

HONG KONG : THE FACTS

Tourism

The tourism industry is one of the major pillars of the economy of Hong Kong. The total tourism expenditure associated to inbound tourism reached HK\$91.8 billion in 2004.

Visitor arrivals showed a strong recovery throughout 2004, reaching 21.81 million, a 40.4 per cent year-on-year increase. This not only surpassed arrivals for the whole of 2003 but also topped the previous record of 16.57 million arrivals in a full year, set in 2002. The growth momentum of arrivals continued in the first eleven months of 2005 with total arrivals reaching 21.16 million, a 7.3 per cent growth year-on-year. Almost all markets recorded double-digit growth rates, with the long haul markets and Asian markets being the key drivers behind the growth of the tourism industry. Looking ahead, with the newly opened Hong Kong Disneyland in September 2005 and the opening of several other major tourism attractions in early 2006, the outlook of the tourism industry is expected to be positive.

Accommodation and Length of Stay: By September 2005, Hong Kong had 113 hotels, with 42 985 rooms. The average occupancy rate for 2004 was 88 per cent, an 18 percentage points growth compared with 2003. From January to November 2005, the average occupancy rate was 85 per cent. The average length of stay of overnight visitors in 2004 was 3.7 nights.

Tourism Commission: The Tourism Commission (TC) was established in May 1999 to coordinate within government various tourism development efforts and to provide better policy support and leadership on the part of government to the development of tourism in Hong Kong.

The Commission's task is to establish and promote Hong Kong as Asia's premier international city, a world-class destination for leisure and business visitors.

To fulfill this mission systematically, the Commission needs to ensure that tourism receives proper recognition as one of the major sectors of the economy, with the industry, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) and the Government working in harmony, and bringing in the community at large.

It is essential for the trade and the Government to work closely together. A Tourism Strategy Group, comprising representatives from the Government, the HKTB and various sectors of the tourism industry, has been established to advise the Government on tourism development from a strategic perspective.

Tourist Attractions and Facilities: The Government has plans to develop a wide-range of diversified tourist attractions in Hong Kong with a view to enhancing our overall attractiveness as a premier tourist destination.

Enhancement projects are implemented to give a facelift to the existing popular tourist areas. The completed

projects include enhancement of the Sai Kung waterfront, minor improvements to Lei Yue Mun, enhancement of the Central and Western District, and the Avenue of Stars which is a joint venture with the private sector. The installation of visitor signage in all 18 districts is targeted for completion in 2006. Beautification works for the Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade and Stanley waterfront are in progress for completion in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Works for the Peak Improvement Scheme and a new transport link in Tsim Sha Tsui East have just started and will be completed in 2007. Projects being planned include the Aberdeen Tourism Project to complement the redevelopment plan of Ocean Park, further enhancement of the facilities along Lei Yue Mun waterfront and the development of a piazza at Tsim Sha Tsui.

"A *Symphony of Lights*", launched by the Commission in January 2004, has been very well received by both visitors and locals. It was awarded the world's "Largest Permanent Light and Sound Show" by Guinness World Records in November 2005, accredited on the basis of the 20 buildings on Hong Kong Island jointly performing in a fully synchronized light and sound show every night. The Show has been extended to Kowloon side covering a total of 33 buildings on both sides of the Victoria Harbour in December 2005.

The opening of Hong Kong Disneyland in September 2005 is a milestone in Hong Kong's tourism development. It helps reposition Hong Kong as a premium destination for family tourists in Asia, and promises to bring net economic benefits of HK\$148 billion over the next 40 years. In 2006, two other major projects, namely Ngong Ping 360 (which includes the Ngong Ping Skyrail and Ngong Ping Village) and Hong Kong Wetland Park, will be completed. The heritage tourism development at the former Marine Police Headquarters Compound is expected to be completed by 2008. The Government is examining views collected from the public in deciding the way forward for the development of the Central Police Station, Victoria Prison and the former Central Magistracy Compound into a heritage tourism attraction. The Government is also working on the timely development of new cruise terminal facilities in Hong Kong in order for Hong Kong to capitalize on the rapid growth of the cruise industry worldwide and in the region by developing herself into a regional cruise hub. The Government has endorsed the redevelopment plans of the Ocean Park, which will form the basis for the development plan of the Aberdeen tourism node.

The promotion of tourism is not simply about construction of new facilities. The Government has not lost sight of the fact that Hong Kong's traditional relics and assets, some of which date back six thousand years, offer visitors a fascinating insight into the region's history. To better explore heritage tourism, the HKTB has enhanced its Cultural Kaleidoscope cultural experience programme with a guided tour of Hong Kong Museum of Art, Chinese cake-making and Chinese medicine classes. It is presently

drawing up a railway sight-seeing guidebook to promote the attractions, including heritage sites along the KCR East and West Rails. In addition, the HKTB continues to work with trade operators to promote traditional Chinese customs and festivals such as the Tin Hau Festival parade in Yuen Long, the Cheung Chau Bun Festival and the Birthday of Lord Buddha celebrations at Po Lin Monastery.

The ecological richness and diversity of Hong Kong is also quite unexpected and is another aspect which has not hitherto been fully recognised. The Commission is looking systematically into how to open up the countryside and make sensible and sustainable use of natural resources to promote green tourism, using a combination of information, access, signage and, where necessary, minor works programmes. The Government is taking forward a programme to develop green tourism in the Northern New Territories anchoring on two pilot projects in the Plover Cove and Tolo Channel area and on Tung Ping Chau respectively, with an emphasis on nature conservation and sustainable development. The HKTB has produced a publication to promote green tourism and it features seven hiking tours, as well as a guidebook on bird watching hot spots in Hong Kong in collaboration with Hong Kong Bird Watching Society. The HKTB is also revamping the green tourism section of its website to make it more comprehensive and user friendly, and will step up relevant green promotion to complement Hong Kong Wetland Park's full completion in 2006.

Standards and Performance: Apart from making available a wide range of attractions to enrich the experience of tourists, it is equally important to enhance the standard of service offered. The Travel Agents (Amendment) Ordinance 2002 has taken effect since November 1, 2002 to put in place a licensing scheme to regulate travel agents which carry on the business of providing inbound travel services. Parallel with this, to ensure the quality service provided to the visitors, the training of serving tourist guides has commenced in July 2002 with subsidy from the Government. Any serving tourist guide who has completed the prescribed training course and passed the required examination will be issued with a "Tourist Guide Pass". They are required to observe the "Code of Conduct for Tourist Guides" issued by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. With effect from July 1, 2004 all travel agents are required to assign only those tourist guides with a valid "Tourist Guide Pass" to receive visitors to Hong Kong. As part of the efforts to help members of the travel agents trade to seek continuous improvement in the area of professional knowledge and skills and the quality of their service, the Government has approved a new funding to subsidize the launching of new courses commencing in 2006 for members of the travel agents trade.

The HKTB continues to implement the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme, which aims to enhance the overall service standards among retailers and restaurants. The Scheme was strengthened in 2003 to provide visitors with better quality assurance and a more comprehensive and effective complaint handling mechanism. By the end of November 2005, over 5 800 outlets had received QTS accreditation, an increase of more than 17 per cent in 12 months, reflecting growing trade and visitor recognition of the scheme's value. The China National Tourism Administration has also expressed its support for QTS. The HKTB, with funding from the

Government, has also been running a Tourism Orientation Programme. The programme, started in 2002, aims to provide participants with practical and structured training in hospitality services.

The promotion of a community-wide hospitality culture is essential to the sustainable development of the tourism industry. The Tourism Commission will continue to run the territory-wide public education campaign entitled "A Hospitable Hong Kong" for another two years to promote a hospitality culture. This campaign will comprise a series of programmes and activities, including the Hong Kong Young Ambassador Scheme, general publicity scheme, service quality seminars and campaigns. The Commission is conducting a Service Quality Study, which aims to work out with the industries and related government departments service standards for each sector. It will also exemplify the best practice and service excellence attained and help promote service quality generally.

Accessing Hong Kong: The Government continues to ensure Hong Kong's accessibility. Nationals from some 170 countries can visit Hong Kong visa free for period from seven to 180 days.

As for Mainland visitors, the quota of the Hong Kong Tour Group Scheme of Mainland visitors has been abolished since January 2002. The number of Mainland travel agents authorised to organise such tours has also increased significantly. The Individual Visit Scheme was introduced on July 28, 2003. The Scheme has been gradually extended and now covers Guangdong province, Shanghai, Beijing, Chongqing, Tianjin and nine cities in Fujian, Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Over 8.6 million individual visitors have visited Hong Kong as at August 31, 2005.

Promoting Hong Kong: The HKTB is a statutory body set up to promote Hong Kong globally as a business and leisure destination and take initiatives to enhance the experience of visitors when they arrive. The HKTB continues to promote the destination to business and leisure travellers through its worldwide "Hong Kong – Live it, Love it!" campaign. It also organises a series of popular Mega Events. In 2005, the HKTB will continue to place special emphasis on attracting more visitors in the high-yield business-cum-leisure and family segments.

Leveraging on the opening of several new attractions from 2005 onwards, the HKTB has designated 2006 as Discover Hong Kong Year. This global marketing campaign makes use of a series of strategic promotions to showcase the new image of Hong Kong and promote it as a "must-visit" destination in 2006. The HKTB has already started promotions to the travel trade in May 2005 and are rolling out the campaign in various long-haul markets, with launches in short-haul markets towards the end of 2005.

Alongside promoting Hong Kong as a preferred tourist destination in Asia, the HKTB places emphasis on developing joint marketing efforts with strategic partners to promote multi-destination tourism and develop new markets. Building on the Pan-Pearl River Delta co-operation agreement, a series of joint overseas marketing initiatives is being conducted with Macau and the nine provincial tourism bureaux concerned. The Government supports the HKTB and the tourism industry to further these efforts.

In the years ahead, the Government will continue to work closely with the HKTB and the trade to maintain Hong Kong's status as Asia's world city.