

LCQ17: Measures to enhance the reputation of Hong Kong as a shopping paradise

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, to a question by Dr Hon Lam Tai-fai in the Legislative Council today (January 18):

Question:

It has been reported that a survey organisation in France published a report in early January this year on the ranking of prestigious commercial shopping avenues in 30 cities in the world, pointing out that as passers-by in Hong Kong are not friendly enough, and do not seek to help tourists, Hong Kong ranks 29th among the cities. There have been comments that the ranking result will damage Hong Kong's reputation as a shopping paradise, and will have a negative impact on the tourism and retail industries in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the respective numbers of complaints received by the authorities from overseas and mainland tourists in each of the past five years (with a breakdown of the complaints by category), and the difference in the numbers and categories of complaints made by these two categories of tourists;

(b) whether the authorities had conducted surveys or studies in the past five years, so as to understand the perception of overseas and mainland tourists towards the attitude of Hong Kong people; if they had, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) what measures the authorities had put in place in the past five years to improve the service quality of people engaged in the tourism and retail industries in Hong Kong, and the expenses incurred in implementing the various measures;

(d) what measures the authorities had put in place in the past five years to promote the sense of hospitality among Hong Kong people, and the expenses incurred in implementing the various measures;

(e) whether assessment on the effectiveness of the measures under (c) and (d) has been made; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(f) whether the authorities had compared the levels of satisfaction of overseas and

mainland tourists in sightseeing and shopping in Hong Kong in the past five years; if they had, whether there is any difference between the two; if they had not made the comparison, of the reasons for that;

(g) whether it has assessed if the aforesaid ranking result will have a negative impact on the tourism, retail and hotel industries, etc. in Hong Kong; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(h) whether the authorities will take the initiative to contact the aforesaid survey organisation to find out the details of its survey and make clarifications; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(i) whether the authorities have assessed if it is due to the quick pace of life or decline in English standards of Hong Kong people that they are reluctant to stop on the streets and communicate with tourists from other places; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(j) given that many incidents which have damaged the reputation of the tourism industry in Hong Kong have been widely reported in recent years, whether the authorities have assessed if Hong Kong's reputation has been damaged; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(k) whether the authorities know if, in the past five years, any local or overseas organisation had conducted surveys of a similar nature to this survey on the ranking of prestigious commercial shopping avenues in the world; if so, of the details; and

(l) whether the authorities know if, in the past five years, any local or overseas organisation had conducted surveys on the perception of overseas tourists towards Hong Kong people; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

The Government all along promotes a culture of hospitality, and the overall impression of Hong Kong among inbound visitors is generally good. We launched the Hong Kong Young Ambassador Scheme with the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups in 2001 to instil a sense of courtesy and helpfulness to visitors in young

people, as well as to cultivate a hospitable culture in schools and local communities. Announcements of Public Interest along the same theme are broadcast on television to spread the message to the general public. Different trade organisations also strive to enhance their services. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) introduced the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme in 1999 to encourage merchants from different sectors to provide quality service. The Scheme has received wide support from industries.

My reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(a) The respective numbers of complaints (with a breakdown by category) from Mainland and non-Mainland tourists received by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), the HKTB and the Consumer Council over the past five years (i.e. from 2007 to 2011) are set out in Annex 1. As an overview, in the past five years, although there was a significant growth of inbound visitors from 28.17 million in 2007 to 41.92 million in 2011, the respective numbers of complaints received by the three organisations in 2011 were lower than those in 2007.

(b), (f) and (l) The HKTB conducts a Departing Visitors Survey (DVS) every year to assess, among others, the overall satisfaction level of visitors towards Hong Kong. According to the survey, the overall satisfaction ratings given by the respondents in the past five years are set out in Table 1 in Annex 2.

The DVS also collects visitors' comments on shopping in Hong Kong. In the past five years, among the interviewed Mainland and non-Mainland tourists, on average over 80% of the respondents found shopping in Hong Kong satisfactory or highly satisfactory. The respective percentages are set out in Table 2 in Annex 2.

No information is available on whether any local or overseas organisation has conducted any survey on overseas tourists' impression of Hong Kong people.

(c), (d) and (e) On fostering the hospitality culture, the Tourism Commission, together with the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, launched the Hong Kong Young Ambassador Scheme in 2001 to instil in young people a sense of courtesy and helpfulness to visitors. Since then, over 2,200 young ambassadors have completed the training courses and been deployed to various tourist spots to introduce attractions to visitors. They have also participated in large scale activities and tourism promotion events. To date, the Young Ambassadors have provided over 180,000 hours of

service and the Scheme has received positive feedback from schools, youngsters and their families. In the past five years, we have also collaborated with various trade organisations to organise more than 50 activities for managerial and frontline staff of the tourism industry, taxi and coach drivers, and retail trade employees. A total of 5,500 participants have taken part in these activities, which included seminars, workshops, courses on language skills and customer services knowledge, and continuous training courses for tourist guides. The cost for implementing the Hong Kong Young Ambassador Scheme and co-organising the above activities in the past five years was around \$6 million.

In addition, the HKTB launched the QTS Scheme in 1999 to award accreditation to merchants that have attained an established level of service, with a view to encouraging the retail and food and beverage industries to provide quality services. The Scheme has been expanded to cover hair salons and licensed guesthouses in recent years. As at the end of 2011, over 7,500 local merchants in Hong Kong have received accreditation under the QTS Scheme.

On the other hand, to encourage different industries to enhance their services, the Hong Kong Retail Management Association and Hong Kong Association for Customer Service Excellence also launch professional training programmes and award schemes from time to time, such as the Mystery Shoppers Programme and the Customer Service Award, to foster a culture of quality customer service in their member agencies.

As mentioned above, according to the HKTB's DVS, the overall satisfaction rating given by respondents ranged from 8.2 to 8.3 on a 10-point scale in the past five years. The findings also indicated that on average over 80% of the respondents found shopping in Hong Kong satisfactory or highly satisfactory.

(g) and (j) We do make reference to the findings published by survey organisations on the performance of Hong Kong's tourism industry for conducting appropriate analyses, reviews and follow-up actions. Judging from such indicators as visitor satisfaction level, number of visitors, their duration of stay in Hong Kong and consumption level, we have found no negative impact of such surveys on their impression towards Hong Kong.

In view of the latest findings from Presence, a survey organisation in France, we will work with the TIC and various trade organisations to strengthen the training for

the frontline staff of the tourism industry so as to enhance the service level of the industry and the retail sector. We will actively encourage Hong Kong people to be courteous and hospitable to visitors. We will also continue to liaise closely with the government departments concerned to improve the environment and supporting facilities at our shopping avenues and tourist attractions. Moreover, the HKTB will continue its efforts in promoting Hong Kong as a world-class tourist destination around the world.

(h) We have studied the executive summary of Presence's survey findings. The French organisation has also explained to us the methodology adopted for this survey. We will share the aforementioned executive summary and methodology of this survey with the tourism industry.

(i) We did not conduct any survey on whether the Hong Kong people are willing to communicate with tourists. According to information from the Education Bureau, the language proficiency of our students and workforce has been improving over years. For example, among all university graduates who have taken part in the International English Language Testing System on a voluntary basis, their average score has been assessed at Level 6 (Competent Users) or above, rising from 6.46 in school year 2002/03 to 6.72 in school year 2009/10. Besides, according to the annual business outlook survey released in 2009 by the American Chambers of Commerce in Hong Kong, 75% of the respondents considered that Hong Kong's business environment in terms of English language proficiency of employees was satisfactory, comparing favourably with the 67% and 47% in 2004 and 2002 respectively.

(k) The image of Hong Kong as a premier international tourist destination is well established among travellers around the world. Our world-class shopping experience has won awards in recent years. For instance, in May 2011, the TripAdvisor, the world's most popular and the largest travel commentary website, announced the "Top Ten Destination Worldwide" and Hong Kong was the only Asian city listed as one of the ten best tourist destinations on the list. The TripAdvisor commended Hong Kong as a place that offered fabulous shopping experience to tourists. In September 2010, in a reader poll of Condé Nast Traveler, a travel magazine, Hong Kong was voted first in the "Best Islands" category and came third in the "Best of the Best Top 100 Travel Experiences" category of the Readers' Travel Awards. In September 2009, Hong Kong was voted the "Best City for Shopping in Asia" in a reader poll of Smart Travel Asia, an online travel magazine. In May 2009, Hong Kong was named the city for "Best Shopping" in the online global consumer survey on travel and tourism

conducted by CNN International. Besides, in February 2011, the Chinese New Year celebrations in Hong Kong was selected as one of the Ten Best Events of the Year by leading business magazine Forbes; in November 2010, Hong Kong was the only Asian city selected as the "Top ten places to spend your Christmas" by CNN.com. Regardless of the comments of the surveys on Hong Kong, we will make reference to their findings and analyse whether there is room for improvement.

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