

# PARIS: GOING FOR GOLD

Paris has grand ambitions to host the greenest, fairest Games of them all – can it achieve this?

**A**s I walk along the banks of the Seine, it's hard to imagine that next summer the peaceful vista dotted with tourist cruises will instead be packed with athletes bearing flags from around the world, with crowds cheering them on from the sidelines.

A six-kilometre stretch of this iconic river will set the scene for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games on 26 July, 2024, with a flotilla of some 160 boats meandering between the Austerlitz and Iéna bridges before culminating in front of the Trocadéro. Along the route, delegation boats will pass by historical monuments doubling as competition venues – from the Place de la Concorde to the Grand Palais.

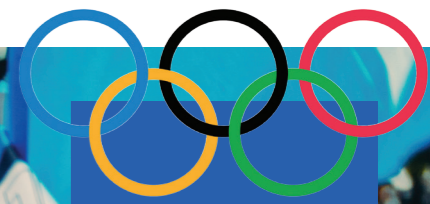
**The Seine will set the scene for the opening ceremony of the Olympics, with a flotilla of 160 boats**

This will mark the first time that the opening ceremony has taken place outside of a stadium, with at least 600,000 spectators (both free and ticketed) attending – ten times more than in an Olympic stadium. “It’s going to be out of this world. A generational event and a watershed moment,” enthuses Will Whiston, executive vice president of On Location’s Olympics and Paralympics business unit, the official hospitality provider for Paris 2024 (see box on page 33).

Hosting the opening on the Seine is an incredibly ambitious way to kick off the world’s largest sporting event, but perhaps an appropriate way to celebrate the centenary of the Paris 1924 Olympics and the return of spectators to the Games – international visitors were →



WORDS HANNAH BRANDLER



**OLYMPICS:**  
26 July – 11 August 2024

**PARALYMPICS:**  
28 August –  
8 September 2024

**10,500** Olympic and  
**4,350** Paralympic  
athletes

More than **13 million**  
spectators

**350,000** hours of TV  
broadcast

**41** competition sites

More than **600,000**  
meals to be served at the  
Athletes Village daily

Average of **30,000**  
police officers and  
gendarmes mobilised  
daily, along with an  
estimated **25,000**  
private security guards

Target to not exceed **1.5**  
**million tonnes** of CO2

Paris 2024 will be the  
first Games to use **100**  
**per cent** renewable  
electricity

Polluted water in the  
Seine is **ten times**  
less prevalent, and the  
number of fish species  
recorded has increased  
from **14 to 32** over the  
last **30** years

banned from attending the Tokyo edition in 2021 due to the pandemic.

The event is also in keeping with the ambitious spirit of the 2024 Games, which seeks to be more inclusive and the most sustainable in history. Here we explore whether the host city is on track to build a lasting legacy.

### Green machine

Paris 2024 is being hailed as the greenest Olympic Games in history, with a target to halve the carbon emissions compared to the average of London 2012 and Rio 2016, and pledges to offset more CO2 than the Games generates.

“What’s special about the Paris Games is that 95 per cent of the venues hosting athletes and competitions already exist,” says Corinne Menegaux, managing director of tourist office Paris je t’aime. “Major sporting events will happen in historical jewels.



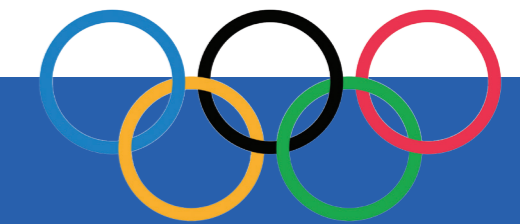
athletes and visitors, will ultimately only be revealed after the Games, though the UK has promised to send its delegation by Eurostar.

### The people’s games?

“Ouvrons Grand les Jeux” (Games Wide Open) is the official slogan for Paris 2024, intended to evoke a sense of inclusivity. Indeed, Paris 2024 is set to be the first Games to have gender parity in athlete participation, while previously exclusive events such as the opening ceremony will have both free and ticketed entry.

That said, the label is at odds with the country’s reputation on mobility issues, with the public transport system ill-equipped to handle the 350,000 people with disabilities who plan to visit in the summer of 2024. Earlier this year the Council of Europe found that France was in violation of the European Social Charter, due to failings towards people with disabilities. The Paris metro, for instance, has just one line (M14) with fully accessible stations – and even then, there are reports of broken lifts.

Measures, albeit long overdue, are being carried out to address this problem. In April 2023 French president Emmanuel Macron pledged €1.5 billion in funding to improve accessibility in public spaces, and more recently the French government announced that small businesses such



### HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCES

Paris 2024 will be the first Games to have an official global hospitality partner, with packages sold on a single platform. On Location will provide an array of experiential hospitality and travel packages for individuals and companies, complete with hotel stays and transport within the city.

Highlights include showstopping views of the opening ceremony from the Alma bridge, finish line seats at the track and field events, interactions with athletes and access to Clubhouse 24, an entertainment zone at the Palais de Tokyo which features large screens, interactive activations, a Parisian-inspired food hall and live music performances. “In the past people have experienced an Olympic sporting event. Now they’re going to have a full day of immersive experiences within Paris,” says On Location’s Will Whiston. See corporatehospitality.paris2024.org for more information.



The Aquatics Centre in the suburb of Saint-Denis, for instance, is the only permanent sports facility to be built for the Games and it was done so using low-carbon construction methods, while a footbridge connects it to the Stade de France opposite.

Next summer it will host artistic swimming, water polo and diving events, but beyond this it will become a multi-sports venue for the community of Saint-Denis. Its modular configuration means the 5,000-seat venue will be transformed into a 2,500-seat facility, complete with two 50 metre pools, and able to host neighbourhood events plus national and international competitions from July 2025.

Additionally, action on the Seine won’t be limited to the opening ceremony.

Paris aims to make the river swimmable for competition events

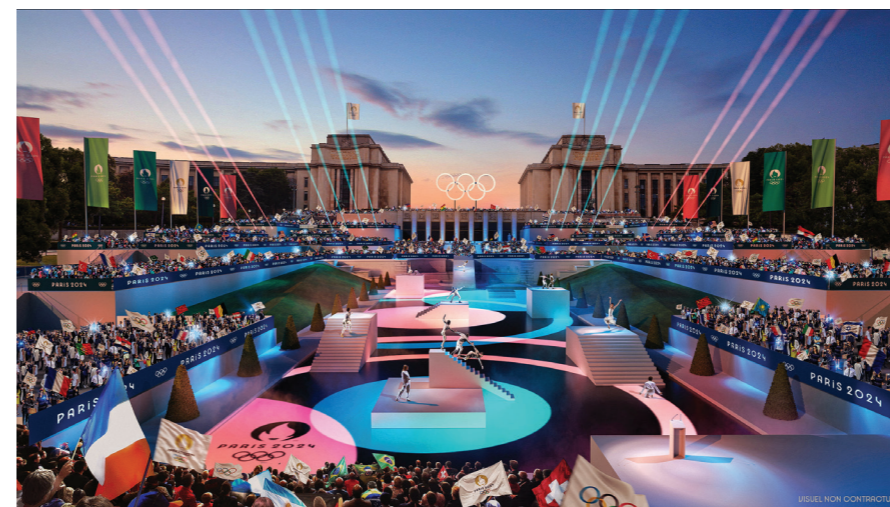
for the first time since 2012, with an ongoing clean-up drive already in operation – test events were held in the Seine in August. The long-term goal is to create public swimming facilities in the Seine by summer 2025. (That is, if people are prepared to dip their toe in the water after the forthcoming release of a fictional Netflix film about sharks in the Seine, as my friend frightfully discovered when she accidentally stumbled onto the film set in September...)

Another focus is to promote the use of public transport for travelling to competition venues, with every site accessible via a combination of metro, trains, buses, taxis and trams. Public transport will be reinforced to take up to 500,000 spectators per day during the Olympics, and up to 300,000 for the Paralympics.

An additional 60km of cycling lanes are also being created to link all the competition venues, and will stick around once the Games end in a bid to reduce pollution in the city centre. Public bike sharing system Vélib is also adding 3,000 bikes to its

network, bringing it to a total fleet of around 21,000 bikes.

The hope is that Paris 2024 will provide a more sustainable model for future events, with the focus on carbon reduction set to become a contractual requirement for all host cities. “They are setting everyone up for a great sustainability story,” says Whiston. The total carbon footprint, complete with long-haul flights by



OPPOSITE PAGE:  
Rendering of the  
Aquatics Centre in  
Saint-Denis  
ABOVE AND LEFT:  
Renderings of the  
opening ceremony on  
the Seine and at the  
Trocadéro

It’s being hailed as the greenest Games in history, pledging to offset more CO2 than it generates

It’s a way to showcase the culture and patrimony,” adds Gwénaëlle Delos, director at Atout France UK & Ireland, the French tourism development agency.

To name a few, the Stade de France will host athletics, para-athletics and rugby (hot off the heels of the Rugby World Cup), the Champ de Mars will provide the backdrop for beach volleyball and blind football, and Stade Roland Garros will set the scene for tennis, wheelchair tennis and boxing.

“If there are permanent constructions, it’s because there’s a real need for them,” Menegaux adds.

as shops, hotels and restaurants will be able to apply for a grant to make their buildings more accessible. The government will pay for 50 per cent of the costs of a project up to €20,000. This is essential given that a study revealed that approximately 560,000 of 900,000 establishments open to the public in France are not yet accessible.

“The Line 14 of the metro, which in 2024 will link Orly airport to the future Saint-Denis Pleyel station (and therefore the Stade de France), is fully accessible to wheelchair users, as are all the tram lines and all those of the Paris Bus Network, as well as RER A and B,” says Menegaux. By the start of the Games, 174 SNCF stations are set to be accessible, and the government aims to increase the fleet of taxis with ramps and the number of trained drivers to 1,000 by 2024.

The system is unlikely to be revolutionised in time for summer, but the hope is that the Games will help create long-term change for the 17 per cent of the population

(12 million people) affected by a disability in France.

French wheelchair tennis gold medalist and advocate for disability rights, Michaël Jérémiasz, spoke on the subject at the Accor Global Meeting Exchange this July in Paris.

“At the moment, disabled people are the most discriminated minority in France. The Games are probably the greatest opportunity to give us more rights... I really believe the games will [accelerate] the process. It’s exciting in terms of entertainment, but I see it as a political tool because the Games for me start on 1 January, 2025. That’s when I expect all the partners, government, society and the media to say, ‘now we understand who you are and what you fight for’”.

**It’s a World Cup with a Superbowl at the beginning and end, and 600 other championships**

### Facing a challenge

Hosting the Olympics and Paralympics is no small feat, with a myriad of challenges to overcome in the run-up to the events as well as firefighting for the period in action. “It’s the most complex event in the world. It’s a World Cup with a Superbowl at the beginning and end, and 600 other world championships

in the middle,” exclaims Whiston. “Major global sporting events are very different from an English Premier League match, for example. You need to manage a whole urban complex, not just a stadium,” he adds.

This is no easy task for a city that has been marred by its fair share of disruption over the past few years. Headlines have ranged from protests against the government’s planned pension reform, which even involved a brief storming of the International Olympic Committee HQ, to terrorist threats and a bedbug infestation.

However, thankfully the Games have a way of uniting a nation. I recall similar unease in the run-up to the London Games in 2012, and yet this event is now looked back on fondly as an optimistic period – though, hindsight has revealed a questionable legacy with regards to improving grassroots sport participation and social inequality.

“It’s a tremendous opportunity to promote the country in terms of investments and tourism. It’s all about improving the quality of the offer and the services, working on our welcome and attractiveness,” says Delos at Atout France. Can Paris go one step further and accelerate sustainable development and social change? Will it be a game changer? Only time will tell. In the meantime, see you on the sidelines – or swimming in the Seine thereafter. **BT**



### ELECTRIC FLIGHT

Urban air mobility provider Volocopter says its eVTOL (electric vertical takeoff and landing) services are on track to launch in time for the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, transporting passengers between Charles de Gaulle and Le Bourget airports and the city centre. The VoloCity air taxi, an eVTOL with two seats (a pilot and a passenger), will have a 35km range and speeds of up to 110km/h. The electric air taxi will be fully battery-powered and will fly at heights below 500 metres in Paris. The public can book flights for the summer of 2024, with booking opportunities set to be unveiled on Volocopter’s channels soon. The operations in Paris will “gradually grow to cover the whole Paris region over the next decade,” according to Volocopter. [volocopter.com](https://volocopter.com)

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