

CE's speech at the MEHK Office Launch Luncheon in Tokyo
(English only)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang, at the MEHK Office Launch Luncheon in Tokyo, Japan, today (February 18):

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Konnichiwa (good afternoon).

It is a great pleasure to be here in Tokyo, enjoying your city's charm and hospitality.

I am delighted to join the Hong Kong Tourism Board to unveil our new Tokyo office, "Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong", or MEHK.

MEHK is our new agency dedicated to providing services and support for meetings, incentive travel, conventions and exhibitions in Hong Kong, generally referred to as MICE for short. I will leave it to our tourism experts here to outline how the MEHK Tokyo office can assist event organisers and benefit MICE travellers. My job today is to highlight some of Hong Kong's unique advantages as an events hub in Asia.

First and foremost, Hong Kong is the ideal location for reaching and developing the vast Mainland market. Not only are we within easy reach of the Mainland, we also have decades of experience in doing business in China. We know what it takes to connect entrepreneurs from China to their counterparts from the rest of the world. Hong Kong is within five hours flying time of half the world's population with efficient and well-developed aviation and transport networks and world-class infrastructure.

Our main venues for MICE events are the AsiaWorld-Expo near the airport, the Convention and Exhibition Centre in the

heart of the city and the Hong Kong International Trade and Exhibition Centre in Kowloon. They all come fully-equipped to stage successful events - including highly-trained professionals with a great deal of experience in ensuring conventions of all sizes run smoothly.

With about 300 international events taking place in Hong Kong each year, there is plenty to keep the business traveller occupied. Some of our trade fairs are among the biggest in the world, providing access to suppliers and buyers from the Mainland and business centres round the globe. I encourage you to take full advantage of our MEHK Tokyo office to see how our MICE sector can work for you.

Hong Kong is a safe and welcoming city and an easy place to get around and to get things done. We have a freely convertible currency, a low and simple tax system and a clean and efficient administration.

Both English and Chinese are official languages but English is the language of our business community. And don't be surprised if you hear some Japanese too. Japanese is the preferred third language for our students to learn.

Last year, we received more than 1.3 million visitors from Japan. Many of our visitors are attracted by the diverse shopping, dining and entertainment experience in our city. There is always something going on in Hong Kong and something for all the family to enjoy. Like Tokyo, we are now a Michelin city. The first Michelin Guide for Hong Kong was published last December, highlighting our commitment to providing a stylish and high quality environment for all our guests.

To make you feel more welcome, we have scrapped wine duties and waived hotel accommodation tax. With visa-free travel for our Japanese guests and the strong value of the Yen, there is no better time to come for a visit and stay for an extra day or two to enjoy the full Hong Kong experience.

Ladies and gentlemen, our two governments have designated 2009 as "Japan-Hong Kong Tourism Exchange Year". Whether you come for business or pleasure, you can be sure of a memorable stay in our city.

Thank you.

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