The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games: How the Australian Tourist Commission leveraged The Games for tourism
John Morse
Journal of Vacation Marketing 2001; 7; 101
DOI: 10.1177/135676670100700201

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://jvm.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/7/2/101
Current Issues

The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games: How the Australian Tourist Commission leveraged The Games for tourism

John Morse
Invited paper

Australian Tourist Commission, 80 William Street, Woolloomooloo 2011, GPO Box 2721, Sydney, NSW 1006, Australia
Tel: +61 2 9360 1111; Fax: +61 2 9361 1388; Websites:http://www.australia.net.au; http://www.australia.com

John Morse is the Managing Director of the Australian Tourist Commission (ATC). The ATC is responsible for promoting Australia internationally as a tourist destination. He has 30 years’ experience in marketing and advertising, including work with major advertising agencies in both London and Sydney. His career with the ATC began in 1982. He is also an Editorial Board member of the Journal of Vacation Marketing.

ABSTRACT
KEYWORDS: Sydney 2000, Olympic games, tourism, Australia

This paper outlines the key strategies used by the Australian Tourist Commission (ATC) in leveraging the Olympic Games to boost tourism to Australia. In 1995, the ATC established its Olympic Games Business Unit. The key elements of the pre-Games strategy were in developing joint-promotions, the establishment of a major media programme, working with TV broadcasters, and the setting up the Business Development Programme. Following the success of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, a twelve month post-Games strategy was operationalised. It has included tactical advertising in key markets, the use of direct marketing, working with key market segments such as the business tourism sector, and developing research to monitor the success of the strategy and tactics. The ATC strategy has also been recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as a benchmark on how to maximise the benefits for both the Games and the host country.

INTRODUCTION

At the closing ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics Games, Juan Antonio Samaranch the president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) declared that Australia had delivered the best Olympics Games ever. Despite this and other accolades from the world’s media, it is not only important for the Australian Tourist Commission to reflect on its Olympic tourism strategy, but also for others involved with the marketing of tourism around such mega-events to have the opportunity to analyse what was done.

It will be some time yet before Australia can fully quantify the overall tourism impact of the Games. However, initial reports have indicated that the increased interest in Australia as a result of the Games is already turning into increased tourism. In the USA for example, research undertaken by the
ATC after the Games revealed that the event has increased the likelihood of Americans taking their next holiday in Australia.1 Around 75 per cent of Americans surveyed indicated that they had seen pictures or stories in the media on Australia as a holiday destination as part of the Olympic Games coverage, and around half reported that this coverage had increased their interest in holidaying in Australia. Meanwhile, in the UK, tour operator Bridge the World reported a 53 per cent increase in passenger bookings in the month following the Games. They also reported that they were also booking more second and third time visitors to Australia.

The Games have provided a lasting legacy for the Australian tourism industry and Australia as a whole. The way the world sees Australia has undoubtedly changed. There is a much greater knowledge of what Australia can do, of who the people are and of what a great destination Australia is. However, the end of the Games does not signify the end of the tourism-related strategy; rather, it signified the halfway mark for the tourism industry. The ATC has always recognised that following the end of the Games there would be another window of opportunity for the tourism industry to capitalise on the increased awareness of Australia.

THE ATC’S OLYMPIC GAMES STRATEGY

The ATC’s involvement in the Games began in 1992 when it supported the Sydney 2000 bid team through public relations and promotion activities. When Sydney was awarded the Games in 1993, the ATC recognised that the event presented the tourism industry with a unique opportunity on which to capitalise. Clearly the ATC’s task was to take on the opportunity presented and make the Games work for inbound tourism. Never having hosted such a mega-event, the first step for the ATC was to carry out an assessment of how to devise a strategy, and structure itself to make the most of the opportunity.

The Olympic Games Business Unit

The main objective of the ATC is to market Australia internationally as a tourist destination. Consequently, the ATC had to identify how to best maximise the opportunities presented by the 2000 Games in accordance with its charter. In 1995, the ATC established its Olympic Games Business Unit (OGBU) with the principal functions of identifying opportunities, coordinating activities and managing relationships resulting from Australia hosting the 2000 Summer Olympic Games, the 2000 Paralympic Games and (later on) the Olympic Arts Festival.

The OGBU worked towards identifying Olympic-related tourism opportunities that were measurable, achievable and realistic. It was reasoned that through the identification of these opportunities the Olympics would offer extraordinary leverage to the ATC’s marketing efforts. One of the first steps was to identify the key objectives of the overall strategy.

Objectives of the strategy

The broad objectives of the ATC’s Olympic strategy were to:

— increase visitor arrivals to Australia;
— increase the amount of export earnings due to international tourism;
— increase geographical dispersal of international visitors to a greater number of areas across Australia;
— increase market share in countries where the ATC is actively marketing;
— raise the profile of the tourism industry within Australia as one of the leading export industries providing jobs and wealth for the country.

Key elements of the strategy

The ATC’s role has been one of leadership for the tourism industry. It has long seen the need to encourage greater cooperation between all partners and stakeholders in promoting Australia internationally. In order to maximise the impact of the Games for tour-
ism, the ATC recognised that the establishment and promotion of additional strategic alliances with traditional and key non-traditional stakeholders both in Australia, and overseas, was going to be vital.

In 1997 the ATC implemented its A$12 million four-year Olympic strategy. The key tactical elements of the strategy included:

— developing joint-promotions with Olympic sponsors such as Visa International, Kodak, Air New Zealand and Ansett Australia. Such activities are reckoned to have generated an additional A$160m worth of promotional exposure for Australia between 1998/1999 and 1999/2000;
— the establishment of a major media programme; this included the visiting journalists programme, which is calculated to have generated more than A$2.3bn worth of publicity between 1998/1999 and 1999/2000;
— working with TV broadcasters to gain extra airtime and exposure about Australia; major broadcasters included Olympic broadcast rights holders such as NBC from the US, CNBC from Canada and Globo from Brazil. By working with these broadcasters it was possible to develop programme ideas and prepare profiles and stories on Australia’s diverse regions and attractions to feature throughout their Olympic coverage;
— setting up the Business Development Programme, which invited influential international tourism business people to attend the Games; this would allow Australia to demonstrate itself as an important visitor destination and encourage long-term business relationships with those in the tourism industry in Australia;
— focusing on increasing high-yield markets such as the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector;
— creating trade marketing programmes, so that the tourism industry could capitalise on Olympic opportunities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, both opportunities and challenges abounded in the lead-up to the Games. On the one hand, the ATC was able to develop relationships with non-traditional stakeholders such as the Olympic broadcast rights holders, who presented new opportunities not usually available to the Commission on such a large scale. On the other hand, the communications channels with the tourism industry, business and government had to be constantly reviewed and assessed. Greater demands were placed on the ATC for information than ever experienced before, and a higher level of servicing these partners was essential in keeping them informed to ensure the maximum benefits for the tourism industry as a whole.

Given the inherent limitations of any tourism marketing budget, the overarching strategy was to leverage the Games to promote tourism in the lead-up to and the one- to five-year period following the Games. This included not only promoting tourism around the actual event itself, but creating a vision of Australia that would leave a lasting positive impression and lead to increased amounts of tourism in the future. As can be seen in Figure 1, the range of media relations and branding partnerships developed was extensive.

**THE POST-GAMES STRATEGY**

In order to capitalise on the exposure and enormous interest in Australia generated by the Games, the ATC recognised that it would need to be very active in the 12-month period immediately following the Games — a time when Australia would still be uppermost in people’s minds. Clearly the record levels of interest in Australia as a destination would not automatically translate into increased international tourists unless Australia was also presented as being easily accessible and affordable.

The ATC’s post-Games strategy has been playing a vital role in increasing international visitors to Australia. The goal has been to meet the 8.3 per cent growth forecast by the Australian Tourism Forecasting Council for 2001 — to a record of 5.3 million visitors.

The strategy involves four elements which have been specifically aimed at capitalising on Australia’s post-Games popularity. They
Figure 1  Highlights of the ATC’s Olympic media relations and branding partnerships

UK

— Visa International ran major integrated magazine promotions in the UK, including Vogue, Condé Nast Traveller, Tatler and Vanity Fair, with a combined readership of 600,000.
— The UK’s Sunday Times published a 16-page ‘Down Under’ supplement on Australia.
— Kodak and the ATC ran a holiday competition involving point-of-sale promotions in 20,000 retail and duty-free stores.
— The Irish Independent featured a 24-page daily supplement on Australia and the Olympics.
— The ATC and UK Olympic sponsor Adidas produced a 16-page supplement featuring Olympic sports linked to Australian experiences, inserted in Cosmopolitan, Esquire, She and Zest magazines with a total circulation of some 1.3 million.

France

— Australian features were included in the International Herald Tribune as well as a major regional broadsheet Quest France.
— Popular TV breakfast programme Telematin on FR3, with a daily audience of three million, broadcast stories on the Olympics and Australia each day during the Games.

Germany

— A German TV network featured two Australian specials, called ‘Sydney Shines’.
— Several European Broadcast Union TV broadcast rights holders, including Danish TV2 Sport, Swedish TV1 and Switzerland DRS ran various spots on Australia and the Olympic Games for the one-year-out celebrations.

Japan

— Vogue Japan featured an Australian style special.
— The national morning show, ‘Yajuma Wide’ featured Australia for two weeks, with live crosses to hotspots around Sydney.
— Broadcast to an audience of 72 million, the Japanese variety TV show, ‘Welcome to Newlyweds’ featured interviews filmed in Sydney and the Gold Coast, with the host visiting some of Sydney’s most popular tourist attractions.
— Visa International ran a A$2.5m television and magazine campaign in Japan promoting Australia as the host of the 2000 Olympic Games.

Brazil

— Australia featured on daily news programmes from August on Globo TV and the channel also screened ‘Fantastico’, a special Australian feature every Sunday.
— Icaro Magazine (in-flight publication for Brazilian airline Varig) published an Australia special which was included on all domestic flights.

USA

— NBC’s ‘Today’ Show shot on location in Australia for three weeks, beginning one week out from the Games.
— The ATC assisted Visa with a series of Olympic-related television commercials as well as a number of newspaper campaigns.
— ‘Postcards of Australia’ featured throughout NBC’s 700-hour Olympic sport coverage.
— Half a million Americans visited the Bank of America ‘Down Under Tour’, which travelled through 21 states for one year in the lead up to the Games and generated US$2.5 million in publicity.
— US travel channels, Travel Channel and the Ultimate Ten featured Australia in the week leading up to the Games.
— Australia was the cover story with a 25-page feature in the September 2000 National Geographic Adventure magazine.
— A joint promotion with Kodak, ‘Enjoy the Best of Australia’ featured in US Gourmet Traveller magazine.

Canada

— An Olympic sweepstake with the ATC and Chrysler Canada was promoted on the Internet, television, newspapers and magazines.
— Australia was extensively promoted in the Visa/Toronto Dominion Bank Olympics sweepstake, with the first prize a trip to ‘down under’.

Singapore

— TCS8 featured seven telecast Australian episodes of the ‘Travel Hunt’ programme generating approximately A$6.3m worth of publicity.
— A ‘live in Australia’ eight-day broadcast by Singapore’s most popular English radio station, Class 95FM, attracted half a million listeners and approximately A$2.5m worth of publicity for Australia.
are focused on converting the interest in Australia into actual arrivals. The four key elements of the strategy are:

— tactical advertising: the launch of over 90 joint tactical advertising campaigns, worth more than A$45m and involving more than 200 industry partners, promoting specific holiday deals to Australia;
— direct marketing: an aggressive A$6m direct marketing campaign, including the redevelopment of the ATC’s website, http://www.australia.com;
— working with key markets: by looking, for example, to build the lucrative meetings, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) sector;
— research: undertake continuing research on how the Olympic exposure has shifted Australia’s image internationally so that the strategy and tactics can be modified.

Overview of post-Games promotions around the world

In the period immediately following the Games the ATC launched a substantial number of promotional campaigns in identified key markets. They have been designed to capitalise on Australia’s increased profile as a destination.

Europe

The ATC launched around 60 tactical campaigns throughout Europe following the completion of the Games, and they are scheduled to run until mid-2001. The campaigns have involved more than 190 partners with a total spend of around A$15m. The tactical campaigns have been released throughout Europe, including the key markets of the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands.

In addition, for the first time a campaign in the Nordic region was launched during the last few days of the Olympic Games, with the title ‘Now you’ve seen Australia on TV, come down and see it yourself’. This has been the largest project ever undertaken in the Nordic region to date, and has also involved six state and territory partners and more than 27 tourism operators.

North America

A tactical campaign launch was timed to start in the US market immediately following the closing ceremony. The initial focus was on a range of unbeatable holiday deals (starting at US$1,499 for 12 nights) to demonstrate that Australia was an affordable destination. The ATC launched a A$7m TV advertising campaign with Qantas airlines as a partner. The advertisements featured both the well-known persona of Paul Hogan as Crocodile

(continued)
Dundee and Qantas’s Vic the Koala. Responses, including direct calls to participating wholesalers and impressions on the specific deal pages on the australia.com website, had totalled 90,000 as at December 2000. Furthermore, an online campaign with Air New Zealand was also launched, and newspaper tactical advertising with Air New Zealand and United Airlines (again offering holiday package deals) was also launched.

The Canadian market was also targeted with four joint advertising campaigns, offering Australian holiday deals launched post-Games with Qantas, Air New Zealand, Canada 3000 and Air Canada. Again the campaign was timed to coincide with the end of the closing ceremony.

**New Zealand**

The New Zealand market is one of Australia’s closest and most familiar markets. Despite the familiarity with Australia as a destination, many New Zealanders fail to travel beyond the major cities of Sydney and Melbourne and key resort destination of the Gold Coast. The focus of the campaign in New Zealand has been to encourage this market to explore other areas of Australia with the ATC joining states and territories in magazine advertising campaigns. Separate promotions for the states of Tasmania and South Australia, which included special holiday offers, were also launched. In addition, the ATC joined with Visa International to leverage the Olympic Games further and drive travel to Sydney and other parts of Australia from the New Zealand market by an average annual growth rate of 2.1 per cent until 2010.

**Japan**

In Japan, the Internet is being heavily used to help convert the increased desire to travel into actual bookings following the Olympic Games. Japan recorded the second largest number of visitors to the ATC’s Internet site during the Games period. Internet activity includes a Web-designed campaign with Coke’s leading brand of tea, Sokenbicha, as well as a special site on Japan Airline’s home page.

The ATC continued a successful joint initiative with Japan Airlines immediately following the Games, with the target market being young Japanese women. A new campaign is being launched in 2001 to encourage the ‘new 50s’ market to travel to Australia. In addition, joint tactical campaigns, valued at around A$3m, were also released in Japan following the Games.

**Asia**

In contrast to the Japanese market, television has been the major focus in the rest of Asia, with a number of popular drama series being filmed in Australia and being aired in markets such as Thailand and Hong Kong. Star TV’s premier travelogue programme, ‘Travel Asia and Beyond’, is viewed by more than 18 million households in Asia and featured Australia between November and early 2001.

In addition, tactical campaigns throughout Asia covering China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand were released immediately following the Olympic Games to capitalise on the increased interest across the region.

**CONCLUSION**

The ATC’s Olympic strategy was one of the most ambitious and far-ranging ever to be undertaken by a national tourist office. In recognition of the ATC’s success the International Olympic Committee has declared the strategy to be a role model for future host cities to consider. Michael Payne, the IOC’s Marketing Director, applauded the way the ATC had worked with the Olympic movement, its sponsors and official broadcasters on advertising, publicity and media programmes to promote both Australia and the Games. He acknowledged that Australia was really the first Olympic host nation to take full advantage of the Games in vigorously pursuing tourism for the benefit of the whole country. ‘It’s something we’ve never seen
take place 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.3 In further recognition of the link between sport and tourism established by the ATC, a cooperation agreement was signed in 1999 between the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and the IOC. The agreement seeks to ‘cooperate to strengthen the links between sport and tourism, in order to promote better the appreciation of these two activities’.4 The Sydney 2000 Olympic Games presented both challenges and opportunities for the tourism industry. The ATC attempted to address every challenge and maximise every opportunity that presented itself. But has the ATC been successful? In terms of determining future visitor arrivals, it is of course still too early to tell. However, this will be monitored by the ATC’s own research, and also by questions concerning the influence of the Olympics which have been built into future Australian international visitor surveys (IVS) data commissioned by the Bureau of Tourism Research (BTR).

On reflection, the ATC believes it is fair to say that the range of activities undertaken with the various Olympic sponsors, stakeholders and other partners have advanced Australia’s brand image and awareness by at least ten years. What the world knows about Australia today, it would not have known about for another ten years if Australia hadn’t had the Games.

The end of the Games in no way means the end of the work. The success of the Olympic Games has raised the world’s expectations of Australian tourism, and the industry must continue to deliver the high level of service provided to international visitors during the Games. The Games have raised the standards on all aspects of a holiday in Australia, from the service levels in hotels and restaurants, to the friendliness and spirit of the Australian people. What the world saw, heard and read about Sydney and Australia during the Olympics is what the international visitors of the first decade of the new century will expect. Australia now needs to ensure that it is able to deliver on the promise of the world’s best tourism experience. Australia cannot afford for the holiday experiences of its international visitors to fall short of the expectations they now have.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that Australia, Sydney and the Olympic Games were all objectively reported on in glowing terms around the world. Accolades were received from not only the media, but also athletes, businesses and the Olympic movement. Australia showed the world that it could deliver the best-ever Olympics. On reflection, the ATC strategy of leveraging the Games to promote the tourism industry was well founded. The endorsement of the ATC’s Olympic strategy by the IOC, and the cooperation agreement between the IOC and WTO, highlight in some measure not only the success of the ATC’s strategy but also the future importance of Olympic host cities in working with the Olympic movement for the benefit of the wider tourism industry.

REFERENCES
(1) ATC commissioned tracking research.