

2012 Games Tourism Seminar, 26 January 2010

Christopher Rodrigues, Chair of VisitBritain - Opening Remarks

Good morning and welcome to our 2012 Games tourism seminar. Welcome to the familiar faces and allow me to introduce myself to others in the audience. My name is Christopher Rodrigues, and I'm Chair of VisitBritain.

With just over 900 days to go, serious training has already begun for our Olympic hopefuls. Squads are being narrowed down, gruelling training events have been scheduled, a last round of World and European championships beckons and then the big one. London 2012, the definitive global sporting event in one of the great capital cities of the world.

Those of you who have had the pleasure of seeing an Olympic opening ceremony live, or the privilege of carrying the Olympic flame on one of the torch relay legs will know there is nothing quite like the excitement or the emotion of those moments.

And when you talk to past competitors about their Olympic moment - the moment when time stood still and the eyes of the world were upon them - they tell you it was like no other experience in their lives.

A time when delivering personal best was all that mattered and you prayed silently that personal best was good enough to mean best in the world.

I'm sure that for many in our industry the Olympics still feels like a distant event - but if you go away with only one thought from today it should be this - with just over 900 days to go - the time has come for us to get into serious training if we want to deliver our personal best.

Its now time to lay the foundations for the commercial opportunity the Olympic Games brings, as well as being time to begin serious preparations for our part in welcoming the world to Britain.

Make no mistake, we have to prepare just as seriously as the athletes. For this is not just about making money it is also an opportunity to raise our game and deliver a best in class welcome, world-class service, real value for money and a games unequalled for its accessibility and its focus on sustainability.

The Olympic Games put Barcelona on the map and changed the world's view of Sydney. The Athens Olympics was a triumph of last minute will over the global scepticism and Beijing celebrated China's coming of age on the world stage.

Our Games will be different, they must be different. For London is not an unknown city - it's already one of the world's great capitals and a tourist Mecca in its own right.

But just as is true for our athletes, competition is getting tougher all the time so we must do everything possible to use the unparalleled global audience for the Games to showcase our attractions to billions of TV viewers around the world.

This is our chance to inspire first time visitors and to rekindle experienced travellers desire to visit us before during and after the games – our chance to invite the world to Explore Britain.

Of course one thing will make the Olympic experience different for us in tourism. This isn't a one-off event. It won't come and go in under 9.6 seconds like Usain Bolt.

For us the Olympics is a cross between a relay and a marathon. Many are involved, we need to work together better than we have ever done before and we need to keep going over an extended period.

And to make it more difficult – success in the tourism Olympics will depend on our skill in multiple disciplines: -

- Offsetting the drop in tourism that so often occurs before a global event
- Getting visitors to explore the rest of Britain during the games when the competitors and their sporting and media entourage are in London and
- Ensuring we capitalize on this unique opportunity to showcase Britain by actually getting more tourists to visit us in the years after the games.

So for all you closet Daley Thompson's, today we've brought together a great group of speakers to explain how you can engage with our Olympic tourism plans. The morning is divided into two key sessions, followed by question time.

In the first session is all about the run up to the games. We'll start by looking at how we plan to use the Games to inspire audiences all over the world to visit London and explore Britain.

Then we move on to 'Raising Standards' in which we'll explain how we're already working overseas; at ports of entry across the country and in England, Scotland, Wales and London to improve visitors' experiences at every stage of their journey - and how you can help raise standards in your part of the industry.

After a break, the second session starts with a sponsor's perspective from IHG, London 2012's Official Hotel Services Provider, who have kindly provided this venue today.

Then we take a more detailed look at what will actually happen during the summer of 2012; how you can keep abreast of activity and how you can engage with the programmes because, while much of the action will be centred on London, there are also opportunities across the whole of the UK.

Next, since we know many of you want to understand what your own business can and can't do around the Games, we've invited a senior spokesperson from LOCOG to outline the main opportunities and restrictions.

We close the second session with contributions from Nations and Regions and the 2012 team at VisitBritain

Then we close with a Question Time session in which a number of key figures from the industry will try to answer your questions.

A final thought by way of introduction. As we go through the morning please bear in mind Dr Johnson's observation that there are two kinds of knowledge, that which you know yourself and that which you know where to find.

Today may not answer all your questions about this complex, multi-disciplined topic, but it should leave you better informed about what's going on and where to find answers to your questions as the Olympics approach

Now, to help set the scene and to outline some of the key achievements to date, would you please welcome our Minister for Culture and Tourism, the Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP.