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Unprecedented glut of tickets ahead of Games

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The bad news piling up for the Rio Olympics means Americans can still score some uncommonly good last-minute tickets.

On May 26, just 10 weeks before Rio's opening ceremony, individual tickets were available for the Games' premier events on the website run by CoSport, the exclusive authorized ticket reseller in the U.S. That includes both the opening and closing ceremony, every day of track and field competition, three days of gymnastics and 10 out of 13 days of beach volleyball. Swimming had sold out one day earlier.

Experts say the glut is unprecedented in modern Olympic history. At the same point heading into the 2012 London and 2008 Beijing Games, tickets were impossible to find except through personal connections with sponsors or costly VIP packages.



"I don't recall at any time over the past 30 years that the general public could ring up an official ticket broker for the Olympic Games and buy a single ticket to an opening or closing ceremony, ever, at near or close to face value," said Rob Prazmark, co-founder of 21 Sports & Entertainment.

Jeff Bliss, CEO of The Javelin Group, who has advised clients during 10 Olympic Games, agreed. "I'm surprised to see this many quality tickets to this many events, including ceremonies and gymnastics, made available with less than 100 days left to go," he said.

Relentless news reports about the Zika virus, economic and political turmoil in Brazil, crime and pollution are almost certainly hampering demand. But Bliss speculated that global factors were also at play, including the fear of terrorism in the wake of the EgyptAir plane crash on May 19 and last year's terror attacks in Paris.

"The combination of Brazilians, international travelers and sponsors, it appears to be that all three groups are hesitant for a variety of reasons," Bliss said.

Slow domestic sales in Brazil, where citizens have access to the majority of tickets, have been well-documented, with most seats going unsold until recently. However, tickets are now 76 percent sold, according to Rio 2016 spokesman Philip Wilkinson. "We're confident in having full stadiums," Wilkinson said.

There has been little hard data on American demand for Rio tickets, but hospitality providers and travel agents say the CoSport availability comes as no surprise.

Brian Peters, CEO of Bucket List Events, confirmed ticket sellers are trying to unload inventory and unbundling expensive packages. He said worries about Rio haven't led to current ticket holders reconsidering, but they have stopped new buyers.

"New bookings from interested people are just way below expectations, but we haven't had a single cancellation," Peters said.

Don Dow, president of DowEvents, canceled his Rio program altogether due to uncertainty from the organizing committee. He thought last-second travelers might still materialize because the Brazilian government has waived visa requirements and accommodation prices may plummet.

Peters agreed, noting the lack of demand could work out for late deciders.

"If you're just now planning a trip, you could put together a much less expensive program than you could have six months or a year ago," Peters said.

Currently on the CoSport site, a category-A opening ceremony ticket, the more expensive of two tiers, costs \$2,009. Track and field seats at the same level go for between \$178 and \$434, depending on the day.

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