

Speech by Commissioner for Tourism at Congregation of School of Hotel and Tourism Management of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (English only)(with photo)

Following is a speech by the Commissioner for Tourism, Miss Au King-chi, at the 14th Congregation of the School of Hotel and Tourism Management of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University today (November 11):

Professor Chon, faculty members, parents, graduates, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I am flattered by Professor Chon's kind introduction, and am honoured to have been invited to address this congregation.

Your school has produced a large pool of talent for the hotel and tourism industries here in Hong Kong and around the region. It is indeed a pleasure this morning to be here in such magnificent surroundings and to see so many smiling young faces, the faces of our tourism industry's future. I congratulate you all on your academic achievements.

This congregation encapsulates so many of the things that make us proud of Hong Kong: the pursuit of learning and excellence, an ability to create opportunities, an international outlook and a willingness to embrace challenges.

The Pursuit of Learning and Excellence

The fine and well-rounded education you have received here at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University will give you a valuable start as you begin your careers.

I say "start" because graduation, or "commencement" as it is quite accurately called in the United States, signals a new chapter in your life.

Your education will not end with what you have learnt here in classrooms. The previous internship opportunities and the adventure on which you are embarking are vital in equipping you with new skill-sets. These will be essential attributes, as you strive to develop new services and look for new recipes for success.

The pursuit of learning is especially relevant to our tourism and hotel industries.

Hong Kong has been a favoured destination in the region for family visitors. Of the 28 million visitors to our city last year, almost half of them came with their families and friends for vacation. Our source markets are getting more diversified over time and with evolving trends, and we must adapt accordingly.

We, together with our neighbours, are chasing after the high-value-added MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions) and business travellers as well as cruise passengers.

Hotel spas are becoming more popular. So much so that hotels face a perennial problem of finding suitable staff for their expanding spa service sections.

A first-degree is a great asset, but to reap the full rewards it must be accompanied by a long-term commitment to self-improvement. In other words, a commitment to life-long learning and excellence. As Hong Kong has never been a place of mediocrity, I urge you to continue to improve yourselves, in terms of service standard, linguistic skills and work attitude, throughout your careers.

An Ability to Create Opportunities

As you kick-start your careers, you may draw strength and inspiration from the fact that Hong Kong's success has been built on our determination, resilience and adaptability to change.

Although we have few natural resources, Hong Kong has a prime location, superb infrastructure, unparalleled experience and contacts in Mainland China, and a broad and deep knowledge bank of international best practice in many disciplines including our tourism and hotel industries. Our tourism professionals have learned to create and seize opportunities to the full, and ahead of the competition.

In his Policy Address last month, our Chief Executive highlighted some of the large-scale infrastructure projects that will be coming on line in the next few years.

The Government will fund and develop the new cruise terminal at Kai Tak. We expect to commission the first berth in 2013.

We have also established the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority to take forward this important strategic project that will support Hong Kong's development as a creative economy as well as an arts and cultural hub.

In addition, design of the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link is under way. And we expect works for the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge to start by 2010. These will provide better access and links to our hinterland and help promote tourist flow.

These are just some of the new avenues opening up for our next generation of savvy tourism professionals to explore. Given the increasing competition in the region, we will

require all your resourcefulness, enterprise, imagination, enthusiasm and energy to succeed.

An International Outlook

We aspire to be Asia's world city, and in many ways we already are. Certainly, a defining characteristic of Hong Kong is our international outlook, engagement with the world and our openness to new ideas. To stay ahead of our competitors, we must remain international and be ready to embrace international practices and values.

Professor Chon told me that about a quarter of the student population and almost three-quarters of the members of the faculty in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management are from the Mainland or other countries.

I was pleased to learn of this but not altogether surprised. After all, Hong Kong's charm as a tourist destination - and as a location of choice for international businesses - is its vibrant cosmopolitan environment with a cultural blend of the Orient and the Occident.

Hong Kong is committed to attracting the best and brightest entrepreneurs, professionals and students in all fields - not just tourism. We maintain an open immigration policy. Last year, more than 33,000 talented people came from the Mainland and overseas to live and work in the city. That's almost double the number five years ago.

Earlier this year, the Government relaxed the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme and streamlined the arrangements for non-local graduates to stay and work in Hong Kong.

We welcome graduates from other places to join our home-grown talent to contribute to our tourism and hotel industries in Hong Kong. In fact, your exhilarating learning

experience here in our city has proved that coming to Hong Kong feels like coming home.

Though there are certain aspects of Hong Kong that really set us apart in Asia, Hong Kong has never been a city to stand still for long. The Government is currently reviewing Brand Hong Kong to see if our brandline, "Asia's world city" and the flying dragon logo still reflect the aspirations of our people. We are engaging the public on what kind of city they want Hong Kong to become by 2020. I hope you will take part in this exercise so that we can co-create a vision for Hong Kong.

A Willingness to Embrace Challenges

The current credit crisis has not only engulfed the global financial markets but also dampened travel propensity and consumer confidence. The travel trade, airlines and hotels are feeling the impact of this global downturn.

The prevailing air of uncertainty may make it tougher for young graduates to join the brave new world.

But, as I said in the beginning, provided that we continue our pursuit of learning and excellence to better equip ourselves, we shall emerge stronger and faster as the economy recovers. After all, we have faced similar adversities in the past and become stronger as a result. This financial storm will pass and, when it does, we have to be ready to capitalise on the opportunities that will lie ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen, on a personal note, you may know, I will be moving to a new post in government next month. In the past two-and-a-half years, I have had the good fortune of enjoying my every encounter with students and academia in the tourism field, as well as members of the travel and hotel trades. With the tourism policy agenda, I have never had

a single boring day. As I move on I will take with me a great deal of pride in our tourism industry and even more confidence in its future.

It only remains for me to wish you all happy and successful careers.

Thank you.

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