New York Is Lucky Not to Have the Games

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Now is the time for New York to mount a counter-Olympics: one based on the High Line, a rejuvenated Coney Island, free museums and fantastic street life. Why would anyone choose to visit London — when even London cabbies are threatening a work stoppage and major theatrical productions are closing down during the Olympic Games — when New York is safe, easy to move through by foot, subway, bike or taxi, and filled with world-class food trucks and restaurants rather than the McDonald’s fare that will be served at all Olympic venues.

London will be a morass this summer. Meanwhile, New York City has never been a better place to visit.

New York, which competed unsuccessfully for the 2012 Olympics, may well turn out to be the big winner this summer. Thousands of Londoners intend to flee their homes, and non-Olympic tourists plan to avoid Britain, rather than endure Internet slowdowns, Olympic-generated traffic congestion, extortionate hotel prices and airport delays caused by airspace restrictions throughout the 2012 Games.

Although the British have extensive experience countering Irish freedom fighters, the $1.58 billion allocated to prevent any disruption of the 2012 Olympic Games far exceeds anything that Scotland Yard or MI5 ever spent to combat the I.R.A. London, which experienced a terrorist subway bombing in July 2005, is now competing with itself to show that it can attract 17,000 athletes and almost one million visitors without any big disruption. It won’t be easy; during riots last year, the local police did not even have sufficient manpower and vans to arrest groups of looters.

The true competition this summer is between a free and open New York City — where new pedestrian plazas are jammed with visitors and theaters are open seven days a week. New York relies on its civilian-controlled police department to maintain safety, while Britain is preparing a military deployment and private security forces along with drones in the sky and an aircraft carrier on the Thames River. In fact, as The Guardian notes, there will be more British troops swarming London (about 13,500) “than are currently at war in Afghanistan.”

The London Department for Transport is already urging local residents to avoid the subway, to work from home and to even go to a pub before taking the subway home from work. And hotel rooms during early August are available for only 14-day stays, often with a severe price increase — another disincentive for the typical global tourist lacking a passion for athletic competition. In order to make sure the athletes are not tied up in traffic, an extensive Olympic road network has been designated for the exclusive use of the athletes, corporate sponsors, media, V.I.P.’s and Olympic officials. All nonemergency vehicles are banned from this network, including ambulances carrying blood supplies and noncritical patients. Referring to the London Olympic Committee for the Olympic Games, one observer wrote, “healthcare transports risk being mired in semi-permanent jams, and the decision has been widely interpreted as a victory for LOCOG over the little people.”

Let the games begin: New York's high-energy, sidewalk fashion show, and spontaneous flow of people all day and night would win the gold medal for urban life — with or without the Olympics.
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