

LONDON SLUMPS DESPITE PREDICTED BOOST FROM OLYMPICS



Before the "Olympic Summer" of 2012 began, it had been widely predicted that London would benefit from the "Games boost". In fact, the opposite happened, with 2012 proving to be among the worst summers on record for many attractions, including some of the capital's most prestigious landmarks.

It hardly helped that the summer was the wettest in the last hundred years, and the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA) reported that this combination of negative factors resulted in **some attractions suffering a year-on-year fall of 60 per cent in their visitor numbers during the period of the Games (27 July - 12 August)**. Some of the worst hit attractions had such a poor summer that they requested that ALVA officials should not release full details of their visitor numbers until its full report comes out in 2013.

Unsurprisingly given the weather, the biggest drops in visitor numbers were endured by outdoor attractions, such as London Zoo and Kew Gardens. In the garden and leisure sector, sites saw an average fall of no less than 21.3 per cent.

Another sector which was badly affected was heritage and cathedrals. In this group, which includes St Paul's Cathedral, the Houses of Parliament and the Tower of London, visitor numbers were down by over 20 per cent.

The figures were described as "sobering reading" by ALVA's chief executive, Bernard Donoghue, when he spoke to the BBC. He went on to say that the summer of 2012 had seen considerable financial challenges for some of the nation's best-known and best-loved tourist attractions.

He singled out the soaking weather as a major cause of the problem, especially for outdoor attractions such as gardens, saying that the trading period had been "one of the worst ... since 2001", the year when tourism was badly hit by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

The figures reported fit well with those released last month by the Office for National Statistics, whose July data showed a fall in both visits and spending by people coming from outside the UK. Spending fell to about £2 billion, a fall of £310 million since last year, while 3.18 million trips were made from overseas, as against 3.36 million in July 2011.

As the Olympic Games approached, there was widespread criticism of the hotel industry, which was seen as taking advantage of the situation to increase prices excessively. At one point, some rooms were being priced at as much as ten times their normal amount. This did not last once it became clear that the ambitious predictions for demand during the period of the Games would not be realized.

Olympics organizers also came under attack from traders, who accused them of driving visitors away with overly dramatic warnings of possible disruption during the period of the Games.

Outside London, the combined effect of the poor weather and the Games was not as significant, although the majority of England and Scotland did see a fall in visitor numbers averaging 4.7 per

cent.

The most notable exception to the downward trend came in Scotland's museums and galleries. Here, helped to an extent by the National Museum of Scotland's 2011 refurbishment, visitor numbers grew by over 30 per cent.

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