

Life's a Beach at the Winter Games

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A shirtless spectator watching Sweden's Charlotte Kalla compete Thursday in the women's cross-country race. **Jae C. Hong**

SOCHI — Forget the parkas and stocking hats. Sunscreen and shades are the must-have items at the Sochi "Winter" Games.

The temperature soared to 16 degrees Celsius on Thursday, prompting Olympic visitors to grab a nap on a bench outside a venue or hit the nearby beach for some impromptu sunbathing and even a dip in the Black Sea.

"I think it should always be like this," said Yury Valyeyev, a resident of Bryansk, located between Sochi and Moscow, who came here to work construction during the Olympics. "We are glad that it is held in Russia. Being Russian, I am very glad because everywhere in Russia is cold and here it is warm."

And the heat just keeps on coming. Forecasts call for a high of 17 C on Friday and 16 C on Saturday before a gradual cool down to 10 C on Sunday.

For the Olympic events, officials remain unconcerned about the balmy weather. International Olympic Committee spokesman Mark Adams said it is "always a constant battle for winter sports" to maintain optimal conditions when the weather warms up. He said they "are relaxed, but will watch the situation" as the days progress.

While the warm temperatures are making life difficult for the skiers and snowboarders on the mountain in Krasnaya Polyana, they have provided a welcome relief to Russians, Canadians, Americans and other visitors who have endured harsh winters back home.

Just a few hundred meters from the Olympic Park, visitors shed their clothes and lounged on the rocky shores of the Black Sea. Fishermen cast their lines into the water and Valyeyev jumped right in.

"The water, you can bear it," Valyeyev said with a shrug of his shoulders. "And it is normal for a Russian man."

For President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Olympic Committee, bringing the Games to the subtropical climes of Sochi was as much an investment in the long-term prospects for this resort village as it was for any immediate payoff that the influx of visitors and money would bring. They saw it as an opportunity to establish Sochi as an attractive vacation destination for visitors from all over the world, and from the rest of Russia in particular.

Seeing lush green grass blanket the mountain cluster of events rather than billowy snow may not be advantageous in the short run. But it could get others thinking about heading to Sochi when they need to break from another long, hard winter.

In Moscow, it was 2 C on Thursday and has been brutally cold for much of the season. It was minus 4 C in New York on a day that another nasty storm was spreading across the southeastern U.S. and threatening to cancel or postpone sporting events. And Sochi was considerably warmer than two cities it beat for the 2014 Games — Pyeongchang, South Korea at minus 2 C and Salzburg, Austria at 4 C.

"Yes, the weather is absolutely gorgeous, which is, of course, challenging," Sochi 2014 spokeswoman Alexandra Kosterina said. But, she added: "Nothing we are not prepared for."

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