

SCED's speech at opening ceremony of 24th International Travel Expo  
and 5th MICE, Business and Incentive Travel Expo (English only)

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Following is a speech by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, at the opening ceremony of the 24th International Travel Expo and the 5th MICE, Business and Incentive Travel Expo today (June 10):

Mr Tong, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to all of you, particularly to those who have travelled a long way to Hong Kong and who have been supporting us in the Expo year after year.

Many years ago, travelling was a luxury to most people. Transportation was then not as efficient as it is now and it may take weeks or even months to travel to and from the destination.

With remarkable technological advancement in recent decades, travelling has become part of our lives. Many of us travel for leisure, business or study. The continuous enhancement and increasing usage of wide-bodied aircraft and high-speed railways have enabled us to go to distant places in a much shorter time. Meanwhile, a lot of travel information about places previously unheard of is readily available from various channels. Via the Internet, we can even take a snapshot on a street at the far end of the globe.

The major implication of these trends to the travel industry is that we shall need to constantly prepare ourselves on all fronts in order to respond as well as stimulate the interest of potential customers. This is one of the reasons why you and representatives from more than 40 countries and territories are assembled here today.

As Asia's world city, Hong Kong is known for its vibrancy, international outlook, world connectivity and hospitable culture. Last year, despite the challenges of the global financial crisis and the swine flu, we received a record breaking 29.6 million visitors. In the first five months of this year, we already have had over 14 million visitors coming to Hong Kong, an impressive increase of 20% over the same period last year.

To sustain our appeal, we are upgrading and expanding our tourism infrastructure. Our two major theme parks, Ocean Park and Disneyland, are carrying

out expansion works in full swing with completion scheduled for 2012 and 2014 respectively. A new cruise terminal will open in mid-2013 to welcome the largest cruise vessels in the world.

With hardware readiness, we have paid equal attention to the software side. Two years ago, the Hong Kong Tourism Board set up a dedicated agency called "Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong" to promote Hong Kong as a premier MICE (Meetings, Incentive Travels, Conventions and Exhibitions) destination and provide one-stop support for MICE event organisers. Today, Hong Kong is home to a wide spectrum of conventions and exhibitions ranging from the well-established fashion design and jewellery shows to new events covering fruit produce and funeral services. We have also established a Mega Events Fund to sponsor more arts, cultural and sports events, and adopted "Festive Hong Kong" as our promotional theme this year. In the coming months, we will witness a series of exhilarating events taking place in Hong Kong, which include the International Dragon Boat Races in July, the Halloween and Wine and Dine Festival in autumn, as well as the Louis Vuitton Hong Kong Trophy yacht race in January next year. An eventful Hong Kong is one catchword that you should take home today.

Ladies and gentlemen, with the world economy set on a recovery path, the business opportunities are immense. While in Hong Kong, I encourage you to experience the diversity of our tourism offerings, be it the legendary Star Ferry ride, delicious cuisine, fabulous night scenes or peaceful countryside. No matter what your interests are, Hong Kong has something to offer. With this in mind, I look forward to seeing you back in Hong Kong soon. I wish you and the Expo great success.

Thank you.

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