Olympic Accommodations
1928 Amsterdam Games
For nearly the first three decades of the Modern Olympic Games, the participating athletes and their supporting team officials were at the mercy of local innkeepers when it came to finding a comfortable and affordable pillow upon which to rest at night. Athletes from less affluent nations certainly must have been at a disadvantage arriving at the starting line less well-rested than other competitors.

That all finally changed when the Organizing Committee of the Paris Olympic Games of 1924 decided to house the athletes in a centralized village at Colombes. With three athletes per cabin, the accommodations weren’t plush, but at least everyone was on an equal footing. The cost for each competitor was 30 francs per day. Full pension (3 meals per day) plus showers, electricity, linens and service was an additional 25 francs per day. In 2010 US Dollars, that came to about $60/day/person—not an insignificant amount. Interestingly, the last Games at which athletes were charged a fee to stay at the Olympic Village was at Seoul in 1988. The fee then? $60.96/athlete/day (in 2000 US Dollars!)

The Organizing Committee for the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games, hereafter referred to simply as “the Comité,” had every intention of continuing this benefit.

Initial plans by the 1928 Olympic Games architect, Jan Wils, included the provision of an Olympic Village for the athletes. The concept centered around a rebuilding of the Old Stadium, including a new cycling track, along with a centralized “Olympic Town.” To be included were a fencing hall, exhibition hall, pavilions for wrestling and boxing, a post office and additional outbuildings. Situated between the proposed tennis stadium and swimming stadium there was an Olympic Village.

Figure 1. In the final facilities design for the 1928 Olympic Games, a new Stadium complex (at left) replaced the much smaller Old Stadium (center). Unfortunately, the Olympic Village was eliminated from the final plan.
The Comité foresaw a big problem: how to transport the many Olympic spectators. Without a solution, paralyzing traffic jams would certainly ensue.

Coming to the rescue, the Amsterdam Town Council made available – at no cost – land adjacent to the Old Stadium to build a brand new Olympic Stadium. Sufficient parking would be provided in front of and behind the Old Stadium. This offer was too good to pass up; the Comité quickly changed their plans (Figure 1).

In the end, the idea for an Olympic Village proved to be unworkable, as much for financial reasons as logistical. It was determined that a village with appropriate amenities could not be provided at a reasonable per-head cost to teams. The area originally projected for the village was eventually relegated to use as a motorcar park.

**Olympic Housing Department**

The Comité, created a special housing department within the organizing committee. The head of the department, Mr. L.F. Verwoerd, was instructed to assess the number of beds available for accommodating the Olympic family and spectators. Taking into account hotels, boarding houses and other lodgings there were only 2000 beds in Amsterdam.

With a need for accommodations for an estimated 5000 athletes and officials alone, not to mention the Olympic visitors and normal tourists on summer vacation, it was clear that there were not enough rooms.

Another important question was how and where to accommodate large Olympic delegations together under one roof. Ideas included utilizing ships and schools. With state-run schools empty for the summer holidays, this option was possible. Additionally, there were large hotels outside Amsterdam yet still within a 60 km. radius of the Olympic City.

While the organizing committee’s housing department was responsible for accommodations for the athletes and Olympic officials, a bureau needed to be created to assist Olympic visitors in securing lodging. The Comité turned to the Town Council of Amsterdam for assistance. They arranged for a Housing Bureau to be operated by the Touring Association “t Koggeschip” funded by a subsidy of 35,000 guilders. The Housing Bureau operated out of offices located at Reguliersgracht 109 (Figure 2).

Mr. H. D. van Dellen was placed in charge of the ‘t Koggeschip Housing Bureau. A registry of some 35,000 beds in Amsterdam and an additional 15,000 in the outskirts was compiled. Of these, most of which were located in private homes, fully a third were rejected as not up to the standards necessary for Olympic visitors, demonstrating how seriously the comfort of the Dutch and foreign spectators was taken.

More than 10,000 applications/requests for visitors housing were submitted and honored. That was far fewer than the Comité had expected.

Preliminary information suggested that large groups of spectators from Germany – especially football enthusiasts – would visit *en masse* and require accommodations. This was not to be the case. In the end, Germany spectators for the football matches arrived by train in the morning and returned home at night, so there was never a housing problem.

Nevertheless, a total of some 4,200 German spectators did request accommodations, constituting the largest group. Visitors from the United States (923) were the second largest group for which lodging was found by ‘t Koggeschip.
During the period of the Olympic Games, the ‘t Koggeschip offices were relocated to the Central Train Station to be convenient for arriving visitors.

Amsterdam’s tourism office, working closely with ‘t Koggeschip, published a special directory (125 mm x 240 mm in size) with addresses of all the hotels, boarding houses and other lodgings (see front cover of JSP).

**Athletes Housing**

The housing for the Olympic athletes was extensive and varied. In this article I will limit discussion to the most important facilities used to lodge the teams.

It should be noted that there were actually two waves of athletes. The Olympic field hockey and football players arrived early. Their competitions actually took place from 17-26 May and 27 May - 13 June, respectively. The remaining sportsmen weren’t scheduled to compete until between 28 July (opening day) and 12 August. Olympic planners were thus able to allocate rooms twice, thereby reducing the number of rooms needed for athletes.

**Country Living**

It was clear from the start of planning that the city of Amsterdam could not possibly accommodate all the teams. Fortunately, there were plenty of options for housing athletes within a reasonable distance from the main Stadium complex.

The German Olympic teams were assigned to facilities in the beach city of Zandvoort, about 30 km. west of the Olympic Stadium. The primary venue was the luxurious Hotel d’Orange right on the seashore (Figures 4-8). It was here during the pre-Olympic period that the German field hockey team and later the German rowing team resided (Figure 10). Later in the Games it housed a large delegation of Argentine athletes, rowers, fencers and weightlifters. No doubt they used the local post office to send postcards and letters home (see front cover).

The Grand Hotel (Figure 9), also located along the Zandvoort beach, hosted the German football players followed by the German athletics team.

![Figure 3. Some teams were housed in facilities an easy driving distance from the city center (distances in kilometers).](image)

![Figure 4. Olympic series on cover of Hotel d’Orange to Berlin. Postmarked with double ring cancel Amsterdam 2.VII.1928.](image)

![Figure 5. The luxurious Hotel d’Orange on the beach at Zandvoort was the headquarters for part of the German team. Later, members of the Argentine team resided there.](image)
Uruguay’s famous football team, winners in Paris in 1924 and again in Amsterdam, resided in Velsen, also on the coast and roughly 31 km. northwest of the stadium. They were lodged at the Huize Velserbeek (Figure 11). This mansion on the Velserbeek country estate has an interesting Olympic connection. The Dutch International Olympic Committee member, Baron Frederik van Tuyll van Serooskerken, a good friend of Baron de Coubertin, was raised there. Baron van Tuyll was also the person most responsible for bringing the 1928 Olympic Games to Amsterdam. Unfortunately he died in early 1924.

Following the departure of the Uruguayan football team, the Australian delegation took up residence at the mansion.
The Uruguayan’s big rival were the Argentine football team who were well taken care of among the beautiful coastal dunes and park land of Bloemendaal (23 km. northwest of the stadium) where the Dutch millionaires and jet set maintain grand homes. The footballers were lodged at the prosaically-named Hotel Duin en Daal (Hotel Dune and Valley). As at Velserbeek, the hotel was situated on a large country estate (Figures 12-14).

The first Olympic inhabitants were the Swiss field hockey team. Also housed here later in the Games were the Swiss fencers and the athletics team from Sweden.

The Olympic delegation from Japan occupied two hotels in Zaandam, a nice industrial town dotted with windmills about 21 km. north of the stadium on the North Sea Canal.
The equestrian teams found housing in the area of Hilversum, about 37 km. southeast of the stadium (Figure 15). The area had long been a hub for equestrian activity with ideal stabling facilities for horses. Today, this is Holland’s center for the media and broadcast industries.

Some of the Olympic equestrian events, particularly the “Grand Prix de Concours d’Hippique” on the closing day of the Games (12 August 1928) were held in the Olympic Stadium. The horses were transported by railway from the Hilversum Station to the Amsterdam-Willemsparkweg Station near the stadium.

Back to Amsterdam. A part of the British team was accommodated at the new Centraal Hotel der AMVJ (AMVJ: Amsterdam Society for Young Men). Some IOC members including Georges Averoff of Greece and Comte Clary of France chose to stay here, as did André Chevalier of the Haitian Olympic Committee (Figures 16 & 17).

Another portion of the British team was housed at the Hotel Lloyd in Amsterdam’s harbor (see front cover of JSP). The building was owned by the Koninklijke Hollandsche Lloyd (Royal Dutch Lloyd) shipping company. Also staying here were the Olympic teams of New Zealand and South Africa.

The American Hotel, renowned as a meeting place for everyone from Dutch artists to aristocrats, served as an Olympic hotel (Figures 18 & 19).
The British women lived there during the Games. In the pre-Olympic period, this was the home to the Swiss team’s hockey and football squads. The Dutch football team and French field hockey team were also housed here.

Early on in the Olympic period, the American Hotel was the domicile for a large delegation of French participants. They also had the company of some Swiss Olympic Committee members: Hirschy, Wagner and Messerli.

Built in 1867, the *grande dame* of Amsterdam’s hotels was (and still is) the Amstel Hotel at 1 Professor Tulpplein (Figure 20 and front cover of *JSP*). On the square facing the hotel was the post office where the Comité posted its mail. The head office of the Dutch Olympic Organizing Committee was on the Weesperzijde, a mere 100 meters away.

As one might imagine, this hotel was reserved primarily for the more distinguished members of the International Olympic Committee: IOC President Baillet-Latour of Belgium, General Sherrill (USA), Lord Rochdale (England), Godefroy de Bloney (Switzerland), Marquis de Polignac (France), Comte Clarence de Rosen (Sweden), etc.

Also finding space here was the French football team

The Hotel Schiller on Rembrandt Square was the place for the Italian footballers to congregate (Figure 21). Later it housed the Olympic delegation from Norway (except for the yachtsmen) and IOC member Guth-Jarkovsky of Czechoslovakia.

Those yachtsmen from Norway were ensconced at the Hotel L’Europe along with members of the team from Argentina (Figure 22).

Other “Olympic” hotels included the Hotel Suisse, Hotel Polen, Hotel Holland, Hotel Krasnaposky, and Hotel Doelen (Figure 23).
Alternative Lodging

It was thought area public schools would play an important role in housing teams, yet only 18% of athletes were assigned such accommodations. Part of the Dutch team was lodged in a school as were the teams from France, Hungary, Poland and Sweden.

Other Olympic delegations arrived in Amsterdam by ship which also served as a “hotel” for them during the Games. The ships were moored in the harbor behind the Amsterdam Central Station. The S.S. President Roosevelt provided both transportation and a residence for the U.S. team (Figure 24).

This arrangement had its up and downs. Ernest Carter, the U.S. team’s 1,500-meter man, remembers living on the S.S. Roosevelt this way:

> When we arrived they docked the ship by the pier, they had planned to leave it there. Of course, everybody got off the boat as quick as they could to walk around. Everybody had “sea legs” from being on that boat for 7 days, rocking all the way across.

> In this country (the U.S.) we had Prohibition and a lot of us had never seen a bar. [When team officials] caught two or three athletes in one of [Amsterdam’s] bars or saloons … they got scared and the administrators on board ship panicked. They decided to pull the ship out in the middle of the harbor. It must have been a mile away from the pier. We had to go back and forth by launch. You couldn’t go whenever you wanted, you had to wait for a group. You had to be chaperoned.

> The boat rocked the whole time we were there. So, we never got rid of our “sea legs.” We only won one running race outside of the two relays … I always felt that it was caused by staying on board that ship and having it rock all the time.

Even some European teams availed themselves of using their own transport ships as floating hotels: the Italian team onboard the S.S. Solunto, and the Finns on the S.S. Oihonna. The S.S. Oranje Nassau hosted the Irish team and part of the Belgian team.

Although the German and Polish teams arrived by ship – the S.S. Ubena and S.S. Polonia, respectively – both stayed on dry land with the Germans in various hotels and the Polish athletes in a school.

In conclusion, the Housing Department, managed to find accommodations for all its Olympic family members with the vast majority in hotels (20% in Amsterdam and 28% within a short driving distance of the city). The remainder were assigned to schools (18%), boarding houses (9% in Amsterdam and 3% outside the city), or private lodging (4%). Shipboard accommodations provided room for the remaining 18%.

References

* Model for the future, Amsterdam Olympic Games 1928, Ruud Paauw.
* De Olympiade, official newspaper of the Comité 1928.