

Will SA's tourism brand succeed like Sydney or flop like Beijing?

The Sydney Olympics is said by the head of Australia's tourism authority to have advanced that country's international tourism brand by a decade. Can South Africa achieve the same result with 2010?

 By [Dr. Nikolaus Eberl](#) 24 Feb 2009



As the global credit crunch takes its toll on international tourist arrivals, with some destinations such as India reporting that inbound traffic has declined by almost 20%, it has become critical to shift gears in attracting visitors to our shores and intensify the marketing efforts for 2010.

This begs the question, what are the benchmarks for leveraging international sport events for maximum tourism benefits? Which previous hosts stand out as possibly best-in-class - and which ones are examples to avoid?

At the forefront of global contenders for best-leveraged-event, are the 2000 Olympics hosted by Sydney, which then IOC President, Juan Antonio Samaranch, declared "the best ever", and Australia's Olympic tourism strategy has been hailed by industry experts as a role model for future host cities.

It was the IOC's director of marketing, Michael Payne, who suggested that "Australia is the first Olympic host nation to take full advantage of the Games to vigorously pursue tourism for the benefit of the whole country. It's something we've never seen taken to this level before, and it's a model that we would like to see carried forward to future Olympic Games in Athens and beyond."

On the heels of the Sydney closing ceremony, the Managing Director of the Australia Tourist Commission (ATC), John Morse, stated that the Games changed forever the way the world sees Australia and that the country's international tourism brand had been advanced by 10 years.

A comprehensive strategy

The ATC's four-year Olympic strategy focused on promoting Australia through an intensive media relations program. By working with the world's leading broadcasters, the ATC managed to turn the Olympics into a two-week documentary on all aspects of Australian life. For instance, the UK's leading travel show, *The Holiday Program*, focused its tenth anniversary program in 1999 on Australia, featuring its cities as well as its people.

Further, ATC teamed up with Visa to promote Australia and the Games in a move that turned out to be the

most effective PR campaign of modern Olympics. The logo *Australia prefers Visa* was seen all over the world in all forms of media and reached millions. In another partnership, US Broadcaster NBC agreed to promote Australia by linking Brand Australia with the Olympic brand by the colours of the Olympic Rings. This ensured Australia was seen as a “vibrant, friendly, colourful, free-spirited place that offers a sophisticated lifestyle”.

The success of Australia's tourism branding campaign was reflected in the steady rise of Brand Australia in the Nation Brand Index (NBI) over a period of five years, until it was voted the favourite tourism destination by international audiences in the second quarter of 2005.

Selling Australia

Says Simon Anholt, the author of the NBI: “What this tells us is that much of the world has an appetite for things Australian. Now is the time for Australia to be producing great Australian-branded products, culture, events, services, ideas, and media as fast as it possibly can. Anything that reflects, promotes and sustains those essential and admired Australian values will sell.”

On the other hand, hosting the 2008 Olympics appears to have done little for China's tourism brand. According to a recent poll carried out by GlobeScan for BBC World Service, global attitudes towards China are worsening. China's positive ratings have fallen six points over the year - to 39%.

"Our poll results suggest that China has much to learn about winning hearts and minds in the world," said GlobeScan chairman Doug Miller. "It seems that a successful Olympic Games has not been enough to offset other concerns that people have." This is despite spending more than US\$400m on the lavish opening ceremony and scooping up the biggest medal tally of all nations participating in the 2008 Olympic

Other than Australia, China did not use the Olympics to proactively promote inbound tourism, but rather focused on sanitizing the event and using it as a platform to demonstrate her logistical and organizational prowess.

Countries have one chance to use an event to full effect

As a result, the nation brand index notes that “tourism appeal in China is lagging. People are showing no increase in their desire to visit China, despite the undoubted fascination of its historical heritage. In fact, the trend in China's results for “likely to visit, money being no object” is the worst of any country - a drop of 5.6 since late 2005. China has sunk to the 27th position in the tourism brand rank.”

If there is one lesson from previous hosts, that sets a memorable event apart from an average one, it is Anholt's conclusion of branding sporting events: “The event gives the country permission to make one single, clear, striking point about itself; and if the only point it manages is its ability to run an event competently, or that it has money to burn on new facilities and lavish opening ceremonies, then by the time the next host takes over - or even sooner - the world will have forgotten that the event ever took place.”

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