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**LEGCO QUESTION NO. 6**

(Oral Reply)

Asked by : Hon CHAN Kam-lam

Date of meeting : 24 May 2006

Replied by : Secretary for Economic  
Development and Labour

Question

It is learnt that with favourable conditions such as the extension of the Individual Visit Scheme to six more Mainland cities and the opening of the Hong Kong Disneyland, the number of Mainland visitors coming to Hong Kong during the last Labour Day Golden Week saw a 6% increase over that of last year. The increase, however, fell slightly short of expectation, and was lower than the 9% increase for Macau. The number of Mainland visitors joining package tours even decreased by nearly 20% over the same period last year. The Hong Kong Tourism Board ("HKTB") attributed the cause to unstable weather, Mainland students taking their mid-term examinations and change in travelling habits by Mainlanders etc. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it has assessed the factors, other than those listed by HKTB, which resulted in just a slight increase in the number of Mainland visitors coming to Hong Kong during the Labour Day Golden Week amidst the favourable conditions; and
- (b) how it will promote tourism?

Reply

Madam President,

- (a) During the last Labour Day Golden Week (10-day period), we received some 726,000 visitors, an increase of about 7.5% as compared with the same period last year. Of these, some 415,000 were Mainland visitors, representing an increase of 6% as compared with the same period last year. Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) visitors and group tour visitors accounted for 54.8% and 7.5% of total Mainland visitor arrivals respectively. According to past experience, there were fewer Mainland visitor arrivals during the Labour Day Golden Week amongst the three Golden Week holidays each year.

As the IVS becomes more popular, the share of IVS visitors increases to more than half of the total Mainland visitors while the proportion of group tour visitors decreases correspondingly. This shows a change in the travel pattern of Mainland outbound visitors. The "Golden Week effect" is expected to diminish gradually. Taking the visitors from Guangdong province as an example, they prefer to visit Hong Kong during normal weekends so as to avoid the crowd and the surcharges for peak seasons. During the first four months of this year, there were a total of 4.7 million Mainland visitor arrivals, increased by 16.8% as compared with the same period last year, and the number of IVS visitors coming to Hong Kong during normal weekends for the same period has increased by an average of 22% year-on-year.

The number of countries granted the "Approved Destination Status" by the Mainland has increased substantially from 14 in 2000 to 81 in March 2006, providing more destination choices for Mainland visitors. Hong Kong therefore faces competition for Mainland visitors from other destinations.

Despite the change in the travel pattern of Mainland outbound visitors as well as the intense regional competition for Mainland visitors, with the promotion launched by the Hong Kong Tourism

Board (HKTB) and the concerted efforts of the travel industry, the number of Mainland visitor arrivals maintained a growth during the Labour Day Golden Week. This reflects that Hong Kong remains attractive to Mainland visitors.

- (b) Our key strategies in promoting tourism are – (1) to develop new tourist attractions and enhance existing ones with a view to diversifying the travel experience in Hong Kong; (2) to strengthen promotions in the Mainland and overseas to attract more visitors to come to Hong Kong; and (3) to enhance the quality of tourism service and consumer protection so as to let visitors have an enjoyable stay here.

Regarding the development of tourism facilities, the Hong Kong Disneyland was opened in September last year. It helps strengthen Hong Kong's position as the preferred destination for family visitors in Asia. "A Symphony of Lights" was awarded the world's largest permanent light and sound show by Guinness World Records last November. Phase II of the show was launched last Christmas covering 33 buildings on both sides of the Victoria Harbour. It has been well received by locals and visitors. The Hong Kong Wetland Park, a nature conservation, education and tourism facility, was just opened last week. The Ngong Ping 360 (comprising Ngong Ping Skyrail and the Village), an attraction in a cultural and religious setting, will be opened next month. Besides, the Hong Kong Disneyland will launch three new attractions (Autopia, Stitch Encounter and UFO Cool Zone) this summer. These projects will help diversify the tourism products in Hong Kong and enhance our attractiveness to family visitors. At the same time, we will give full support to the Ocean Park Redevelopment Plans to turn the 28-year-old Ocean Park into a world-class marine-themed attraction.

We will also continue to implement the Tourism District Enhancement Programme. While the Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade Beautification Project is expected to be completed within the next few months, the improvement works in Stanley waterfront and the Peak will be completed next year. Other projects being planned now, such as the Tsim Sha Tsui Piazza, Aberdeen Tourism Project

and Lei Yue Mun Waterfront Enhancement Project, will be implemented in tandem.

The HKTB focuses on three areas of tourism promotion work. Firstly, leveraging on the opening of major tourist attractions in 2005 and 2006, the HKTB has designated this year as “Discover Hong Kong Year”, and launched a series of worldwide promotional activities targeting visitors, the trade as well as the media in 16 key markets overseas to attract more visitors to come to Hong Kong. Strategic promotions targeting family and business visitors will also be launched; various mega events and new tourism products will be implemented to attract them to visit and spend in Hong Kong. As regards the development of new markets in the Mainland, the HKTB will continue its vigorous promotion in key IVS cities. It will promote Hong Kong’s attractions to the residents in the secondary markets and new IVS cities, and encourage the trade to launch tailor-made tour itineraries targeting at residents of these cities. Thirdly, the HKTB will also cooperate with a number of Mainland provinces and cities to develop multi-destination itineraries by combining Hong Kong and Mainland cities to develop more attractive and theme-based itineraries, with a view to attracting more overseas visitors to Hong Kong.

In addition, the Government has all along been playing a facilitating and coordinating role, and keeping close liaison and communication with various Mainland provinces and cities. For example, under the auspices of Pan Pearl River Delta (PPRD) regional cooperation, we have been proactively exploring cooperation opportunities within the region to provide a favourable business environment for the tourism industry in Hong Kong.

On enhancing the quality of tourism services, the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) has launched a “Tourist Guide Accreditation Scheme” in 2002 to improve the professional standard of tourist guides. The Government and the TIC will continue to cooperate to offer continuing training courses on “green tourism”, “cultural tourism” etc, in order to enable tourist guides to continue skills enhancement and upgrade their service standards.

To help visitors recognise reliable shops and restaurants, the HKTB will continue to enhance its promotion of the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme, and ensure the attainment of service excellence by participating merchants through annual assessment. The HKTB will expand the Scheme to cover more tourism-related sectors. To ensure service excellence of merchants, the HKTB also provides training courses to the practitioners and steps up its surveillance of the outlets. To safeguard the consumer rights of group tour visitors in shopping arranged by travel agents in Hong Kong, the TIC has implemented the “14 Days 100 Percent Refund Guarantee Scheme”, and also launched the “Demerit System for Registered Shops” in April 2005 to strengthen disciplinary actions against travel agents and registered shops that contravene the rules.

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