

Travel Industry Bill to be gazetted on March 10

The Government announced today (March 8) that the Travel Industry Bill will be published in the Gazette on March 10.

The Bill seeks to provide for the establishment of an independent statutory body, the Travel Industry Authority (TIA), and the legislative framework for the licensing and regulation of travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts.

A Government spokesperson said, "The Bill will provide legal backing for setting up the TIA to regulate travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts in a holistic and impartial manner. Our policy objectives are to enhance the professionalism of the travel trade and foster the healthy long-term development of the industry.

"When formulating the Bill, we have been maintaining dialogue with the travel trade and other stakeholders. During the process, we have strived to strike a balance by reducing the impact on law-abiding travel trade members on one hand, while combating unscrupulous acts to protect the interests of the travel trade and tourists on the other."

The key areas of the Bill are as follows:

- (a) The TIA will be an independent statutory regulatory body, of which non-travel trade members will be in the majority to establish an impartial image. The Bill will put in place checks and balances, such as establishing an independent appeal panel to handle appeals against the TIA's decisions or disciplinary orders;
- (b) The Bill will strengthen the licensing regime for travel agents with new requirements of depositing guarantee money by bank guarantee, appointing authorised representatives, etc;
- (c) The Bill will establish a statutory licensing regime for tourist guides and tour escorts to enhance the service quality and professionalism of front-line trade practitioners;
- (d) The Bill will empower the TIA to formulate licence conditions through subsidiary legislation, particularly to tackle problems in relation to coerced shopping;

(e) The TIA will run the current Travel Industry Compensation Fund (TICF) to offer protection to outbound travellers. Furthermore, funds of a certain percentage of the TICF will be set aside to set up the Travel Industry Development Fund to provide funding support for the travel trade to facilitate the continuous development of the industry; and

(f) Upon the full commencement of the new regulatory regime, the TIA will take up the licensing and trade regulatory roles from the Travel Agents Registry and the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) respectively. All existing travel agent licences, as well as tourist guide passes and tour escort passes issued by the TIC by then will be taken to be licences issued under the new ordinance until they expire, or three months after the commencement date of the new regulatory regime, whichever is the later.

Other details under the new regulatory framework will be formulated by the TIA through subsidiary legislation and administrative measures. During the process, the TIA will maintain thorough discussion with the travel trade.

The Bill will be introduced into the Legislative Council for First and Second Readings on March 22.

The Government will continue to fully support the TIC's trade regulatory work before the new regulatory framework takes effect. After the establishment of the TIA, the Government and the TIA will maintain close liaison with the TIC to support the continuous development of the trade.

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