

LCQ6: Promote cruise tourism

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam Kin-fung and an oral reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, in the Legislative Council today (May 6):

The Chief Executive announced on April 18 that the mainland authorities will allow mainland group tour travellers to travel to Taiwan via Hong Kong on Hong Kong-based cruise liners, and are now studying the pilot implementation of this arrangement in four ports, namely Shanghai, Tianjin, Qingdao and Dalian. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it knows the respective numbers of Hong Kong-based cruise liners, the respective person-times of cruise travellers boarding and unboarding in Hong Kong and the number of Mainlanders among them, in 2007, 2008 and the first quarter of this year;
- (b) how the authorities will promote cruise travelling on Hong Kong-based cruise liners, so as to establish Hong Kong's position as a cruise hub; and
- (c) how the authorities will co-operate with the municipal governments of the aforesaid four ports in the promotion plan to attract and facilitate mainland travellers to travel by cruise; and when the relevant promotion plan is expected to be implemented?

Reply:

President,

Our reply is set out below –

- (a) Apart from the local cruise vessels stationed in Hong Kong, depending on market strategies and demand, cruise operators usually deploy cruise vessels to run different itineraries during different periods of the year. Cruise vessels homeporting in Hong Kong with itineraries that have destinations included Costa Allegra, Superstar Libra and Superstar Aquarius for 2007 and Costa Allegra, Rhapsody of the Seas, Superstar Libra, Superstar Aquarius and Superstar Virgo for 2008. According to the information provided by the cruise operator, Costa Allegra homeported in Hong Kong in the first

quarter of 2009, and Costa Classica will homeport in Hong Kong in the second and fourth quarters of 2009.

In 2007 and 2008, the cruise passenger throughput for cruises with destinations (excluding those on cruise vessels visiting Hong Kong as a port-of-call) was about 100,000 and 340,000 respectively. Among them, Mainland visitors accounted for about 30,000 and 90,000 respectively. For 2008, including the passengers of cruise vessels visiting Hong Kong as a port-of-call, the passenger throughput would be over 420,000.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is consolidating the statistics for the first quarter of 2009, and will release them in due course.

(b) With our advantageous geographical location, deep natural harbour and world-class infrastructure and tourism facilities, Hong Kong is well-positioned to become a regional cruise hub, attracting cruise vessels to homeport here. We will continue to enhance our hardware and software so as to develop Hong Kong into a leading cruise hub in the region.

In terms of hardware, we are pressing ahead with the new cruise terminal. To ensure that the first berth will commence operation in mid-2013, we will soon apply for funding approval from the Legislative Council for the site formation works to start by the end of this year. Given the scale of the works, the current timetable is already much compressed. Nonetheless, the works departments would continue to review the progress of construction with a view to expediting the programme.

Apart from the construction of the new cruise terminal, development of software is equally important. Only with well-developed software can Hong Kong attract cruise vessels to homeport here and tourists to visit Hong Kong by cruise.

Through the Advisory Committee on Cruise Industry and other channels, Tourism Commission (TC) would continue to work with HKTB and the industry to jointly formulate strategies to strengthen Hong Kong's position as a cruise hub in Asia-Pacific. The major tasks include –

(i) drawing up manpower training plans, increasing on-the-job training opportunities, and encouraging young people to join the cruise industry. Through the Government's Skills Upgrading Scheme and Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, training courses related to cruise tourism, including "Introductory course on cruise travel",

"Practical skills in servicing cruise travellers" and "Cruise selling training course", etc, will be offered in the course of the year. We will also develop cruise-related courses under the Employees Retraining Scheme. It is estimated that the above-mentioned courses will provide no less than 200 training places at the initial stage. Thereafter, the number of training places can be adjusted to meet the needs of the cruise market;

(ii) formulating and implementing promotion plans for overseas market, including participation in international cruise fora such as the Seatrade Cruise Shipping Convention in Miami, the United States, and arranging the local travel trade to visit major cruise markets to enhance Hong Kong's position as a must-visit port and develop a platform for industry co-operation;

(iii) strengthening connections with neighbouring coastal provinces and establishing an information exchange platform to develop a diversified range of unique cruise itineraries and promote cruise tourism. HKTB launched a cruise tourism website entitled "Cruise South China" early this year. The website, with information on berthing facilities as well as tourist attractions in Hong Kong and neighbouring provinces, facilitates cruise operators in developing cruise itineraries and pre- and post-cruise land excursions; and

(iv) arranging various hospitality activities for cruise vessels visiting Hong Kong with the aim of enriching passengers' experience in Hong Kong.

(c) We welcome the measure to allow Mainland tour groups to travel to Taiwan through Hong Kong by taking cruise vessels homeporting here. This should attract cruise operators to deploy more vessels to homeport in Hong Kong, and enhance Hong Kong's position as the cruise hub in Asia-Pacific.

TC has discussed the implementation details of the new measure with the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) in the first instance. Our first and foremost task is to encourage the local travel trade and cruise operators to work with the Mainland designated agents operating group tours to Taiwan to develop products including cruises from Hong Kong to Taiwan, and launch such itineraries as soon as possible. HKTB will also arrange publicity in the Mainland to tie in with the new products.

As regards cruise services from the Mainland to Taiwan via Hong Kong, CNTA indicated that Mainland ports would first need to work on the supporting facilities, such as the Customs, Immigration and Health Quarantine services. In the meantime,

cruise operators can liaise with the Mainland authorities to develop such itineraries. The Government will also continue to liaise with the relevant authorities to facilitate the early implementation of the measure.

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