FROM B1

EVENTS: 'Banner year' for tourism, says mayor

The combined economic impact on the city from the five major events alone was estimated to be close to $90 million.

And of course, it wasn't just about sports as Calgary played host to the Dalai Lama and the international WorldSkills competition as well.

"For many hoteliers, 2009 was a bit of a saving grace. General business travel was off, and travel from the U.S. was down. Having these events helped save the year. Without them, it would have been a much bleaker picture," says Joseph Clohessy, general manager of the downtown Calgary Marriott and president of the Calgary Hotel Association.

Randy Williams, new CEO of Tourism Calgary, says the 1988 Winter Olympics was really a launching pad for Calgary as far as solidifying a reputation for hosting major events.

"Calgary's got a lot of advantages" particularly with the convention centre and the Stampede facilities, he says.

"A lot of cities have one venue as an option but Calgary has a couple of options to look at. And they're looking at the expansion of the convention centre and that's an opportunity for the future. . . . We've also got good air access into Calgary and it's improving, which is important. We've got a good airport facility here and it's fairly close in to the city. It's got a reputation for hosting. Every time you host a major event, it adds to your asset base as far as reputation with organizers of international events."

Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier describes 2009 as a "banner year for tourism and sport" in Calgary, with numerous major events.

"They kept Calgary in the forefront in terms of a place for active participation," he says. "Overall, it was a stellar year and a great A-class performance for Calgary hosting."

He says the city is working on a number of events for 2010 that have not been announced.

One of biggest that's known is the annual meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank in March 2011.

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The Grey Cup festival was just one of many national events that Calgary hosted in 2009.

"This is very big," the mayor says.

Tourism Calgary says the anticipated attendance for that event is 4,000, which equates to about 20,000 hotel room nights for the city.

When the announcement was made last year regarding Calgary hosting the event, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said it was a "testament to Calgary's increasing stature as a world financial centre."

It is the first time since 1990 that a Canadian city has been chosen to host the prestigious international forum.

But while Calgary is becoming known internationally as a financial centre as well as being recognized as an energy sector, it has long been a powerhouse in the sports world.

The Calgary Sport Tourism Authority, a group of business people who volunteer their expertise to bid for major sport and cultural events on behalf of the city, has been instrumental in securing many of this year's events, as well as the 2012 IIHF World Junior Championship slated for Calgary and Edmonton in December 2011 and January 2012.

"We're thrilled about all the exciting events on Calgary's horizon," said chairman Doug Mitchell.

"This city has an outstanding track record for hosting international sport events. This (past) year is an example of how hard the CSTA and its partners have worked, and will continue to work, on attracting international sport events to our calendar that stimulate economic activity, provide community legacies and benefits to our tourism industry."

Mitchell says the group is "working on all sorts of events. Can we do the same as in (2009) with all those events? It's probably going to be tough."

Brookman says Calgary really works well for big business events. It is recognized as a business city, an energy city.

"So anything that caters to the energy industry, anything that caters to the high-tech industry, any of those big shows, that's what we want to go after. And I think we're going to put a plan in place that will really see us doing that," he says.

"I really believe that it's critical that we expand our convention centre. I think it's critical that we finish another hall at the BMO Centre, and the next two or three years we've got to get a few more hotel rooms. Those are all bits and pieces. You can't sign the big convention and then have no place for people to sleep. So it all has to work in tandem.

"But there's no question our convention centre is too small for the city and for the dreams we have for bringing big shows here."

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