

LCQ11: Quality of Hong Kong's tourist guides

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, to a question by the Hon Vincent Fang in the Legislative Council today (December 1):

Question:

In the middle of this year, a mainland tourist was suspected to have died after quarrelling with a female tourist guide when shopping at a jewellery shop in Hong Kong. Subsequent to that incident, a female Hong Kong tourist guide insulted her mainland tour group members on a tourist coach because she was not happy that they did little shopping. There have been comments that such incidents happened one after the other have adversely affected Hong Kong's tourism industry and caused public concern about the quality of Hong Kong's tourist guides. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it knows:

(a) the respective average numbers of part-time and full-time tourist guides employed by each travel agency at present, their remuneration packages, and their average monthly income;

(b) in the past three years, the respective total numbers of new and renewal applications for tourist guide passes received by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC); among these applications, the number of applications approved; among the applications approved, the number of applicants who were new immigrants; and

(c) in each of the past three years, the respective numbers of complaints and reports against Hong Kong tourist guides received by TIC; among them, the numbers of cases relating to tourist guides' poor attitude and forced shopping, and the number of cases where the tourist guides' passes had been revoked?

Reply:

President,

The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) established the "Task Force on the Review of the Operation and Regulation of Mainland Inbound Group Tours" (Task Force) in June 2010. It examined the receiving arrangement for Mainland

inbound tour groups, with a special focus on the question of zero/negative reception fee and regulation of tourist guides. The Task Force submitted its review report with 10 proposed measures to the Government in early October. The Government supported these measures. On November 19, the Board of the TIC approved most of the directives for implementation of the measures. The directives are expected to take effect in early 2011. The Chief Executive stated in this year's Policy Address that the Government would review the operation and regulatory framework of the entire tourism sector, with a view to promoting the healthy development of the tourism industry.

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows.

(a) As at the end of October 2010, there were 1 543 licensed travel agents and 6 001 accredited tourist guides in Hong Kong. Tourist guides provide services to travel agents on full-time, part-time or self-employed basis. Their remuneration system depends on the mode of employment. The remuneration package generally comprises basic salary, tour-guiding fee and gratuities, while detailed arrangements are subject to agreement between employers and employees. Given that not all tourist guides are employed full-time, and that travel agents typically recruit more part-time or self-employed tourist guides in the peak seasons, the Government and the TIC do not have data on the average number of tourist guides employed by a travel agent or the average monthly income of tourist guides. In the context of the reception of the Mainland inbound tour groups, the TIC has already formulated a directive requiring travel agents and tourist guides to sign agreements, which stipulate the salary and tour-guiding fee agreed between the parties.

(b) Between January 2008 and October 2010, the TIC received 1 166 new applications and 4 007 renewal applications for tourist guide passes (TGPs). Among these 5 173 applications, 5 170 were approved, and three renewal applications were rejected. The TIC does not have any statistics on the number of new immigrants among the applicants, as the length of residence in Hong Kong is not a condition for application.

(c) The numbers of complaints related to tourist guides received between January 2008 and October 2010 are set out in annex.

During the period, there were 16 tourist guides whose TGPs were suspended for violation of the code of conduct, but there was no case of revocation of TGP.

Ends/Wednesday, December 1, 2010

Issued at HKT 15:18