

Speech by SCED at Hong Kong Hotels Association 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner
(English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at the Hong Kong Hotels Association 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner tonight (November 24):

Mr (Felix) Bieger, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. It is my great pleasure to be here tonight to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Hong Kong Hotels Association.

When my colleagues went through tonight's rundown with me earlier, I told them no need to worry. I remember Mark Twain once said, "All saints can do miracles, but few of them can keep a hotel." Surrounded by a full ballroom of hospitality experts tonight, I am certain that I will be in capable hands.

Founded by seven members in 1961, the Hong Kong Hotels Association has been playing an important role in enhancing the professionalism of the industry. To date, the Association has over 110 member hotels, representing most, if not all, major hotel brands in Hong Kong. I would like to give my heartiest congratulations to the Association on its remarkable achievements in the past 50 years.

Tourism is one of the key pillars of Hong Kong's economy. It goes hand in hand with the hotel industry. Surely you are well aware of the robust growth of business and the continuous high occupancy rate in the past few years. Indeed, in the first nine months of 2011, our total visitor arrivals has already passed 30 million, representing a 16 per cent growth over the same period of last year. We are optimistic that our total visitors for the year will break the 40 million mark, which will be another new record.

I must take this opportunity to compliment the hotel industry in Hong Kong on doing a fantastic job in providing a high standard of services to our visitors. Nothing feels quite like returning to an impeccable room after a long day of travelling!

In the past few years, the Government has been investing to enrich our tourism portfolio. To name a few, Ocean Park is carrying out a Master Redevelopment Plan, which will double the number of attractions in the park by 2012. Two new attractions,

Aqua City and Rainforest, opened earlier this year, and another two new attractions, Thrill Mountain and Polar Adventure, plan to open next month and in July 2012 respectively. Meanwhile, Hong Kong Disneyland opened a new themed area, Toy Story Land, last week. There are two more new themed areas in the pipeline. Apart from theme parks, the construction of the new cruise terminal is also in full swing. We expect to commission the terminal building and the first berth in mid-2013.

However, just relying on the Government alone is not enough. The success of the tourism industry relies heavily on concerted efforts by the Government, the Hong Kong Tourism Board and relevant stakeholders. The promotion of MICE (meetings, incentive travels, conventions and exhibitions) tourism is a good example. Last month, the Government and the Hong Kong Tourism Board successfully united all major attractions and venue providers on Lantau Island to jointly launch a large-scale publicity campaign to promote Lantau as an alternative MICE destination. The campaign has been very well received in the market. Likewise, for the healthy development of the industry, the Government will strive to ensure a steady growth of hotel room supply, and would wish to see the hotel industry take a long term view and work together with the travel trade to plan the supply of hotel rooms at predictable and reasonable prices, so as to protect Hong Kong's reputation as a travel destination.

To maintain our status as the preferred destination in Asia, all the stakeholders have a role to play. To this end, we will continue to count on the support of the hotel industry in providing quality hospitality and professional services to our visitors.

Ladies and gentlemen, I can see that you are all ready to let the wine flow and music roll. I would like to finish by congratulating the Hong Kong Hotels Association once again on this memorable occasion. I wish you all a wonderful evening. Thank you.

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