

LCQ2: New cruise terminal at Kai Tak

Following is a question by the Hon Ronny Tong Ka-wah and an oral reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, in the Legislative Council today (May 20):

Question:

The Government submitted to the Panel on Economic Development of this Council in September last year a paper on the progress and development timetable for the new cruise terminal at Kai Tak, advising that the target completion date for the first package of projects, which included the first berth, was 2013. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it has assessed the current development of the cruise market within the Asian region, particularly on the Mainland, as well as the comparative advantage of Hong Kong in this regard when compared with other areas in the region; what plan the Government has in place to enhance or maintain such edge;

(b) whether it has assessed the urgency of the various projects in the first package of projects to the South East Kowloon development and the overall development of Hong Kong, the necessity of completing the first berth concurrently with other projects, and if it is possible to first implement those projects relating to the first berth; if so, of the time needed for constructing the first berth separately; if not, the relevant detailed reasons and justifications; and

(c) of the Government's current plan to develop various tourist attractions with historical, cultural and geographical characteristics in Hong Kong, so as to tie in with the development of the cruise industry in Hong Kong; as well as the details and selling points of such attractions?

Reply:

President,

Our reply is set out below –

(a) The Asia-Pacific region is an emerging market in the cruise industry, with enormous growth potential. According to our cruise consultant, the capacity

placement of the Asia-Pacific region will continue to grow by 3.2% to 4.9% per annum. We maintain close liaison with the major cruise operators and they all are optimistic about the long-term prospect of the Asia-Pacific cruise market. As the financial tsunami has a more severe impact on the American and European markets, cruise operators would be even more eager to develop the Asian market.

With our advantageous geographical location, deep natural harbour and world-class infrastructure and tourism facilities including superior air connectivity with other parts of the world, Hong Kong is highly competitive among the ports in the region. As many international cruise operators regard Hong Kong as a must-visit port, we stand to benefit from the robust growth of the Asia-Pacific cruise market.

We will continue to enhance our hardware and software so as to develop Hong Kong into a leading cruise hub in the region. On the hardware, we are pressing ahead with the new cruise terminal. To ensure that the first berth will commence operation in mid-2013, we will start the site formation works by the end of this year.

As for the software, the Tourism Commission (TC), through the Advisory Committee on Cruise Industry and other channels, would continue to work with the Hong Kong Tourism Board (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;
- (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;
- (iv) arranging various hospitality activities for cruise vessels visiting Hong Kong with the aim of enriching passengers' experience in Hong Kong; and

(v) encouraging 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, to tie in with the new measure which allows Mainland tour groups to travel to Taiwan through Hong Kong by taking cruise vessels homeporting here. This will strengthen Hong Kong's position as the leading cruise hub in the region.

(b) The Government is pressing ahead with the development of the new cruise terminal to ensure that the first berth can commence operation in mid-2013 as scheduled to satisfy the needs of the cruise market.

The cruise terminal is situated at the southern tip of the runway of the former Kai Tak airport, and will become the most important facility at the Southeast Kowloon waterfront. The development of the cruise terminal and its backup servicing facilities has to be co-ordinated to ensure its smooth operation.

The works of the first berth of the cruise terminal (i.e. site formation) includes dredging of seabed, demolition and re-construction of existing seawall, piling, construction of apron area, mooring and fender systems, apron lighting, water supply and power systems, etc. We will also construct roads connecting the cruise terminal with the urban area for the convenience of cruise passengers.

Separately, we will take forward a series of other infrastructure works that are programmed for completion together with the first berth on the prerequisite that their construction will not affect the implementation and completion of the latter. These infrastructure works, which are included in the first stage of Kai Tak Development, are located in various areas in Kai Tak and their construction can proceed in parallel without affecting the progress of the first berth of the cruise terminal.

(c) The Government, in collaboration with HKTB, has been actively developing and promoting local heritage, cultural and green tourism to diversify our tourist offerings with a view to enhancing Hong Kong's appeal as the preferred tourist destination to all types of visitors, including cruise passengers.

Hong Kong is not short of buildings of historic significance. Through the "Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme", the Government has been injecting new life into these buildings, thereby enhancing their appeal to visitors. We will, in conjunction with HKTB, consider how to develop these revitalised buildings into tourist attractions.

HKTB is committed to promoting local historical relics and monuments, including the Ping Shan Heritage Trail and Tai Fu Tai Mansion in Yuen Long, Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail in Fanling, Dr Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail, etc. It also works with the travel industry in packaging the attractions as feature itineraries for visitors. At the same time, HKTB promotes our traditional culture to visitors in different markets by highlighting our special Chinese customs and festivals, such as the Fire Dragon Dance at Tai Hang during Mid-Autumn Festival, the blessing ceremony of the Hung Shing Festival in Mui Wo, the Birthday of Lord Buddha celebrations at the Po Lin Monastery, the Cheung Chau Bun Festival, etc. It also encourages trade operators to include the festivals in their itineraries, so that visitors can experience first-hand the vibrancy of the local customs.

The West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) project is an important strategic investment for Hong Kong and the long-term development of arts and culture. The vision of the WKCD project is to develop an integrated arts and cultural district with world-class facilities, distinguished talents, iconic architecture and quality programmes with a must-visit appeal to both locals and visitors. The arts and cultural facilities in the WKCD will include 15 performing arts venues of different types and sizes, a new and forward-looking cultural institution with museum functions called "M+", an exhibition centre and a piazza. After completion, WKCD would certainly become an attraction not to be missed by our art-loving visitors.

Under the vision of the WKCD project, we will enhance support for local arts groups of various sizes and nurture emerging artists on the one hand, and strengthen our efforts in promoting arts education and building audiences on the other hand. TC, in collaboration with HKTB, will continue to work with performing arts groups and travel trade partners to leverage on our arts and cultural products to enrich the choice of activities and travel experience of our visitors.

On promotion of green tourism, we believe that the establishment of a geology park can help diversify the green tourism products on offer in Hong Kong. We actively support the development of the geology park by the Environment Bureau by offering input from the tourism perspective, and will in future promote the park to overseas visitors through HKTB.

Meanwhile, HKTB will continue its promotion activities under the "Hong Kong Nature Kaleidoscope" with guided eco tours organised by the travel trade and other organisations, including the Northeast New Territories Islands Hopping Tour, hiking

or bird watching tours, etc. This year, HKTB adopts a brand new hiking theme and steps up promotion of the scenic attractions in Hong Kong's countryside. It also plans to organise a "Hong Kong Hiking Festival" every autumn with a view to leveraging on the "Hong Kong Trailwalker" event to showcase our city's green treasures.

Ends/Wednesday, May 20, 2009

Issued at HKT 13:05