

Speech by FS at Tourism Promotion Luncheon in Bangkok - Discover the Hong Kong Magic

Following is a speech (English only) delivered by the Financial Secretary, Mr Henry Tang, today (May 9) at a tourism promotion luncheon in Bangkok - "Discover the Hong Kong Magic".

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be here today, and I would like to thank all of you for coming to this luncheon to share our excitement as we launch several Hong Kong's major tourist attractions. The multi-media show you have just seen is but a glimpse into the full range of activities and experiences Hong Kong has to offer.

In the past few years, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has consistently invested in our tourism infrastructure. Over US\$4 billion of government funds have been used to develop tourist attractions that will help us realise our vision in becoming the premier tourist destination in Asia. As it is in Thailand, tourism is one of the key driving forces for our economy. Last year, visitor arrivals reached a record high of 21.8 million bringing us a total tourism expenditure of US\$11.8 billion, as more and more people come to experience Hong Kong's unique blend of Eastern and Western cultures, our diversity and our dynamism. Hong Kong has long prided itself in being a cosmopolitan city with state-of-the-art infrastructure and world-class efficiency, a paradise for shoppers and connoisseurs alike. With the new projects we are building, Hong Kong is set to go beyond our core strengths of fine dining and shopping, offering our visitors a full and diversified experience, especially for families.

For family visitors, probably the most exciting event will be the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland just four months from now. This will be the first Disney theme park in China. You'll hear more about it from Mr Robinson in a few moments. The Hong Kong Government is proud to co-own Hong Kong Disneyland and we are working very closely with Disney to ensure that the forecast 5.6 million park visitors in the first year of operation will have a most memorable experience. Like Thai people, Hong Kong people place great emphasis on the education and well-being of our children. So I hope that the next trip you plan for the family, Hong Kong will feature as the number one preferred destination, as we welcome families from Thailand and around the world. Not to mention that we offer visa-free entry for Thai nationals.

Another major attraction we are building will be on Lantau, Hong Kong's biggest and most beautiful island. "Ngong Ping 360" comprises a Skyrail providing a 20-minute cable-car ride linking Tung Chung, near the airport, and the Ngong Ping Village, a new religious-themed attraction, the Giant Buddha and Po Lin Monastery. The Skyrail will also improve accessibility to other intriguing parts of Lantau, such as the quaint fishing village of Tai O, giving tourists a venture into a part of Hong Kong more akin to our origin as a fishing village. We expect some 1.5 million people to enjoy the 360 degree experience in Ngong Ping, Lantau each year.

Lantau is not the only place in Hong Kong for nature lovers, and tourists are not our only visitors. Every year, more than 120,000 migratory birds arrive at the Mai Po marshes on their way between Russia and Australia, including some endangered species like the famous black-faced spoonbill. So we are very excited about the Hong Kong Wetland Park project, adjacent to Mai Po, a world renowned sanctuary. It will be a 60-hectare, world-class conservation, education and tourism facility. The park will promote eco-tourism and offer entertaining family education without disturbing the ecologically sensitive wetlands at Mai Po. We expect over 500,000 visitors in its first year of operation.

And once you've had your fill of nature, you can return to the city for a spectacular sound and light extravaganza. A Symphony of Lights has been delighting spectators since January 2004 by turning Victoria Harbour into a kaleidoscope of colourful buildings at night. The harbour is turned into a stage every night for choreographed movement of lights complemented by specially composed music and narrative. By the end of this year, A Symphony of Lights II will extend to 30 buildings on both sides of the harbour - a bigger and better show, with more rooftop fireworks on special holidays. Together with the nearby Avenue of Stars, it will be a great way to experience the buzz of Hong Kong's nightlife.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have briefly described to you how we have enhanced our tourism infrastructure so that we can provide more attractions for different segments of the tourism market. Together, they will form a matrix of tourist hot spots that we think will be irresistible to visitors. I also have with me here today the leaders of the Hong Kong tourism industry - operators of the new attractions, hotels, travel agents, airlines, and also tourism promotion organisation. We work together as a team to develop our tourism industry and maintain world-class standards. One of the most important members of this team is Mrs Selina Chow, the Chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, herself as dazzling as the multi-media show you have just seen. She will tell you more about the promotions that we will be staging. So, together with my team members, we invite you to come visit us soon, and "discover the Hong Kong magic".

Thank you very much.

Tourism Commission
Economic Development and Labour Bureau

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