

LCQ8: Development of home-stay lodgings

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Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, in the Legislative Council today (March 25):

Question:

Some members of the tourism industry have pointed out that as shown by the experience of Taiwan, Japan and the United Kingdom, home-stay lodgings offer an alternative travel experience which is highly attractive to both local and overseas travellers. On the premise of preserving humanistic features and not damaging the natural environment, home-stay lodgings may not only make economic contributions to the remote areas, but also further enrich tourism resources. In Hong Kong, on the contrary, premises used as home-stay lodgings are required to comply with building and fire safety requirements as stringent as those applicable to licensed guesthouses and hotels, which has hindered the development of home-stay lodgings. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether:

(1) it has made reference to the successful experience of other places and studied the feasibility of developing home-stay tourism in Hong Kong, so as to enrich the tourism resources in Hong Kong; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) it will consider enacting a dedicated legislation to provide for a simpler and less stringent licensing system for home-stay lodgings, so that village houses can be used for operating home-stay lodgings after minor alteration works only; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) it will regard home-stay tourism as an emerging industry and formulate policies to encourage young people to join the industry; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government acknowledges that there are some suggestions of developing tourist accommodation facilities premised on the concept of "home-stay lodgings" in

Hong Kong, with reference to the experiences of some overseas countries and regions. From the tourism perspective, developing more diversified tourist accommodation facilities can help attract a wider range of visitors to Hong Kong and enrich our visitors' travel experience in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, Hong Kong is a small yet densely populated city. Any kind of tourist accommodation facilities, including those premised on the concept of "home-stay lodgings", should be regulated under the laws to ensure quality and safe accommodation be provided to our visitors.

With input from the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), our consolidated reply to the Hon Starry Lee's question is as follows:

(1) Some overseas countries or regions promote the provision of "home-stay lodgings" by subletting private residential units to tourists. Yet the development of tourist accommodation facilities premised on such concept of "home-stay lodgings" in Hong Kong has to be further examined. First of all, quite a number of such "home-stay lodgings" in the overseas are located in rural areas, where the farms, fishing villages and village houses located therein can provide tourists with a strong rural home feeling. This is the prerequisite and edge of developing this kind of tourist accommodation facilities. The living environment in Hong Kong is generally more crowded as compared with the abovementioned overseas rural areas. It is hard to make available space from village houses or residential flats for subletting to tourists. The concept also faces challenges on various fronts, including fire safety, environmental hygiene, personal safety of tourists and third party risks insurance, etc. Thus, it would be rather difficult to offer safe and comfortable accommodations to visitors through such concept in Hong Kong.

(2) To ensure the safety of our visitors, any kind of tourist accommodation facilities premised on the concept of "home-stay lodgings" should be regulated under the laws as in the case of licensed hotels and guesthouses. This is also in line with the visitors' legitimate expectation. At present, operation of hotels and guesthouses in Hong Kong, which refer to any premises whose occupier, proprietor or tenant provides sleeping accommodation at a fee for any person presenting himself, is regulated by the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance (Cap. 349) (the Ordinance). The primary aim of the Ordinance is to, through a licensing regime, ensure that premises intended to be used as hotels or guesthouses comply with the statutory building structure and fire safety standards in order to safeguard the lodgers and the public.

Any premises with the mode of operation falling within the definition of "hotel" and

"guesthouse" under the Ordinance must obtain a licence from the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) under the Home Affairs Department before commencing operation, unless the premises is provided with a tenancy period of 28 consecutive days or more for each letting which is exempted from the application of the Ordinance.

In accordance with the existing licensing mechanism, application for a hotel and guesthouse licence can be made for any New Territories Exempted House in the New Territories which complies with the requirements set out in the Buildings Ordinance (Application to the New Territories) Ordinance (Cap. 121) with a Certificate of Compliance or a letter of No Objection to Occupy issued by the District Lands Office, and complies with the lease conditions for residential purpose. Having regard to the design of village type houses in the New Territories and the unique rural environment, the OLA has all along been adopting a flexible and practical approach and has formulated basic building and fire safety requirements applicable to the New Territories village type houses. Upon receipt of an application for licence, the OLA will conduct site visit to inspect the premises and specify the applicable building structure and fire requirements for individual application. At present, around 120 holiday flats on outlying islands are licensed under the above arrangement.

As far as the HAB understands, "home-stay lodgings" or similar tourist accommodation facilities in other jurisdictions are also required to comply with the building and fire safety requirements as prescribed in respective domestic legislations. Such requirements are comparable to those currently applicable to holiday flats in Hong Kong.

(3) In this year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive proposes to set up a \$300 million Youth Development Fund (YDF) to support innovative youth development activities which are not covered by existing schemes, including subsidy in the form of matching funds for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to assist young people in starting their own business. HAB is consulting the Commission on Youth on the Fund's operational details (e.g. eligibility criteria, approval procedures and allocation priority, etc.). The preliminary thinking is that the Government will co-operate with NGOs of different nature and background. These NGOs will be responsible for vetting the application under the YDF, and providing various forms of support such as linking up the youths with mentors with relevant experience, provision of business information and guidance, assistance in establishing business networks etc. As for other recommendations proposed by the Legislative Council Members, HAB will consider them together with other views collected.

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