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McDonald's Will Fuel Gold Medals in Sochi

By Lena Smirnova

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A woman enjoying a hamburger on Moscow's New Pushkin Square. McDonald's has been recruited to fulfill the task of feeding participants, staff and visitors of 2014 Sochi Olympics. **Igor Tabakov**

Despite his best efforts, McDonald's Russia founder George Cohon did not manage to have his golden arches planted on Russian soil in time for the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, but his company will get a triumphant welcome in Sochi as the event's official restaurant.

As one of 15 contracted caterers to the 2014 Sochi Olympics, the world's largest fast food chain and nine-time official restaurant partner of the games will build three temporary outlets at Sochi Olympic sites: in the athlete's village, the media center and the ski resort Krasnaya Polyana. These restaurants will feed athletes, support staff and journalists.

In addition, McDonald's will add three additional permanent restaurants to the Sochi area, McDonald's Russia chief Khamzat Khasbulatov said at a press conference on Wednesday.

"The demand and the interest [in McDonald's] will remain, so our decision to build three [temporary] sites and have another four permanent ones in Sochi is linked the fact that the flow of guests will be huge," Khasbulatov said. "We think that we'll manage. We have great resources."

He added that the company did not have a limit on the budget it would spend for Olympic catering because they had guaranteed a round-the-clock supply of burgers, and they intended to keep that promise.

The company served a record 20,000 to 30,000 clients per day during the Summer Games in London in last year and is getting ready to repeat this feat again. Over 350 people will staff the restaurants on the Olympic sites to make sure athletes get 24-hour access to food.

‘Athletes demand more calories to support staying in shape, so we won’t change the recipe.’
Khasbulatov
McDonald’s Russia

"We don't stop the process," Khasbulatov said. "For 24 hours, we have to be accessible to any visitor, to any athlete. They can come in at six, or five in the morning or at midnight."

The variety of food available in Sochi will be broad, as other operators in addition to McDonald's have been recruited to fulfill the task of feeding participants, staff and visitors.

The 15 catering contractors will serve food at 967 venues for more than 2 million people during the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Sochi. Over 7,300 people will service the sector.

As of January, Sochi had 1,236 functioning food venues, including 65 restaurants, 548 cafes, 318 seasonal venues, 50 bars and 129 cafeterias, according to city government statistics.

Some foreign contractors, such as Switzerland-based Infront Hospitality Management, have already made the cut. There are also Russian caterers whose team members have worked at the games in Vancouver and London. Some of these include Yuzhnoye More+, Germes-Tur, Andre, Fusion Management, and Dellos Catering.

The games' organizing committee president Dmitry Chernyshenko said the menus would incorporate not only Caucasian and traditional Russian cuisines, but also vegetarian, Islamic law-approved halal, and other special cuisines to make the athletes feel well-fed and energized during competitions.

"But of course we'll do everything possible to promote traditional Russian food," he added.

McDonald's also plans to diversify its menu for the Olympics, although Khasbulatov assured journalists that the restaurant's iconic burger recipes won't be tampered with.

"I know that athletes demand more calories to support staying in shape, so we won't change the recipe," he said about the burgers' potential fattening effects.

But the lack of vegetarian options at an international sporting event has some concerned.

Moscow-based vegetarian chef Ruslan Sumtsov will design an international vegetarian menu for select clients at the Olympic Games, with the food to be served at various dining facilities there. He said that there were not a lot of options for vegetarians in Sochi now since the local cuisine was traditionally very dependent on meat.

"People that have gone to Sochi have said that there are vegetarian dishes, but they are identical in all the eateries. It's as if one chef swooped through all the restaurants," Sumtsov said.

But the games could become an impetus for promoting vegetarianism in the area, as restaurants try to cater to foreign visitors with different eating habits.

The trend might be similar to what happens countrywide after the Orthodox Lent, which prohibits consumption of animal-based products. Chefs incorporate vegetarian dishes into their menus during the religious holiday and keep them on the menus permanently after once they see how popular they are.

"It will depend on restaurateurs if there will be enough vegetarian options in Sochi," Sumtsov said. "But it's hard to open new vegetarian restaurants. There are not a lot of customers and it's hard to get the right products. We're very particular about the products we use."

These will not be the only challenges ambitious catering entrepreneurs will have to face.

Chief sanitary inspector Gennady Onishchenko sent a list of 11 forbidden food items to the games' organizing committee in the beginning of May. The comestibles that were deemed unsafe to be served to athletes and spectators at the Olympics include homemade beer, cottage cheese made from unpasteurized milk, dried fish and mushrooms. The popular Russian dish that mixes pasta with mincemeat called *makaroni po flotsky* was also excluded.

The 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona are unofficially considered to have been the best in terms of catering, while the worst food was provided at the Atlanta games in 1996, according to popular opinion published on the Internet.

Some Olympic hosts seem to have placed patriotism over variety when serving. In Beijing in 2008, little attention was given to different food preferences, so athletes were offered a preponderance of noodles, fried mollusks and spring rolls. Warned in advance of the catering arrangements, the American team decided their hosts would not be offended if they did take-out and imported its own food supplies to the games.

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