

## Sport - A Driving Force For Tourism Development

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The 4th International Conference on Tourism & Sport underscored the importance of large sporting events as an increasingly important part of today's tourism supply and for their potential to foster sustainable development.

The Chairman of CNTA, Shao Qiwei, opened this 'pre Olympics' Tourism Conference with a commitment that the 2008 Beijing Games would be fully linked to the progressive tourism strategies of China in which service and quality are key components.

During two days of intensive discussions, more than 300 delegates from around the world listened to practical analysis of earlier Olympics including organizers of the Athens, Sydney and Barcelona Games, as well as other recent mega sporting events. They shared experiences and looked for key trends and opportunities to improve the links between tourism and sport generally and for the Beijing 2008 games specifically. Representatives from the UK also explained how the 2012 games were already planned as a major tourism event.

Ambassador Dho Yung Shim Sport and Tourism Advisor to the UNWTO Secretary-General also outlined the new partnership with FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) to promote tourism related aspects of the 2010 World Football Cup across Africa, to help reducing poverty.

Amongst the principle issues that emerged in relation to major sporting events generally and the Olympics particularly were:

- œ The importance of building both quality and sustainability standards to meet visitor expectations and to ensure the continuing economic and lifestyle values for local communities.
- œ The opportunities for securing infrastructure to provide lasting improvement to the tourism offer.
- œ The intense global media and internet exposure that can affect a country's tourism competitiveness, its visitor appeal and its entire international image.
- œ The increasing public interest in long term sustainability for tourism generally with climate impacts as a growing factor and the specific interest around travel to major sporting events.

Geoffrey Lipman, UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General said that 'the Beijing Games will be another landmark in the growing interface between sport and tourism, given the emergence of China as a major inbound and outbound destination. By 2020 China is forecast to be the top market for visitors, as well as a dynamo for sustained global tourism growth and the massive socio-economic development that it creates".

Lipman also referred to 'the evolving need for quadruple bottom line sustainability in Tourism and Sport - economic, ecological, social and climate', drawing attention to the Climate Change Summit UNWTO and the United Nations Environment Programme would be holding in Davos, Switzerland, in October 2007, with the support of the World Economic Forum.

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