

Re: Comments on the Proposals

I write to support Option 3--the setting up of an independent statutory body to regulate the tourism sector in Hong Kong. The incidents of malpractices in Mainland inbound tours in the last few years painfully demonstrated that the existing regulatory framework was not able to protect the tourists.

The independent statutory body should have the authorities to monitor and handle complaints relating to the practices of tourist guides and tour escorts. One of the main duties of this body is to make certain that quality services be given by tourist guides. As many tourists from the Mainland are ill-informed about pricing of different merchandize, it seems reasonable to impose tighter regulation and requirements for tourism practitioners. Though some western countries exercise a laissez-faire policy in tourism, it does not work in Hong Kong. The setting up of this statutory body can also help to resolve the issue of conflict of interest which is perceived by the public to exist in the Tourist Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC).

The current Tourist Guide Accreditation System set up by the TIC to regulate tourist guides is not satisfactory. As in the case of guaranteeing the quality of driving, the independent body should be responsible for the licensing of tourist guides, which would be a good attempt at upholding the quality of service.

Regarding the financial arrangement of Option 3, a one-off grant or loan to support the expenditure is a viable choice. However, in the long run the principle of "cost recovery" must be imposed in order to cut down the anticipated annual short falls.

Another source of malpractice is designated shops which are mostly open to group tourists from the Mainland. At present, there are about 70 such shops in Hong Kong which are not open to the public. The way they operate is subject to question and should be put under the public scrutiny. More stringent conditions should be imposed to ensure that consumers' rights are well protected. As it has become a strategy of promoting the sales of low quality merchandize, the 180-day refund policy should be revisited.

Thank you.

Regards,  
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