

Take a bow Birmingham but some landlords should be ashamed

Birmingham has rolled out the red carpet to welcome Commonwealth Games visitors from around the globe, but some of the city's landlords should hold their heads in shame.

We have heard horror stories of visitors refusing to stay in dirty flats and moving to hotels with inflated prices, of others who have arrived after long flights to find their accommodation has not been cleaned and others have arrived only to find that the key holder has not turned up. They have slept on couches.

We've also suffered (accommodation described as "fabulous" on booking.com, reality average) with dirty floors and basic items not in place at The Forge, but we have soldiered on despite repeated calls and emails to the owner.

However, let's not detract from the overall picture of a proud city showcasing modern Birmingham and an army of smiling volunteer helpers out of the top bracket who have gone out of their way to assist.

The grey and orange helpers are everywhere, many with foam hands, showing you the way and answering questions.

One locally-based pair, for example, spent hours in Centenary Square taking pictures of visitors with the Games mascot, Perry, named after a district in the city.

Others, however, have been brought in from other cities, not a good move as in the early part of the Games they had as much a clue of the layout of Birmingham as I had. Minimal at best.

And, when I was young, I was always told to ask a policeman.

Not a good move here. The boys in blue have been really helpful, but they have been drafted in from all part of England including Tyneside, Devon and Cornwall and Wales.

They are doing a great job but asking for specific directions can lead to them bringing out their mobile phone.

Birmingham is buzzing, say TV and radio commentators. It is in Victoria Square, the main centre for music and dance, and in the Bull Ring shopping plaza.

Ten minutes walk away is the highly-popular and hugely-entertaining beach volleyball, with action jollied along by a superb commentator, which is housed in the city centre Smithfield site, as is the adjacent public area where music and events are hosted.

Packed houses have been reported at the athletics venue, The Alexander Stadium, four miles from the centre, and at the newly-built and much-praised Sandwell Aquatics Centre.

The hockey centre at The University of Birmingham in Edgbaston is a superb facility with good viewing for fans and ideal spill-out areas.

The university's sports centre has also hosted the squash which had a specially-erected, all-round viewing, glass court erected in one hall. Good viewing here and crowds have been good.

Minutes away by the super efficient bus service, lies the cricket venue. It is in Edgbaston which regularly hosts Test cricket. No problems here.

Crowds have lined the streets for the marathon and cycling, many sitting on deckchairs in their front garden to encourage the athletes.

They are proud of what has been achieved and also pleased that Birmingham is currently centre stage. There is a rich history

in Britain's second city, stretching though Britain's industrial past to today where modern offices are still being built and logos of some of the world's leading finance companies are prominently displayed.

Naturally, Birmingham's tourism bosses hope that this international profile brings more visitors. However, they **MUST** ensure that tourists are not ripped-off and that accommodation is of a decent standard.

Sadly, many visitors will go home from here with bad memories of sub-standard accommodation and they will spread the wrong message. That's not a legacy the majority of Birmingham deserves or wants.

PICTURE: Skyscape of modern Birmingham viewed from the top tier of the beach volleyball venue at Smithfield.