

Speech by Commissioner for Tourism at "Rhapsody of the Seas" Plaque & Key Ceremony (English only)

Following is a speech by the Commissioner for Tourism, Miss Au King-chi, at "Rhapsody of the Seas" Plaque & Key Ceremony today (January 15):

Captain Lokling, Mr Milan, Francis, Anthony, distinguished guests and friends from the media,

It is really a great pleasure for me to be on board "Rhapsody of the Seas" with you all on her inaugural arrival at Hong Kong today.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Rhapsody, which is the largest cruise vessel homeported in Hong Kong. Her arrival marks a new page in the development of the cruise market for Hong Kong, as well as for the Asia-Pacific Region. With world-class tourism infrastructure and facilities, and our commitment in developing a new cruise terminal at Kai Tak, we believe that Hong Kong is well placed to become a leading regional cruise hub.

Hong Kong is a preferred tourist destination. Last year, we have received a record number of visitors, exceeding 28 million, an increase of more than 10% as compared with 2006.

We cannot however rest on our laurels. Our vision is to enhance, on a continuous basis, Hong Kong's position as a premier destination in Asia for visitors from around the world. Both the Government and the market have been investing heavily in tourism infrastructure. Other than flagship projects like the Hong Kong Disneyland, Hong Kong Wetland Park, Ngong Ping 360 and Ocean Park redevelopment, we are seeing new hotels, shopping malls, dining establishments, convention facilities, etc. coming on stream. Hardware alone, however, is not enough. We are attaching equal importance to the development of software including, say, promotion of new products in areas like cultural tourism and green tourism. This will help enrich the experience of our visitors from around the world.

Hong Kong is also growing strong as a hub for cruise passengers. Cruise holidays have become increasingly popular amongst locals, as well as regional and international visitors who come to Hong Kong to join cruise holidays. In 2007, about 50 internationally renowned cruise vessels called on Hong Kong. Together with

those homeported in Hong Kong, our total cruise passenger throughput reached over 2 million, among whom more than half a million are visitors. While cruising remains a “novelty” to most of the consumers in the region when compared with the more mature American and European markets, the growth potential is huge in view of the booming economies in the region, and Mainland China in particular.

To capture market potential, we are according top priority to the development of a world-class new cruise terminal at Kai Tak. Our current timetable is to close the open tender for the new cruise terminal in March, and award the tender in the second quarter. We welcome local and overseas bidders to participate in this open tender exercise.

The new cruise terminal operator is expected to commence the operation of the first berth at Kai Tak in February 2012. Following international practice, we shall require the operator to open the berthing facilities to all cruise companies. To cater for their different needs, the new terminal will be equipped with modern facilities, and be able to berth cruise vessels of various sizes, including the largest cruise vessel being constructed – the Project Genesis. We also expect the new cruise terminal operator to engage the cruise market and tourism industry through a market consultation forum. We shall also join forces with Hong Kong Tourism Board in promoting Hong Kong as a “must see” cruise destination.

While developing the cruise terminal, we will not lose sight of the need for parallel development of software facilities for the cruise market. To this end, we are working on measures to foster cooperation with neighbouring coastal provinces in the Mainland for cruise itinerary development; we are working on measures with Mainland authorities on ways to facilitate the entry of cruise vessels, and of course their passengers, homeporting in Hong Kong to Mainland ports, and are working on measures to promote cruise tourism in Hong Kong and in the region. Last but not least, an important agenda item will be how to prepare ourselves, together with cruise companies, for interim berthing arrangement from now to 2012. And, of course, the supply of talent is very important to meet the longer term need of our cruise market. To take these forward, we need to have a forum to work together with the cruise industry. I shall convene an Advisory Committee on Cruise Industry shortly to work these out together with the cruise market, the travel industry and, of course, leading cruise line operators like RCCL.

The arrival of Rhapsody demonstrates that the cruise industry shares our vision

and aspiration for the further development of Hong Kong as a leading regional cruise hub. We welcome the Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. as our partner in developing Hong Kong's cruise market. With the new cruise terminal now being planned, Hong Kong will be ready to receive the next generation of mega cruise vessels. We look forward to more world-class cruise vessels homeporting in Hong Kong, and receiving mega cruise vessels in future.

Let me once again extend our warmest welcome to this magnificent vessel. Her name, Rhapsody, can refer to music or mean a state of bliss. I wish her every success for harmonious, blissful voyaging in Hong Kong and the region.

Thank you very much.

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