

Sochi Games Sell Nearly 925,000 Tickets, Empty Seats a Problem

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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SOCHI — Olympic organizers said Tuesday that 924,802 tickets have been sold so far for the Sochi Games.

Dmitry Perlin, the head of Sochi's ticketing department, said 70 to 75 percent of the tickets sold have gone to Russians, while Japan and Germany have sold out their quotas. He said "sales are significantly above our expectations."

Facing many rows of empty seats in the opening days of competitions, some senior Olympic officials have voiced concern about less-than-capacity crowds and a dearth of spectator enthusiasm.

Gerhard Heiberg, a Norwegian member who heads the IOC marketing commission, praised the overall organization but said the Games were not as lively as hoped.

"We feared that a little bit," Heiberg said. "We were warned about this. The television pictures are wonderful, the competitions are wonderful, the venues are great. But I feel a bit the lack of enthusiasm and the joy of sports."

Heiberg said the issue had reached the highest levels of the International Olympic Committee.

"There are not enough people," he said. "You have seen the stadiums are not filled."

Certain events like figure skating have been packed. Others, like biathlon, have been half-empty.

Some have been concerned that fears of terrorism, the expense of traveling to the resort town on the Black Sea and Russian bureaucracy would turn foreign fans away.

Ticket prices have not been cited as a major issue. Tickets start at just under \$15 and went all the way up to nearly \$1,500 for the best seats at the opening ceremony. Perlin, head of the ticketing department, said the average cost of a ticket for the Sochi Games was about \$115.

John Coates, an IOC vice president from Australia, said he had experienced good crowds at hockey and moguls.

"There was great atmosphere," said Coates, who had not been to the alpine venues yet. "I think it is all fine. I think it is OK."

Anita DeFrantz, a U.S. member who sits on the policy-making executive board, said Russian crowds are different.

"Here, people are more reserved," she said. "There's not a lot of rah-rah, except for the Russian athletes who get a great reception. I think as time goes on and they get used to it, there will be more excitement. A lot of people have not seen these sports before."

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