

Speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Henry Tang at 3rd Hong Kong Tourism Symposium Opening

Following is a speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Henry Tang, at the opening ceremony of the "3rd Hong Kong Tourism Symposium: Quality and Diversity" at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre this (March 18) morning (English only):

Mr Miller, Selina, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you here today at the Hong Kong Tourism Symposium 2004, organised by the Tourism Commission and the Hong Kong Tourism Board. At a time when the global economy is poised to resume its growth and our tourism industry is expecting a bright year, this symposium is a timely occasion for members of the trade, academics, journalists and all those who play a role in our tourism industry, to work together and identify the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead of us.

The tourism industry has long been a key driver of our economy. Notwithstanding the impact of SARS, we received more than 15 million visitors in 2003, the second highest on record. The estimated expenditure related to inbound tourism topped \$70 billion, and more than 120,000 jobs were associated directly with the tourism industry. The prospect for 2004 is even better. The Hong Kong Tourism Board forecasts that we will receive more than 20 million visitors, a 30% increase over last year.

One of the key growing areas is, of course, visitors from the Mainland, who now make up more than half our total arrivals. The launch of "Individual Visit Scheme" last year has brought in more than 1.3 million new visitors. Some 1.7 million people have received Individual Visit endorsements, and many more are applying for them every day. With the further extension of the scheme to all Guangdong cities by May this year and possibly other provinces, the Mainland is destined to be a key source market for our tourism industry.

To seize the opportunities, it is important for our industry players to assess this growing market, and to ensure we are ready to cater for the needs of these visitors in the years ahead. I am pleased to note that a panel session of this symposium is devoted to the challenges and opportunities of the Mainland market.

While we look north for growth, we must not neglect our long-haul markets. We must continue to maintain a balanced market structure and the international profile of our visitors. The international and cosmopolitan outlook of Hong Kong is what we pride ourselves on and which we must continue to elevate.

Following the intensive publicity under the Relaunch Hong Kong campaign last year, we have seen a steady recovery in arrivals from markets in Europe and Africa. However, there is still concern over the slow recovery in the US and Japan. The Tourism Board will continue to sustain promotion and marketing efforts in these markets to increase the number of arrivals and encourage longer stays.

Hong Kong offers our visitors a remarkable range of experiences for such a small place: from a modern cosmopolitan city to the striking natural beauty of our country parks; from beaches and outlying islands to the world class shopping and dining. And the truly amazing thing is that all of these are within an hour's traveling time from any hotel in Hong Kong.

Looking forward, I am proud to note that while what we have now is marvellous, what we are going to have will be even better.

The Hong Kong Disneyland project is progressing well and on schedule for its target opening in 2005. Construction of the theme park is in full swing, while government infrastructure works will continue. This will be one of our key attractions and will help develop a new sector: that is, family tourism.

To better serve the various tourist attractions on Lantau Island, the MTRC has just started work on the Tung Chung Cable Car System, which will provide convenient access to the Giant Buddha at Ngong Ping in early 2006. Tourists and local residents alike will be able to reach this major attraction in comfort while enjoying the spectacular views over the Pearl River Estuary during their ride.

Given the importance of the tourism industry in terms of jobs and economic benefits, I announced in my Budget speech that we would be allocating additional resources for various tourism promotion and training activities. This funding will be used to build on our established strategy, focusing particularly on improving our services quality, rolling out targeted marketing, and enriching tourism resources.

It is, of course, not enough for the government and the industry players to foster tourism in Hong Kong. In fact, each one of us has a role to play in making our home a truly friendly destination. The "Hospitable Hong Kong" Campaign, launched by the Tourism Commission in 2001, will be extended for two years to target promotion at the community at large and the younger generation in particular. We will continue to make use of the mass media to heighten public awareness of our tourism industry. We hope that Hong Kong people will appreciate how important it is to welcome all visitors warmly and treat them like our honored guests.

During the last symposium, there were many innovative and creative ideas put forward by participants. I am delighted to say that many of these have been taken forward over the last two years. For example, we have set in train a project to preserve and convert the former Marine Police Headquarters into a heritage tourism development. This is an exciting opportunity to open up a part of Hong Kong's history to a wider audience.

Apart from new projects, existing tourist attractions and facilities are being upgraded. We completed improvement projects in Sai Kung and Lei Yue Mun waterfront in mid-2003. We will start beautification works at the Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade this August; and with funding approval from the Legislative Council, we will also begin enhancement works at the Stanley waterfront and the Peak. As you can see, there are many exciting new projects in the pipeline that are due to come on stream in the next two years.

Ladies and gentlemen, tourism development is about a close partnership across all sectors of the community. I would like to thank the Tourism Commission and the Hong Kong Tourism Board for organising this event, which brings together those with an interest and a passion for tourism, to share their views and express their opinions. I urge you all to participate actively and speak up in the breakout sessions later today. Just as the last symposium helped chart much of the work undertaken over the last two years, I expect the outcome of the sessions today to impact directly on the industry in the years ahead.

Thank you very much.

Ends/Thursday, March 18, 2004