

Concerted efforts to facilitate tourist arrivals from the Mainland

Representatives from the Tourism Commission, the Immigration Department, the Travel Industry Council (TIC) and the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) met today (May 2) to review the handling of visitor arrivals from the Mainland during the Labour Day holidays.

There are standing arrangements to ensure effective coordination of the response to sudden surges in tourist arrivals. The meeting is one of the established steps to facilitate the assessment of the situation at immigration checkpoints and to allow all those concerned to discuss measures to respond to developments.

This morning, immigration officers briefed the meeting on the measures taken yesterday in conjunction with the Police and the Customs and Excise Department in anticipation of the large number of visitors from the Mainland. In accordance with the established contingency plans, the departments deployed additional manpower, dispersed incoming tour groups to immigration checkpoints with spare capacity, and expedite clearance procedures as far as possible.

The contingency plans were reviewed and the actual situation on the ground at each checkpoint was reviewed in detail. The meeting concluded that appropriate measures had been taken in the light of the number of visitors arriving.

TIC briefed the meeting that it had maintained close contacts with the travel agents to gauge the number of arrivals and had shared this information with the relevant authorities. The HKTB indicated that they had mobilised staff and stationed them at various immigration checkpoints to distribute "Shopping Tips" leaflets to Mainland visitors containing useful information on sightseeing and shopping.

The Tourism Commissioner, Mrs Rebecca Lai, said the recent passage of the Travel Agents (Amendment) Ordinance 2002 was most timely. The introduction of a licensing scheme for inbound travel agents coupled with self-regulation by the TIC and new training requirements for tour guides will help improve service quality in the industry.

"The Tourism Commission will continue to monitor the situation carefully and maintain close contacts with our counterpart in the Mainland, relevant government departments, and the travel industry to help facilitate visitor arrivals over the next few days," Mrs Lai said.

End/Thursday, May 2, 2002

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