athens has a unique opportunity to reposition itself in the world tourist industry and reclaim its position as a tourist destination offering:

- a lively city (6th largest in Europe) with a very active commercial center and a renowned nightlife;
- a long coastline;
- some of the world's most famous antiquities, including the Acropolis and Sounio;
- a new and expanding infrastructure in the form of the new Metro, the new Airport (ranked as No. 2 in Europe in the latest IATA survey) and the new Ring Road (expected to be completed ca. 2004)

Of course the Olympic Games create a bleep of activity around the Games themselves and there is a drop in tourist activity immediately after. If managed properly however, this drop in activity is temporary and the long term benefits last for much longer. Barcelona, for example, saw an increase in the number of hotels from 118 in 1990 to 148 in 1992. The trend actually continued after the Olympic



Games and so in 2001 there were 187 hotels accommodating visitors who came mostly for leisure (over 50% of total, compared to just 30% in 1990) and stayed longer. Following this trend, Athens hotels are in the process of renovation and expansion with some of the largest luxury hotels having closed down completely for a 12-18 months renovation and expansion.

Similarly positive benefits arise from the increasing conference and convention activities that usually take place in a city hosting the Olympic Games. Athens, albeit with a long delay, is preparing itself with a new convention center at the venue of the old Athens Airport.

After a bad start in the preparations for the 2004 Olympic Games, the mechanism seems to have streamlined itself and at the last visit of the Olympic Committee Supervisory Team, praise was given for the first time for the state of preparations and the effort being made to make up for lost time.

A notable exception to the problems that plagued the preparation of the 2004 Olympics was the Sponsoring effort which has so far exceeded all expectations and raised record setting contributions in the fields of Banking and Drinks. This is probably indicative of the optimism with which Greek businesses view the 2004 Olympics as a vehicle for increasing Greek presence internationally, particularly so after the introduction of the Euro as Greece's legal tender on January 1st, 2002.