

OLYMPICS: DID TOURISM IN RIO BENEFIT AT ALL?



The 2016 Olympics have come to an end after more than two weeks of action. Many world records set, many breath-taking performances witnessed and many stories written. But were the Olympic Games worth it for Brazil and for tourism in Rio?

One of the goals of the organizing committee was to give Brazil a tourism boost amid economic troubles and the Zika virus. **The target was to increase the visitor inflow in August and September by as much as 82%, which is roughly 350,000 to 500,000 additional visitors.**

However, the empty stands during many events indicate that this prognosis was somewhat hasty from the host nation. For a more objective analysis we need to wait for the official data of course.

Tourism in Rio benefited from the developments. In terms of infrastructure, Rio de Janeiro has experienced a series of renovations. More than hundred kilometers of bus lanes built, the port area revitalized, the subway transport improved.

“We leave a legacy of self-confidence for Brazilians and unity, because we are coming of a very important political and economic crisis. Brazilians have found their pride again,” insists Mario Andrada, the Olympics spokesperson.

This has been countered by Juliana Barbassa, journalist and author of *Dancing with the Devil in the City of God*, a book written about Rio de Janeiro. “The cost has been tremendous; it is coming at a time when the country is facing a significant recession. The city has spent a lot of money. When you look at the infrastructure that has been put into place, it serves the needs of the wealthier side of Rio,” Barbassa said.

The huge expenses did not find the understanding of every citizen in Rio. “I don’t think the Olympics left a lot of things to us or to tourism in Rio, because the only people who participated were the ones who could afford it,” a citizen of the city said. But others say that the Olympics left a lot of good things for the city, highlighting the new infrastructure. “Now let’s see if the politicians will take advantage and maintain it all,” another person remarked.

For now, it is hard to say whether Brazil and Rio will be able to benefit from the event. The long-term trend is that the economic benefits are inflated to justify the spending of huge amounts of taxpayer money. Some examples are Sydney, Barcelona and even London. These cities did not benefit from the mega-events as their overambitious plans had stated they would.

With the difficulty to justify the massive spending connected to the Olympics, it really seems that tourism benefits are the only justification of such acts.

Alas, despite Usain Bolt’s and Michael Phelps’ incredible shows in Rio, questions arise about the outcome of the event for the host country. It remains to be seen whether it will at least serve as a boost for a country heavily affected by all sorts of issues.

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