

Welcome, Olympic Tourists, to Brazil. Please Don't Mind the Mess

David Biller – June 13, 2016

When Rio de Janeiro won the rights in 2009 to host the Olympics, Brazil planned a blitz of projects to showcase just how far it had risen. But when tourists start showing up in two months to attend the games, it'll be the **bust** and not Brazil's best that'll be on display.

That sewage-filled harbor that visitors will pass on the way from the airport -- and the spot where Olympic sailing events will be staged -- was supposed to be a clean bay. That new metro line they'll take from the posh Ipanema beach neighborhood to the games will at best run on a limited schedule, having started operations just four days before the opening ceremony. And what about the **state-of-the-art** gear that police were supposed to get to help keep travelers safe? A top official says it never happened. Welcome to Brazil, a land of political, economic and fiscal crisis.

"When you look back at the bid documents from 2009, the Olympics were definitely designed and pitched as a way of showcasing Brazil as this **thriving** democracy and burgeoning economy," said Jules Boykoff, the author of a book on Olympics history that's critical about the legacy of major sporting events. "How big a difference seven years make."

To be fair, most of the 39 billion reais (\$11 billion) in arenas and infrastructure being built ahead of the Olympics will be ready in time and, besides a few **eyesores** and commuting delays, most tourists may not even notice all that should have been. But the unfinished work is an indication of a much bigger problem that will last long after the visitors leave: Rio state is all but broke.

No one knows that better than Joao Vitor da Silva and his father, Rodrigo da Silva. The scrawny nine-year-old in an Iron Man T-shirt is a hemophiliac, and Batista said they've been warned that public-health spending cuts may disrupt supplies of prophylaxis, the shots that prevent Joao from bleeding out whenever he's injured or sick.

"If there's money for the Olympics, there has to be money for health," said Da Silva, a 34-year-old former forklift-operator who's on medical leave.

These days, Brazil is stuck in a crushing recession and Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, was stripped of power while she faces an impeachment trial on allegations she illegally financed budget deficits. Rio state missed debt payments last month and is delaying public-worker salaries after oil prices collapsed, a primary source of revenue. And at least six companies contracted for Olympic projects and related infrastructure have been crippled by allegations they paid **kickbacks** to win lucrative public-works deals.

Leonardo Espindola, chief of staff to Rio's governor, told the Supreme Court in April that the state is on the verge of "social collapse." State Finance Secretary Julio Bueno agrees. At the **outset** of an hour-long interview last month, Bueno claimed to have "the worst job in Rio de Janeiro."

"We're unable to maintain essential services like police and health," he said. "That's what defines the health of a society."

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