

CE's speech at Dinner Reception and Launch Ceremony for Japan-Hong Kong Tourism Exchange Year in Tokyo (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr Donald Tsang, at the Dinner Reception and Launch Ceremony for the Japan-Hong Kong Tourism Exchange Year in Tokyo, today (February 18):

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good evening. It is a great pleasure to be here to celebrate the launch of "Japan-Hong Kong Tourism Exchange Year 2009". This event marks a significant milestone in furthering the partnership and friendship between Japan and Hong Kong.

Over the years, we have built close business, social, academic and cultural ties that continue to grow. Tourism is a key sector for both our economies. Japan and Hong Kong are popular holiday destinations with their own unique sceneries, cultures, outstanding cuisine and a wide variety of entertainment for all the family. Last year, we welcomed more than 29 million visitors to Hong Kong, including 1.3 million from Japan. Also in 2008, half a million Hong Kong people travelled to Japan.

Our Japanese community numbers about 26,000 people - it is one of our largest expatriate communities. Japanese cuisine, fashion, films, music and entertainment are very popular with Hong Kong people as well as with our overseas visitors.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of aviation links between Hong Kong and Japan by Cathay Pacific Airways. Our aviation links were enhanced last year when our two governments expanded air services between Hong Kong and Japan making it easier and more convenient to travel and do business.

We are constantly on the lookout for ways to expand our tourism sector - including establishing Hong Kong as a cruise hub in Asia. Indeed, we are moving ahead with plans to build a world-class cruise terminal that will be able to accommodate the largest cruise liners when it becomes operational in 2013.

One of our most ambitious projects is a 40-hectare cultural district along our spectacular harbourfront in Kowloon. The West Kowloon Cultural District will include iconic venues for performing arts and cultural entertainment, not only for Hong Kong people to enjoy but also for people from all over Asia and beyond.

Last December, we joined Tokyo as a Michelin city, with the publication of the first Michelin restaurant guide for Hong Kong. This highlights the high quality and diversity of dining choices in our two cities from an international perspective.

I am delighted that Hong Kong has been selected as the first partner city for Japan to promote two-way tourism since the establishment of the Japan Tourism Agency last year. We have an exciting programme of tourism and cultural events lined up throughout 2009. Sport will also maintain its high profile following our role last year as a co-host city for the Beijing Olympics when we staged the Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events. Next month, we will host the world famous Hong Kong Rugby Sevens and no doubt Japanese fans will be in full voice as they cheer on their team. We also look forward to welcoming Japanese athletes for the East Asian Games in Hong Kong in December.

In the months ahead we will be going all out to promote two-way travel between Hong Kong and Japan to make this Tourism Exchange Year a great success and a platform for stronger tourism links between us in the future.

I thank you for your warm hospitality and I hope you will pay us a visit this year to experience the delights that our city has to offer.

Thank you.

Ends/Wednesday, February 18, 2009

Issued at HKT 18:32