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## Assessing the Readiness of Atlanta Hotels to Host International Visitors During the '96 Summer Olympics

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# Assessing the Readiness of Atlanta Hotels to Host International Visitors During the '96 Summer Olympics

## **Abstract**

Three major areas were investigated to assess the readiness of Atlanta's hotels to host international visitors during the summer Olympics of 1996. In the area of human resource development, hotels were asked if they planned to conduct language training and hire bilingual employees. In the area of services, hotels were asked if they plan to provide special services for international guests. In the area of marketing and sales, hotels were asked if they would provide promotional materials in different languages and advertising to attract international guests. International guests are expected by 83 percent of the respondents, and authors provide answers to these questions

# Assessing the Readiness of Atlanta Hotels to Host International Visitors during the '96 Summer Olympics

by  
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Mark McGrath

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Every four years the Olympic games motivate thousands of people to travel to another country to watch their teams compete. They also travel as tourists, visiting sites and attractions along the way as well as in the country hosting the games. In 1996, Atlanta, Georgia, USA, will be hosting the Olympic Games and thousands of visitors from every corner of the world.

Hosting the games demands that the city prepare itself to house, feed, and provide sporting venues for all the athletes. It also means the cities' hotels, restaurants, public transportation systems, police, fire, and other support systems must be prepared to meet the onslaught of foreign visitors. Meeting the needs of foreign visitors will present many obstacles for the city of Atlanta. The one obstacle that is critical to overcome, and that every entity within every support system will be faced with on a daily basis, is that of communications.

Hotel and motel operations within Atlanta are faced with this communication problem in every department that will interface with international guests — front desk, reservations, guest services, housekeeping, engineering, restaurant, room service, as well as the management team. What do Atlanta area hotels plan to do to have employees with

the language skills needed; inform, in writing, the international guests of food offerings (menus), room locations, directions to sports venues, etc.; and to draw international guests to their properties?

### **Future Growth Lies in International Visitors**

Effective tourism management requires an understanding of tourism on a global level.<sup>1</sup> Lattin<sup>2</sup> suggested that before expanding globally, one of the actions that should take place is to increase the tourism promotion budget in order to be able to compete with other countries. The U.S. ranks twentieth in the world in terms of spending on tourism promotion.<sup>3</sup> International tourism to the U.S. is the largest business service export,<sup>4</sup> and is where future growth lies; states aiming to increase their tourism receipts should promote international tourism.<sup>5</sup> Meyers<sup>6</sup> suggested that travel marketers should focus on foreign visitors and expand the travel destinations by exploring different parts of the U.S. Blalock<sup>7</sup> mentioned that Greg Farmer, U.S. Travel and Tourism Administration (USTTA) undersecretary, describes the decline in international travelers as dangerous to the U.S. economy.

The 1992 Olympic Games provided a very good boost to Barcelona's infrastructure and economy.<sup>8</sup> Hotels in Lillehammer continue to do well even though the Olympics are over. Hotel occupancy in Lillehammer increased by 8 to 10 percent in the summer of 1994.<sup>9</sup>

Beginning on July 20, 1996, Atlanta will host 700,000 visitors and three billion viewers worldwide for 16 days. It is expected that this will provide the city 85,000 new jobs, and \$ 3.5 billion in capital investment.<sup>10</sup> Since Atlanta received the bid to host the 1996 Olympics, international tourists to Georgia have increased by 78 percent.<sup>11</sup>

Koss<sup>12</sup> mentioned that hotels in secondary cities such as Cincinnati, Ohio, and San Antonio, Texas, have realized the importance of international tourism and have marketed themselves through worldwide wholesalers and travel agents. Such hotels have revised their product/service mix and added additional services to appeal to international guests. A study of 19 hotels that largely cater to international tourists found that communication barriers are the most important factors facing these hotels and suggested that U.S. hoteliers should offer guest contact personnel, foreign language training, and multicultural seminars.<sup>13</sup>

### **Hotel Readiness Is Assessed**

The purpose of this research was to assess the readiness of Atlanta's hotels to host international visitors during the summer Olympics of 1996. In addition, the type of hotels (affiliation and size) that are most likely planning to satisfy the international visitors needs will be identified.

The three areas investigated were related to communications and language training, marketing and sales efforts, and menu planning. A questionnaire was designed and a random sample of 96 hotels was selected from the Atlanta hotels listings in *Hotel and Travel Index* of

spring 1994. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 10 respondents. The revised instrument was checked by two faculty members in the Hotel and Restaurant Administration Division at the University of Tennessee for reliability and clarity. A total of 47 questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 49 percent. Data were coded and tabulated using frequencies and percentages.

Most respondents (83 percent) are expecting to host international visitors during the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Chain and franchise hotel operations expect 86 percent of their guests to be international, more than any other type of hotel affiliation.

All hotel operations having between 351 and 400 rooms are planning to host international guests; 90 percent of hotel operations with more than 400 rooms are also expecting to do so. Hotel operations with fewer than 100 rooms do not have this expectation.

Twenty-five percent of respondents are planning to conduct language training programs for employees to overcome the communication barriers with international guests. Chain operations had the highest percentage at 32 percent, followed by franchises at 21 percent, and independent hotel operations with 17 percent.

Forty percent of hotel operations with 400 or more rooms will conduct language training for employees; this is twice the percentage of those with a capacity of 101 to 200 rooms. Hotels with 351 to 400 rooms reported that they are not going to conduct language training for employees prior to the 1996 Olympics. Instead, they will hire more bilingual employees to facilitate communications with international guests.

Prior to the Olympics, 53 percent of respondents plan to hire bilingual employees. More franchise operations (63 percent) will hire bilingual employees than chain operations (55 percent), and independent hotels (17 percent). A greater percentage of the hotel operations with more than 350 rooms plan to hire bilingual employees than the smaller hotels.

### **Hotel Services for International Guests Will Expand**

Menus featuring international items will be developed by 32 percent of respondents to meet the needs of international guests during the '96 Olympics. The results indicate that half of the independent operations plan to add international menu items, while only 32 percent of franchises and 27 percent of chain operations plan to do the same.

More than 40 percent of respondents with a hotel capacity greater than 301 rooms will add new international items to their existing menus. Only 14 percent of hotels with 101 to 200 rooms will do so.

Only 4 percent of respondents will show foreign movies in hotel rooms during the '96 Olympics; these are mostly operations with 350 to 400 rooms.

An international guest relations desk in the lobby will be provided by 30 percent of respondents to better serve the international guests during the Olympics. More franchise hotels (47 percent) will provide

such a desk than independent hotels (33 percent), and chain operations (13 percent).

Business centers of 17 percent of respondents will provide translation services for international guests during the Olympics. While independent hotels will not provide this service, 21 percent of franchise hotels will do so. Hotels with a capacity of 301 to 350 will not provide translation services, but 25 percent of operations with 351 to 400 rooms and 30 percent of operations with more than 400 rooms will do so.

Signs and in-house advertisements in foreign languages will be used by 36 percent of respondents during the '96 Olympics; 75 percent of hotel operations with a capacity of 351 to 400 rooms will post signs in foreign languages, while 50 percent of hotels of more than 400 rooms will use such signs.

One fourth of respondents will provide brochures and promotional materials in foreign languages. Independent hotels will not be providing this service, even though 67 percent of them will host international visitors. More than 25 percent of franchise hotel respondents will provide such brochures.

Hotels with a capacity of 101 to 200 rooms and 201 to 300 rooms rank first and second, respectively, in terms of providing international guests with promotional materials in foreign languages.

Nineteen percent of respondents have currently been conducting some marketing efforts to attract international visitors during the Olympics, while 27 percent are planning to do so just before the Olympics. Large operations, those of 350 rooms or more, are planning more marketing efforts to attract international visitors than smaller operations.

### **Hotels May Not Be Prepared**

Atlanta, Georgia, is going to be the center focus of the world in the summer of 1996. It is expected that three billion viewers will watch the Olympics. International travel to Georgia has increased since the announcement that Atlanta is going to host the 1996 summer Olympics. Many of the hotel operations surveyed (83 percent) are expecting international visitors, and some (19 percent) are doing marketing efforts to attract international travelers.

More than half of the respondents plan to hire bilingual employees, and one fourth will conduct language training programs for their employees to facilitate communications with international guests.

Hotel operations are developing their product and service mix to better serve the needs of international guests. New menus featuring international items will be offered by 32 percent of respondents; international guest relations desks will be provided by 30 percent, and translation services by 17 percent of respondents.

Hotel operations with a capacity of 351 to 400 rooms are willing to put more effort into accommodating the needs of international guests than smaller operations. All large hotel operations (greater than 350

rooms) are expecting international visitors and will hire bilingual employees to overcome communications barriers. Signs in foreign languages will be used by 75 percent of large hotel operations. Marketing efforts to attract international visitors have been made by half the large operations, with the other half planning to do the same just prior to the games.

The Olympics of '96 will be a big challenge to Atlanta to show the world real southern hospitality.

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