

# TOURISTS' RISK PERCEPTIONS OF LONDON AS A SAFE HOST CITY DURING THE 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

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The Olympics Games 2012 provided the host city London the opportunity to showcase its cultural diversity and world-class tourist attractions. However, the build-up to the world's largest sporting event was fraught with problems and attracted considerable negative publicity in both the British and international press. One key component of this involved security at the Games; terrorism and its potential to disrupt the spectacle was undoubtedly the most sensitive issue among venue organisers. Little systematic research has been carried out to elicit the views of spectators at the Olympic Games regarding safety and security.

Understanding tourist-related safety components, which are taken into consideration when deciding upon visiting a destination, is an important aspect in existing tourism literature (Qi, Gibson & Zhang, 2009). Previous research indicates that risk perception is influenced by tourist's personal characteristics (Sonmez & Graefe, 1998). There is a dearth of research on the relationship between perceived risk and sport tourism (Boo & Gu, 2010; George & Swart, 2012; Qi, Gibson & Zhang, 2009). Studies that have examined this relationship have mainly focused on terrorism-related issues related to mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup (George & Swart, 2012; Qi et al., 2009). Boo and Gu (2010) examined the influence of risk perceptions at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and found contrasting results between international and domestic respondents' risk perceptions. Low risk perception, amongst the international sample, was found to be positively related to the likelihood of attending the next Olympic Games; indicating that those whom are more likely to participate are individuals with low risk perception (Boo & Gu, 2010). Low risk perception, however, had no influence on the likelihood to attend the event amongst domestic respondents (Boo & Gu, 2010). The researchers also found that prior event experience and event interest influence low risk perception at mega-events. In a similar study, whereby the relationship between risk perception and travel intentions at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games was examined, Qi et al. (2009) found that risk perceptions of respondents attending the Beijing Games was negatively influenced by various risk factors such as violence, health and socio-psychological risks. Although researchers found previous travel experience to be an insignificant predictor of perceived risk, gender and role types were found to have a relationship with various risk factors (Qi et al., 2009).

The questionnaire for this Olympics 2012 study was based on similar research conducted by George and Swart (2012) on the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Intercept interviews were carried out with 354 spectators during the duration of the Games at public viewing sites and key tourist attractions to elicit the perceptions of London as a safe host city. In particular, the research analysed tourists' perceptions of safety and security in London during the Games and the various elements that influence their likelihood of attending the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016 as well as returning to London and, based upon their experience.

Ultimately a better understanding of spectators' perceptions of safety and security of the Games can help improve communication messages to combat misperceptions in an effort to increase tourist arrivals to host cities during the staging of mega-events and after such events.

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