

LCQ6: Minimise impact of tourist activities on local community

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Following is a question by Dr the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 23):

Question:

It has been reported that the number of Mainland residents joining low-fare tours to Hong Kong for leisure travel has been increasing incessantly in recent years. As such tour groups arrange their tour group members to have meals and shop mainly at districts such as Kowloon City and Tung Chung, serious impacts are caused persistently on the daily lives of the residents and the traffic in those districts, and there has been a trend of such situation spreading to other districts. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that travel agents are required, before taking their tour group members to designated shops for shopping, to register with the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) the information of those shops, whether the Government will request TIC to stop processing the registrations for shops located at districts flooded with tourists or impose on them stricter registration conditions (such as the requirement that those shops which have repeatedly caused nuisances to the districts may have their registration cancelled), and co-ordinate the relocation of registered shops to other places for operation;

(2) given that quite a number of Mainland tour groups joining Victoria Harbour cruises gather mainly at certain piers for embarkation and disembarkation, thereby causing inconvenience to the residents nearby, whether the Government will adopt improvement measures, such as adjusting the berthing time, and stepping up traffic management on the streets near those piers; and

(3) whether it will discuss with the Mainland authorities the setting up of a notification mechanism so as to grasp the daily number of inbound Mainland tour groups and that of tour group members, so as to formulate suitable policies and measures accordingly?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the sustainable and healthy development of the tourism industry. Whilst ensuring that the industry grows in a stable and orderly manner and brings about benefits to society, we continuously seek to minimise as far as possible the impact of tourist activities on the local community.

The Government has been pragmatic in tackling problems brought about by inbound tour groups to local communities, and maintaining close liaison with the travel trade, Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), district personalities and Legislative Council Members to implement various targeted mitigation measures. Such measures include encouraging tour coaches to use proper parking spaces, appealing to the trade to observe order when receiving tour groups and use information technology in strengthening control on visitor and vehicular flow, etc. The Tourism Commission, together with relevant Government departments and TIC, meet with trade representatives from time to time to keep an eye on their arrangements in receiving inbound tour groups.

In response to the question raised by Dr the Hon Elizabeth Quat, after consultation with relevant bureaux/departments, my reply is as follows.

(1) Under the "Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Inbound Tour Group Shoppers" (Registered Shops Scheme) implemented by TIC at present, before taking tourists to any registered shop for shopping purposes, travel agents must register the information about the shop with TIC. The shop concerned must make pledges to TIC, including offering tourists refund protection, not coercing them into making purchases, etc. Any shop found in breach of any pledge after TIC's investigation and disciplinary proceedings can be subject to sanction, such as an advisory letter issued, demerits given, its registration suspended or even terminated.

To reduce the inconvenience caused by inbound tour groups to certain districts, TIC is examining further enhancements to the Registered Shops Scheme by requiring registered shops serving inbound tour groups for designated shopping to put forward and implement visitor crowd management measures. Meanwhile, TIC will continue to reduce the impact brought about by inbound tour groups to local communities under a multi-pronged approach. TIC will issue notices and liaise with the trade from time to time to urge them to observe order and use information technology in strengthening

control on visitor and vehicular flow, and to encourage coaches to use proper parking spaces. Furthermore, through on-site inspection, advisory letters, meetings, etc., TIC will follow up with the trade members concerned on their arrangements to receive inbound tour groups.

As regards the proposal of relocating shops to other places, the Government keeps an open mind and, in tandem with TIC, has been actively co-ordinating with various stakeholders in driving the trade to divert inbound tour groups to other districts, and avoid arranging them to gather in certain districts within a short period of time and causing nuisance. Insofar as the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (KTCT) is concerned, all the seven shops of the ancillary commercial areas in the terminal building have been leased at present. Six of them are in operation whilst the remaining one has ceased operation due to its internal issues. The terminal operator is recovering the vacant possession of that shop from the sub-tenant through legal proceedings. The Government has urged the terminal operator to lease the shop as soon as possible upon completion of the relevant proceedings and recovering possession of the shop. Commercial organisations interested in operating at KTCT are welcome to approach the terminal operator directly to discuss the corresponding commercial arrangements.

(2) In general, public piers and public landing steps are public facilities that are open all day, and vessels may use those facilities so long as they comply with the relevant marine regulations, particularly those in respect of safe embarkation and disembarkation of passengers. As regards the ferry piers for use by operators of franchised or licensed ferry services, the relevant ferry operators may apply for subletting the piers whilst the Government will consider individual applications made by them.

The Government understands that Mainland inbound tour groups joining Victoria Harbour cruises will gather at some locations within certain periods of time for embarkation and disembarkation. It, in tandem with TIC, has thus been actively co-ordinating with various stakeholders in driving the trade to divert inbound tour groups to different locations for embarkation and disembarkation. Yesterday, I paid a visit to other public piers and public landing steps together with TIC, relevant Government departments, travel agent representatives and Victoria Harbour cruise operators, with a view to understanding the feasibility of embarkation and disembarkation at the locations concerned, ancillary transport facilities in the vicinity, etc.

Meanwhile, the Government will continue to monitor the usage of the various piers and landing steps and step up marine patrols in the vicinity of such facilities to ensure the orderly berthing of vessels and smooth embarkation and disembarkation of passengers. The Government will also step up traffic management on the streets near the piers and landing steps to reduce any inconvenience caused to residents nearby. Currently, some of the road sections near Kowloon City Ferry Pier, including San Ma Tau Street and Kwei Chow Street, have been designated as "No-stopping Restriction Zone" and coaches can only pick up/drop off passengers in non-restricted zones. The Police will continue to take enforcement action at illegal coach parking blackspots. The Transport Department will closely monitor traffic conditions and take appropriate traffic measures to ensure smooth traffic.

(3) At present, TIC enforces clear guidelines requiring that travel agents in Hong Kong must, whenever receiving any Mainland inbound tour group, register with TIC and provide information about the tour group in advance. In this regard, the Government has been in close liaison with TIC to understand the situation of Mainland inbound tour groups visiting Hong Kong.

Furthermore, the Government and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, together with other tourism authorities in the Mainland, have been striving to strengthen the regulation of the tourism markets in Hong Kong and the Mainland. In August 2017, the Government and the then China National Tourism Administration entered into the Agreement on Further Enhancement of Tourism Co-operation between the Mainland and Hong Kong to jointly combat unreasonably low-priced group tours, as well as violations of laws and regulations, so as to drive the healthy and orderly development of the markets in both places.

The Tourism Commission will continue to keep a watch on the travel trends of Mainland visitors and maintain close liaison with the Mainland tourism authorities. Before peak periods of Mainland visitor arrivals, including the Chinese New Year and National Day Golden Week, the Tourism Commission will convene inter-departmental meetings to strengthen visitor crowd control measures and endeavour to alleviate the impact brought about by tourist activities to local communities.

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