

What to Do with the Bird's Nest?

The Bird's Nest, which was a showpiece of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and now is showing signs of decline in peeling paint will be converted into an entertainment and shopping centre in three to five years. The plans were recently announced by the National Stadium's managing agency Citic Group. At the same time, it will seek to hold more sports and cultural performances.



“The Bird's Nest will continue to have tourism as its major business, while gradually tapping its commercial facilities and turning them into a centre for entertainment and shopping,” said Citic Group.

Expensive Maintenance

The news was released shortly after the city's top soccer club, Guo'an, backed out from a deal to lease the stadium. Now the 91,000-seat facility needs different way how to cover the high maintenance fees. According to the company, the operation of the 250,000-square-metre National Stadium will annually cost 60 million yuan (\$ 8.82 million) making it particularly hard to make profit. The daily stream of about 10,000 mostly Chinese tourists who pay 50 yuan (about \$7) to walk on the stadium floor cannot cover the costs at all.

Critics point out that the officials appear to have no solid after use plans, just like prior Games. Experts doubt that the Stadium will ever recoup the \$450 million the government spent to build it, particularly as China's economy worsens.



According to the new project, the National Stadium should include a ring-shaped theme restaurant while a 50,000 sq m carnival theme park will be built in the public area of the Olympic Green, northeast of the Stadium. The officials say that the park will be able to hold 30,000 visitors at daily maximum capacity. The restaurant as well as the whole shopping center is expected to bring people back to the memorable moments of the Games and bring the much-desired profits.

Tourism Industry in Trouble

Chinese tourism industry as such has last year witnessed a first drop since 2003. The numbers of visitors have decreased by 2 percent to 130 million in 2008 compared to 2007. Chinese tourism has been obviously hit by the global financial crisis. The most important source market for the People's Republic is the United States, Europe and Japan, which all have problems with the economic meltdown. Local experts suppose that the country will receive a full hit from the crisis in the first half of 2009.



It is not only the global economic crisis that has caused the drop. There has been the Sichuan earthquake, snow storms in southern China and also the Tibet riots. What more, the much-acclaimed Olympic Games did not attract 500,000 overseas visitors as had been expected. Beijing received 389,000 foreign tourists in August, including those from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. The reason for the low numbers was partly the tougher visa policy, high prices, as well as the extraordinary security measures.

Beijing Olympic Venues

The Bird's Nest was one of 12 venues built in Beijing for the Olympics. There were 31 venues (eight temporary and 11 renovated) in the city. Five more were outside Beijing. Most of the temporary venues will be razed. Some of the permanent ones have found uses, notably venues for swimming and tennis. The Water Cube, site of Michael Phelps' record eight gold medals, will be converted to a waterpark and swimming center with much of the seating removed. The tennis stadium will host the China Open, a lucrative WTA-ATP event, later this year. Denverpost.com

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