
All Ready for Pan American Games. Now Brazil Wants to Host the Olympics

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The Americas will be focused in Brazil starting this coming Friday, July 13, when the Pan American Games open in Rio de Janeiro. The Marvelous City, as Rio is sometimes known due to its natural beauty, will play host to 5,662 athletes from 42 countries, from the three Americas who will compete for 332 medals in 38 sports.

The number of foreign tourists in Rio de Janeiro will increase by around 20% due to the Games, according to Ministry of Tourism estimates.

"We will take advantage of these crowds to showcase the beauty and cultural diversity of our country," says Marcelo Pedrosa, director of Business Tourism and Events at Embratur, Brazil's tourism agency.

"We will also be visited by a very large range of foreign journalists, who will have the opportunity to get to know places in Rio and elsewhere in Brazil."

Traditionally, July is already a month which sees large numbers of tourists due to school holidays. This year, the market will be boosted by sports lovers, who will come to cheer on their national teams and enjoy tourist attractions near the competition venues.

These include some of Rio's best-known landmarks, such as the Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, a lake in the middle of the city where the canoeing, rowing and sailing competitions will take place.

According to Pedrosa, the Pan American Games are fundamentally important for Brazil for another reason. "We will demonstrate that we have the capacity to put on even bigger events, such as the Olympics."

The choice of Rio as host city for the Pan American Games was made on August 24, 2002, at a general meeting of the Pan American Sports Organization (PASO) in Mexico City. The other candidate was San Antonio, Texas.

"When the 180 degree view of Rio appeared on the big screen, with the Pão de Açúcar (Sugar Loaf) and the Corcovado, we heard everyone let out a collective sigh. That was when things turned in our favor," says Rio mayor Cesar Maia, referring to the reaction by representatives of the 42 member countries. The "wow factor" resulted in the victory of Rio over San Antonio by nine votes: 30 to 21.

Christ the Redeemer, a Wonder

Recently voted one of the new seven wonders of the world, the statue of Christ the Redeemer, located on the Corcovado hill in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro, was inaugurated on October 12, 1931.

It is the only modern work on the list, which also includes the Great Wall of China; the city of Petra in Jordan; the Inca city of Machu Picchu in Peru; the Chichén Itzá pyramid in Mexico; the Colosseum in Rome; and the Taj Mahal mausoleum in India.

"It was very much deserved. There really is no view in the world that can beat the one from up here on the Corcovado. And then there's the statue itself, imposing because of its size and beauty," stresses the sailor Bernardo Low-Beer, 20, who will represent Brazil in the Sunfish class in the Rio de Janeiro Pan American Games.

Low-Beer is taking advantage of the Games to bring some friends to visit the Christ. And not just friends, opponents as well, as in the case of Sebastian Mera from the Dominican Republic, who will compete in the same class as the Brazilian. In Rio for the first time, Mera was impressed with what he saw.

"The view from the Corcovado is stunning. I've never seen anything like it! And I've been to a lot of places for competitions," he enthuses.

Bernardo explains that it is common for athletes to host their opponents from other countries during sailing competitions. "When I go abroad to compete, I always stay with friends. With the Pan taking place here in Rio, it's my turn to play the host," says the athlete, who often rides his bicycle up the Estrada das Paineiras, one of the access routes to the Christ statue. "It's a tough ride, but the view from the top makes the sacrifice worthwhile."

Since 2000, the statue of Christ the Redeemer has been undergoing renovation. One of the highlights of the improvements carried out to make visits safer and more comfortable is the inclusion of three panoramic elevators.

Embratur will be hosting today, July 11, a party for about 400 foreign journalists accredited to cover the Pan. The welcome party will take place at 8 pm at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) which is located on the Aterro do Flamengo, near downtown Rio.

With views of famous landmarks such as Guanabara Bay and the Pão de Açúcar, the setting will be the stage for attractions including the samba and funk artist Ivo Meirelles and the drum section of the traditional Estação Primeira de Mangueira samba school.

The menu will feature flavors from the different Brazilian regions, which also inspired the decoration of the event.