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# Australia The next host of the Commonwealth Games is a city keen to learn from Glasgow

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**M**ANY people even in Australia don't know whether we're a resort, a city or a metropolitan area of Brisbane, so the Commonwealth Games are our way of putting ourselves on the map," beams George Forbes, who manages the Gold Coast's Social Eating House. His restaurant is just one of the many slick new eateries opened as a tangible upsurge in investment and positivity fills the air with the approach of 2018.

For the record the Gold Coast is a city, though it's easy to see why there is confusion because it didn't gain the status until 1994. This sweeping beachfront oasis – the beaches stretch for nearly 40 miles – is Australia's sixth largest city and one of its fastest growing, with a population nudging half a million. Images of the Gold Coast as no more than a playground for surfers and partying high school pupils are increasingly anachronistic.

The Gold Coast certainly has the pedigree for staging a major global sporting event. The outdoors and watersports in particular are inexorably bound into the local culture. Famous sporting names to hail from these parts include world champion motorcyclist Mick Doohan and cyclist Robbie McEwen, as well as golfers Jason Day and Adam Scott. On the women's front, in terms of Australian sporting stars championing the Games, it's a tale of two Sams – former world doubles No1 tennis player Sam Stosur and Olympic champion swimmer Sam Riley.

Dean Gould, of Gold Coast Tourism, explains the role that the 2018 Commonwealth Games (or GC2018 as it's known in acronym-loving Australia) has in the city's emergence. "It's a way of boosting the Gold Coast. We were hit hard by the late 1990s global financial crisis with our main industries of tourism, property and construction hammered. We've come out of that trying to develop a broader base and these Games are a huge part of that. Currently only 10 per cent of our visitors are from overseas and we want to show all that we have here to help that grow further."

Handovers between Commonwealth Games host cities have not always been the smoothest of affairs, but Gould is effusive in his praise for Glasgow and the city's role in resurrecting the Games.

"Our relationship with Glasgow has been key. We sent a large delegation over in 2014 to study how they staged the Games. Glasgow has also been very helpful in the handover process. They have passed the baton on to the Gold Coast with plenty of advice on how to make our Games as successful as Glasgow's, an event that in many ways resurrected the Commonwealth



Games after the well-publicised disasters of Delhi in 2010."

The Commonwealth Games are sometimes dismissed as a poor man's Olympics, but their scale is staggering, with a worldwide TV audience of 1.5 billion. GC2018, held from April 4 to 15 next year, will see more than 6500 athletes and team officials from 70 Commonwealth nations and territories engulfed in 11 days of fierce competition. The combined Commonwealth population stands at more than 2.3 billion people, with more than half the medal winners at London's 2012 Olympics from the Commonwealth countries.

The GC2018 is not only by far the largest sporting event the Gold Coast has ever hosted, but the largest to be staged in Australia this decade. Unlike the Olympics, all parasports come under the same umbrella and count in the medal tally, with

**The Gold Coast only gained official city status in 1994 but is one of the fastest growing urban areas in Australia**

PHOTOGRAPH: BRADLEY KANARIS/GETTY IMAGES

18 sports and seven parasports. Fittingly, given the Gold Coast's much-vaunted beach culture heritage, beach volleyball is being given its Games debut.

**I**T'S not only Glasgow that the Gold Coast is taking its cues from – closer to home was the Sydney Olympics of 2000, perhaps the greatest Olympics of the modern era. Sydney used the event to regenerate areas and improve infrastructure and the Gold Coast is following this route. It's estimated the Games will create up to 30,000 jobs and bring massive investment with a flurry of tourist and infrastructure projects.

Like Glasgow, how valuable that legacy will turn out to be may be open to question but four state-of-the-art venues have been constructed, while a dozen existing venues have been revamped and, unlike Delhi, all