



## Travel trends'

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# 2012 Olympic Games: Calais is just a stone's throw from London

Ten million tourists are expected in London for the 30th Olympiad from July 27 to August 12, 2012. That's enough to make the candidate cities that weren't chosen green with envy... However, as the British capital pulls out the stops to welcome its many visitors, its neighbors are preparing to get even!

### First stage: hosting

As everyone knows, the competition for the Olympic Games starts well before the Games themselves. Indeed, in 2004, even before Constantinos Stephanopoulos, the Greek Republic's President at the time, had officially declared the 28th Olympiad open, nine cities\* had already thrown themselves into the race to host the 2012 Games.

As early as the summer of 2005, that's seven years before the 2012 Olympic torch was lit, we already knew that London was the big winner. Yet, this stage is by no means easiest part of the competition: the stakes are high and becoming a host city is a huge challenge with the promise of countless benefits.

Why? Because welcoming the Olympic Games often injects new life into cities. Barcelona proved this with the 1992 Olympic Games when it renovated its sea front, an industrial zone at the time, and its famous avenue La Rambla. The Olympics represent great development opportunities for the construction and retail sectors, as well as for telecommunications, environmental protection, etc. and of course for tourism in general and the hotel industry in particular. The latter two are some of the first areas to reap the benefits.

For example, in February 2006, when Turin hosted the Winter Olympics, hoteliers registered record performances with 222% RevPAR growth and occupancy rates of close to 92%. The long term benefit of the international advertising the organizing cities receive during the Games is irrefutable. In 1990, Barcelona welcomed 1.7 million visitors, compared with over 3 million in 1995.



### Second step: attracting

Now, London's carrying the day. It expects some 10 million tourists, spectators, athletes, journalists and officials between next June and September. 300,000 foreign visitors and 800,000 visitors from the rest of the United Kingdom will travel to the capital specially to experience the event first hand. According to a survey by Kantarsport, the city will generate tourism income of close to €2.5 billion.

To prepare for the event, London is building new infrastructures. The costs are substantial: for example, modernizing the transport system alone is already costing €7.8 billion. This project includes the creation of new stations around Stratford, the Olympic site east of London and a new high speed train, known as "Javelin", that will take visitors to the site from King's Cross St. Pancras station.

Accommodation is no concern for the athletes since 97% of them will be less than 30 minutes from the competition venues and they already have 17,320 beds reserved at the Olympic Village. However, for mere mortals, it's time to choose whether to stay in London itself to be right at the heart of the event, or to venture outside the capital for a bit of detachment.

### Third stage: cashing in!

Some tourists prefer to avoid being in the middle of the euphoria that takes over host cities during the Games and opt for more secluded destinations where they get the added bonus of cheaper prices.

London's neighbors might therefore also benefit this summer. Potential destinations include serious Oxford, seaside Brighton, luxurious Bath or Shakespearian Stratford-upon-Avon as well as other European capitals like Brussels, Amsterdam and Paris.

The Nord-Pas-de-Calais region in northern France also intends to benefit from its location just one hour from London by Channel Tunnel. Here, there's just one obsession: to make the most of the situation by attracting as many people as possible. The region has long since expressed its ambition to serve as a "support base" for the 2012 Olympic Games.

It has two key selling points: hotel room prices that are about 30% cheaper and fine sporting facilities. To seduce the athletes, as early as 2005, "mission Pas-de-Calais 2012" allocated €20 million to build and renovate sports facilities so they could be available for federations. Since 2009, over 100 delegations from around the world have come to use the city of Lille's sporting facilities. Some delegations on smaller budgets, like those from Senegal or Uzbekistan, will train there before the competitions. Lastly, even the UK's national gymnastics team will hop across the Channel for its last training sessions... Now, that's good sportsmanship!

*\* Havana, Istanbul, Leipzig, London, Madrid, Moscow, New York, Paris and Rio de Janeiro.*

#### **Accor's position: a UK network that continues to expand**

The group intends to make the most of the upcoming Olympic Games with its nearly 50 hotels in London, but its teams are also all set to welcome sports fans in Calais, Northern France, as well as in all the UK's key "secondary" cities. From the Calais Suite Novotel just 200m from the Channel Tunnel and five minutes from the Eurostar station, to the Francis Bath Hotel, the MGallery collection's splendid newcomer, there's bound to be something for every taste and budget!