

# Greece's devotion to Olympic officials leaves sports fans with nowhere to stay

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NEARLY EVERY single decent hotel room in Athens during the 2004 Olympics has been booked for competitors and officials, leaving spectators and the media nowhere to stay, organisers admitted yesterday.

"Athens 2004 has secured 16,901 rooms for the Olympic family," said the president of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games Organising Committee, Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki. That leaves little or nothing for anyone apart from the thousands of VIPs, officials and associates of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Athens organisers, under pressure over delays, are desperate to win favour with the IOC, with the result that a place

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in Athens

to stay for sports fans has slipped off the list of priorities. Organisers admit they are still hunting for a thousand rooms for the "Olympic family" and that agreements with Greek hoteliers to clinch all deluxe, grade A and grade B (five-, four- and three-star) hotel rooms are the only way they will find them.

After the praise showered on Sydney's Olympic volunteers, the Greeks have called for 150,000 helpers. Of the 10,000 who have applied, many are from abroad, leaving Ms Angelopoulos-Daskalaki unclear on where they will stay. "People will volunteer to house

the volunteers," she suggested when questioned yesterday.

But most Athenians are unlikely to volunteer something they know they can charge for and attractive rates will have to be offered to sign up the 15,000 private residences seen as essential.

Meanwhile, every low-grade hotel in the Greek capital and the wider Attica basin is eyeing an Olympic bonanza with lucrative contracts on offer if they can meet three-star standards. A recent study by Athens 2004 found that 82 per cent of visitors would prefer hotels to private residences. However, Athens 2004 sources admitted that spectators wanting reasonable hotel accommodation

could face in excess of two-hour commutes to and from venues.

Journalists are likely to be housed in hotels a 40-minute trip away, adding to already chaotic traffic problems. Suggestions have been made that cruise ships could be used to cope with demand. Plans to build two flyovers on the approach to the main Olympic stadium and an extension to the metro system have been cancelled.

The IOC has long been worried about the lack of accommodation. It has also recently expressed concerns that building plans did not meet security rules, and that the basketball arena and canoe and slalom course would not be ready.