

SCED's speech at luncheon organised by Hong Kong Tourism Board in Tokyo (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, at a luncheon on "Hong Kong Travel Trade Mission to Japan" organised by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) in Tokyo today (January 26):

Peter (Chairman of the HKTB, Dr Peter Lam), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am delighted to see so many business partners and friends of the media joining us in Tokyo. I look forward to bringing the partnership between Hong Kong and Japan to a higher level in the new year.

Japan is widely regarded as the most popular place for our business trips and trade missions. Every time I ask people where they will go on their vacation, nearly 90 per cent would name Japan. They would then fill me with fascinating ideas on what different cities of Japan may offer in terms of hotel facilities, wine and dine options, latest shopping additions and so on. This really should come as no surprise to anyone. With Tokyo and other major cities here just slightly more than three hours away from Hong Kong, and with the efficient JR (Japan Railways) and subway systems, the attractive and mouth-watering cuisine like sushi, teppanyaki and tempura, and the beautiful scenic spots that display different awesomeness as the seasons change, Japan is one of the most popular holiday destinations for Hong Kong people. In fact, a lot of my colleagues in the office come this way every few months, and they still want more!

At the same time, many Japanese holidaymakers and businessmen also take Hong Kong as their first choice in planning their trips. Every year, we have more than one million Japanese tourists coming to Hong Kong for vacation or business, and visitor arrivals from Japan to Hong Kong showed positive growth last year despite the rather unfavourable exchange rate and the political scene in Hong Kong last autumn. Peter, the Chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, and his dedicated team will work closely with our trade partners here in Japan to sustain this positive momentum.

As Peter has mentioned, the Hong Kong Tourism Board will stage various exciting programmes in Hong Kong this year to enhance the experience of visitors. Just now I talked about the attractiveness of Japan to the people of Hong Kong, and I believe those

factors work equally well in the opposite direction. There are frequent and direct flights from most major cities in Japan to Hong Kong. Narita and Haneda Airports, for example, have a total of 101 direct flights to Hong Kong per week. With the recent launch of new low-cost carriers' flights and increased flight capacity, we see a growth in passenger flow between various cities in Japan and Hong Kong. The number of these low-cost carriers' flights will increase from the present 66 per week to 86 per week in March this year, which will bring about more frequent exchange at lower costs.

After landing in Hong Kong, you will soon discover that our Mass Transit Railway, Star Ferry, trams and other public transport connect effectively to our famous attractions, such as the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong Disneyland, Victoria Harbour, and the night activities areas in Lan Kwai Fong and Soho in Central as well as Tsim Sha Tsui.

Hong Kong has also long been enjoying a reputation as an international gourmet heaven. We have a total of 64 Michelin-starred restaurants and numerous small eateries that serve yummy local delicacies such as dim sum and wonton noodles, which will surely satisfy the most demanding food critics and casual diners alike.

Apart from the blistering city life, our natural scenery including our Geopark featuring massive hexagonal volcanic columns, our country park trails and tranquil outlying islands, will positively surprise nature lovers by offering many interesting hiking and outing options.

I believe all these have begun to raise your appetite to step up your plans and bring more Japanese visitors to Hong Kong. Looking ahead, Hong Kong Disneyland will be celebrating its 10th anniversary later this year, and a new themed area based on Marvel's Iron Man will open by the end of 2016. There will also be a brand new all-weather waterpark at our Ocean Park in 2017. These are certainly worthy markers when you plan your clients' (and your own) next few vacations.

I should also mention that Hong Kong has a unique strength as the gateway to China. Our connection with neighbouring cities such as Macau, Zhuhai and Shenzhen is excellent now, but it will get even better in the coming years. The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge is expected to be completed in 2016. The Express Rail Link, which will connect with the National High-speed Railway Network in the Mainland, is targeted to open by end 2017. These new transport infrastructures will bring great convenience and opportunities as you, our partners, develop more

innovative itineraries covering Hong Kong, Macau and Guangdong for Japanese visitors.

Hong Kong has always been, and will continue to be, a safe and hospitable city. We look forward to furthering the Hong Kong-Japan partnership in tourism, and we are most eager to welcome more first-time and returning Japanese visitors. As Chinese New Year approaches in three weeks' time, I would like to wish everyone good health and great prosperity in the Year of the Goat, and hope that you will be inspired with new ideas through today's event to grow your business in 2015.

Arigatou gozaimasu (meaning "thank you very much" in Japanese)!

Ends/Monday, January 26, 2015

Issued at HKT 12:49