

Speech by Commissioner for Tourism at opening ceremony of Seatrade Hong Kong Cruise Forum (English only)

Following is the speech by the Commissioner for Tourism, Mr Philip Yung, at the opening ceremony of the Seatrade Hong Kong Cruise Forum today (January 22):

Mr Tien (Chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, Mr James Tien), Mr Hayman (Chairman of Seatrade, Mr Chris Hayman), my dear friends from the cruise trade, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. First and foremost, a warm welcome to you all. I am delighted to see many friends from the cruise trade in the audience, and I would like to thank the Hong Kong Tourism Board and Seatrade for organising this wonderful Forum.

The cruise industry has emerged as one of the fastest expanding segments of the tourism industry over the past two decades. As the American and European markets boomed and matured, the unprecedented economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region in the same period has ignited new interest for cruise vacation. All analyses agree that tremendous opportunities await the cruise industry in Asia, so "Asia - Unlimited Potential". Hong Kong is well positioned to drive the growth of cruise business in this part of the world, and the commissioning of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal is an important part of our strategy to develop Hong Kong into a leading cruise hub in this region.

I believe most of you are familiar with the well-established Ocean Terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui, which has faithfully served our cruise industry for more than five decades. The Ocean Terminal will embark on a range of improvements shortly to better meet the needs of today's operators and travellers. On top of this, I am very pleased to tell you that the new Kai Tak Cruise Terminal will be commissioned in the middle of this year. This new terminal's iconic design renders it not only a landmark in our beautiful Victoria Harbour, but also a premier functional facility that will hopefully take cruise travel to a whole new level. The Terminal can berth the world's largest cruise vessels, and its highly efficient passenger clearance and baggage handling facilities aim to provide the greatest possible extent of convenience and efficiency for passengers. For those who want a sneak peek of what you would get from Hong Kong upon disembarkation, or those who want a brief quiet moment before embarking on a very interesting voyage, the landscaped deck on the roof of the Terminal offers an unrivalled full view of the Victoria Harbour.

So with these impressive facilities operating in complement with each other, Hong Kong is fully geared up to welcome cruise ships of all sizes and travellers from anywhere in the world. In this Forum, we will demonstrate to you the strengths and potential of not just Hong Kong, but the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. Those of you who came from abroad will have noticed that our first-class international airport connects Hong Kong with half of the world's population within just five hours' flight time, making Hong Kong a perfect base for fly-cruise passengers. The Greater Pearl River Delta region, located right next door and conveniently connected through road, ferry and rail to Hong Kong, is on its own an enormous source market comprising 100 million people. The Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the construction of which will complete in 2015 and 2016 respectively, will tie Hong Kong even closer to this vast Mainland source market. Geographically speaking, Hong Kong's location brings unsurpassed connectivity and puts us naturally in the centre of the map in this region.

Frequent visitors to Hong Kong will notice the Government's continuous efforts in enhancing our attractiveness and enriching our visitors' experience while staying with us. Apart from the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, we are working on another round of ambitious expansion plans for both the Ocean Park and the Hong Kong Disneyland. These popular attractions aside, the Hong Kong Tourism Board and our industry players are developing a range of new and exciting shore excursion programmes for our cruise visitors. I am sure you will enjoy our versatile tourism offerings when you experience some of these new products in the coming few days as part of the programme of this Forum.

Indeed, our vision to develop Hong Kong into a regional cruise hub has the strong support of the Central People's Government of China. The Central People's Government announced in June last year that Mainland tour groups would be allowed to take cruises from Hong Kong to Taiwan, and then visit Japan or Korea in the same journey before returning to the Mainland. This is really good news for both Hong Kong and cruise operators, as the measure allows us to tap the growing Mainland market and organise more interesting itineraries in the East Asian region. It is an important step of our ongoing efforts to enrich itineraries from Hong Kong and broaden our appeal as a cruise hub. I encourage cruise companies to be a first mover and make good use of this new measure.

Talking about the potential of the region as a whole, the cruise business is perhaps

the one tourism product that creates a win-win situation for all destinations in an itinerary. There is no better means than cruising for travellers to visit a few countries in the same journey. It is important for neighbouring ports to work together to strengthen the overall appeal of the region and spark the demand for cruise tourism for our part of the world. I am glad to see that we have many representatives from our neighbouring ports joining this Forum. The sharing of thoughts, both during formal meetings and in the margins, on possible ways to further cementing our relationship, and how neighbouring ports may work hand in hand in areas such as itinerary planning, development of shore excursion products and port operation facilitation to grow the cruise market, should be one key element of this Forum.

The Government is committed to enhancing Hong Kong's status as a premier tourist destination. We invest not only in theme park or infrastructure development, but also in having a blue sky for the enjoyment of all. The Government will install on-shore power supply at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, so that cruise vessels with such facilities will benefit. The Government will also work to legislate the requirement for ocean-going vessels at berth to switch to low-sulphur diesel after consultation with the maritime sector. I am confident that the industry will work with us to bring about a cleaner Hong Kong.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't intend to take up any more of your time for exchanges, but I do wish to thank all the speakers for honouring our Forum by sharing your insights with us later on. I am sure all participants will be very busy in the coming three days, but do please make some time after your hard work to take a good look at Hong Kong. This hotel where we are now is a very convenient starting point to visit many of our attractions.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will have a very fruitful Cruise Forum, and I wish all our visitors a great stay in Hong Kong. Thank you.

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