

Speech by Commissioner for Tourism

The following is the full text of a speech by Commissioner for Tourism, Mrs Rebecca Lai, at the 16th Hong Kong International Travel Expo (ITE) Opening Ceremony today (May 30): (English only)

Mr CHU, Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today to extend to you all a very warm welcome to Hong Kong on the occasion of the opening ceremony for the 16th Hong Kong International Travel Expo.

Over the past 16 years, the ITE has built its reputation as one of the leading travel expositions in Asia. It is particularly important to us as Hong Kong is the established home for this important trade event.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR) is committed to support and develop tourism as one of the key pillars of its economy. The city is blessed with a congenial weather year-round, a beautiful harbour and fascinating night scenes. Visitors can enjoy a great variety of delicious cuisine, comprehensive shopping in an enormous variety of different types of retail outlets: from open air markets to world class shopping arcades. More than this, Hong Kong offers a spectacular mix of local and international lifestyle, a unique blend with the east meeting the west, and a calendar filled with traditional as well as international events. It is no exaggeration for us to claim to be "Asia's World City". In the year 2001, visitor arrivals reached a record-high of 13.73 million, showing a 5.1 per cent increase over the previous year. Only yesterday, the Hong Kong Tourism Board had announced a record of single month total arrival and single market arrival from Mainland China alone during the month of April 2002.

In the midst of the positive tourism growth for Hong Kong, we know only too well that tourists' choices grow and sophisticate rapidly. We are also aware of the competition from other destinations in the region. That is why we, whether in government or tourism and related industries, must take stock of our position constantly and work hard to strengthen it.

The HKSAR Government has reviewed its tourism strategy and is taking forward a wide range of initiatives to enhance Hong Kong as a tourist destination. In August 2001, the Government announced the planning of five tourism clusters in the coming years. The five clusters are the Lantau Island, including the Hong Kong Disney Theme Park; green tourism, water sports and resort facilities in Sai Kung; a cultural belt along the West Kowloon area; a heritage, cultural and dining area in Central; and a new Aberdeen tourism node, integrated with the development of Ocean Park. These developments will rejuvenate existing facilities and upgrade our infrastructure to meet the diverse needs of the tourists while at the same time add new products to the range of attractions on offer to our visitors.

Hong Kong is blessed by more than its wonderful natural environment. We also benefit from a unique geographical advantage. Conveniently located at the gateway to Mainland with a character of its own, Hong Kong is looking to benefit from the further opening up of the Mainland in the years ahead. Together with the Mainland authorities, we have implemented a series of measures to facilitate the entry of the Mainland tourists coming to Hong Kong.

Hong Kong also starts to gain from the development of inbound tourism in Mainland China. For examples, the Hong Kong Tourism Board, the statutory body responsible for promoting Hong Kong overseas, has already joined hands with their counterparts in Guangdong Province and Macau in promoting multi-destination tourism in the Pearl River Delta region. The travel trade has also demonstrated their versatility in grasping such business opportunities. These efforts have resulted in new itineraries and are important steps towards building Hong Kong as an essential part of multi-destination travel in the region.

We never under-estimate the importance of service quality in the travel industry. Our own experience tells that an unhappy travel experience can deter a tourist from visiting a place again, and worse the unhappy visitor becomes a harsh critic of that place. On the other hand, our best ambassadors are those people who enjoyed their visit to Hong Kong. We must therefore accord a high priority to improve Hong Kong's tourist friendliness and to ensure the standard and quality of service of the tourism industry.

In enhancing the quality of service, we adopt a multi-faceted approach. It includes the recent enactment of the Travel Agents (Amendment) Ordinance 2002 which brings inbound travel agents under statutory regulation and required strict compliance with the code of conduct and regulations set out by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. It also involves training and setting up a certification system for our tour guides on the frontline. These steps, together with ongoing initiatives such as the Quality Tourism Services Scheme run by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, will ensure that our visitors receive a very warm welcome when they come to Hong Kong.

We also try to enhance the tourist experience in Hong Kong through the promotion of cultural, sporting and other major events. Indeed, The Hong Kong Tourism Board is currently staging a two-year long celebration named "City of Life: Hong Kong is it!" to showcase to our visitors Hong Kong's lifestyle through a number of large-scale events. In close partnership, public and private sectors have come together to welcome visitors to Hong Kong. The next event in the programme is the Hong Kong mega sale which will start in the middle of June. I can assure you: it will be worth your while to be here during the two months of this sale.

The steps being taken by the Government, the Tourism Board and the industry in partnership are intended to ensure the community will benefit to the greatest extent possible from the development of the Tourism Industry in the years ahead to make the tourism industry thrive more than ever.

I would like to end by wishing ITE HK 2002 great success and all of you a fruitful and memorable stay in Hong Kong. Thank you.

End/Thursday, May 30, 2002
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