

Sochi Notebook: Ticket Scalpers Given Free Rein Outside Olympic Park

By [Yekaterina Kravtsova](#)

February 20, 2014



People exchanging money for tickets outside the Olympic Park near Sochi on Friday. **Yekaterina Kravtsova**

SOCHI — "Does anybody have a ticket to sell?"

This was the most common question being asked at the entrance to the Olympic Park as the Games entered their third-to-last day on Friday.

Olympic Park admission tickets cost 200 rubles (\$5.60), but with all tickets for the last three days already sold, scalpers have gained an opportunity to earn big bucks.

Prices now vary from 1,500 to 4,000 rubles, though tickets for the hockey final can be bought for 5,000 rubles instead of the face value of 19,000 rubles since the Russian team won't be playing for gold.

Ismail Guenes, who was selling tickets for the hockey final, said few people wanted to buy

them despite being on offer at almost four times below the initial price. If Russia hadn't lost, "everybody would pay 50,000 rubles for a ticket," he said.

Olympic volunteers standing outside the ticket center said that they couldn't stop people from reselling tickets and that security personnel are meant to intervene. People have only started to crowd the square in front of the ticket center to resell and buy tickets in the last few days, they added.

"I'm not worried that the tickets could be fake, I've already bought one and there were no problems at the entrance," said an Olympic visitor who gave her name only as Irina. "On the very eve of an event, tickets are usually cheaper."

Chacos Andrea Szabo, a 40-year-old ski instructor from the United States who bought an entrance ticket for 2,000 rubles, said she had no choice, since it was the only way to get into the Olympic Park.

"I didn't expect that there would be a lack of tickets and that I would have to pay more," she said. "I was at the Vancouver Olympics, people were reselling tickets for sporting events there too, but tickets there were not so expensive, and you didn't have to have a ticket to get to the Olympic Park."

Security officers standing near people who were selling and buying tickets said that they would try to stop them, but that it was impossible to catch every scalper.

I managed to find a person who agreed to sell me entry tickets to the Olympic Park for 1,500 rubles each and I bought them right in front of a security officer's eyes.

Original url:

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