

Comprehensive mechanism to assist tourists

In the light of a sudden hotel closure incident which affected tourists yesterday, the Tourism Commission today (June 19) held an urgent meeting with the Home Affairs Department, Consumer Council, Hong Kong Tourism Board, hotel and tourism industry representatives to discuss immediate measures to help the affected tourists, and formulate a more comprehensive liaison mechanism with a view to better handle similar incidents in the long run.

Commissioner for Tourism, Miss Au King-chi, met the media after the meeting. She said: "We deeply regret nuisance and inconvenience caused to some 40 tourists by this incident.

"After learning about the incident last night, the Tourism Commission immediately contacted the travel industry and relevant departments to arrange follow-up actions. However, we believe there is room for improvement on the arrangements among relevant parties before and after the incident, including the dissemination of information."

Miss Au said the Tourism Commission had today got in touch with the Judiciary and understood that it was the first time the bailiffs pursued a closure order on a hotel. She noted that there was room for improvement for notification and coordination mechanisms, and there was a need to improve communications among relevant departments/organisations in future, so as to facilitate concerned parties to offer timely and appropriate assistance to the hotel guests and minimise the inconvenience caused.

She said: "In future, upon receipt of information on hotel closure, the Tourism Commission will take up a coordinating role. An enquiry counter will be set up in the affected hotel within two to three hours to coordinate works among all parties, so as to offer immediate assistance to the affected visitors.

"The Home Affairs Department – licensing authority of hotels and guesthouses, together with the travel and hotel industries, will gather information on hotels of similar class in the district for visitors' reference," Miss Au said.

As for immediate assistance to those affected by the incident, the Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners and the Hong Kong Hotels Association had contacted a

number of hotels willing to offer discounted rates in the district. The information had been given to the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) for passing to the hotel guests.

The HKTB has taken a series of measures to assist the tourists affected by the incident, including the set up of a dedicated hotline (9536 4525, operating daily from 8am – 11pm) to provide them with information and assistance; arranging staff to station outside the hotel to provide on-site information and assistance; contacting the affected tourists; offering them a free half-day Hong Kong Island tour; as well as posting up notices at all boundary-crossing points and on the HKTB website to inform visitors of the closure.

The Consumer Council said that if the hotel booking was made by credit cards, depending on individual cases, travellers could contact the credit card issuing BANKS to stop payment. If the booking was made through travel agencies, they may ask for assistance from the agencies.

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