Anti-epidemic Fund to further support tourism industry

The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau announced today (February 16) that the Government will provide about $433.5 million under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) for launching a new round of support (the seventh round) for the tourism industry.

Subsidy items under the new round of support are as follows:

(1) To provide a one-off subsidy to eligible licensed travel agents and travel agents' staff: travel agents with 10 or less staff members will be provided with a subsidy at a flat rate of $50,000 each. For travel agents with 11 staff members or more, the subsidy level will be directly proportional to the number of staff members they have, with a subsidy level of $5,000 per staff member as the basis of calculation. Each travel agent staff member will be granted a one-off subsidy of $7,500.

Under the new round of the scheme, eligible licensed travel agents and their staff include (i) licensed travel agents that have been issued with a valid travel agent licence on or before February 8, 2022, and still hold the licence at the time when the new round of subsidy is disbursed, and their staff; and (ii) travel agents' staff who received subsidies in the second round or subsequent round(s) of the subsidy scheme for the tourism industry under the AEF (including travel agent staff whose employer closed down on or before February 8, 2022);

(2) To provide each freelance accredited tourist guide and tour escort whose main occupation is/was tourist guide and tour escort and received a subsidy in the last round of the subsidy scheme with a one-off subsidy of $7,500;

(3) To provide each driver of tour service coaches who received a subsidy in the last round of the subsidy scheme with a one-off subsidy of $5,000; and

(4) To provide a one-off subsidy to hotels which, on February 8, 2022, held a valid hotel licence issued under the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance (Cap. 349) and continue to hold a valid licence when the subsidy under the AEF 6.0 is disbursed. Hotels with 100 licensed guestrooms or below will be granted $300,000 whereas hotels with 101 licensed guestrooms or more will be granted $400,000. This subsidy arrangement will not cover hotels that were used en bloc as quarantine facilities on February 8, 2022, with rent fully paid by the Government.

The Tourism Commission will send SMS notifications to the eligible freelance accredited tourist guides and tour escorts, tour service coach drivers, and travel agents and their staff who received subsidies in the last round of the subsidy scheme to inform them of the subsidy disbursement arrangements. For licensed travel agents and their staff who have never

applied for a subsidy or have not applied for a subsidy in the last round, they are required to submit applications during the period from tomorrow (February 17) to March 17. Details will be uploaded to the website of the Tourism Commission (www.tourism.gov.hk) tomorrow.

Eligible hotels are required to submit applications to the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department between tomorrow and March 17. The OLA will notify hotels about the application details.

In addition, the Government will launch a spend-to-redeem programme for cruise-to-nowhere itineraries through the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) to foster recovery of the cruise industry. A local passenger may enjoy a $500 discount when booking his or her cruise-to-nowhere itinerary with spending of at least $800 in physical retail or dining outlets during a specified period. The HKTB will separately announce the relevant details after consulting the travel trade.

The new round of support is expected to benefit about 1 670 travel agents, about 19 100 travel agent staff members and freelance accredited tourist guides and tour escorts, about 3 400 drivers and about 330 hotels. The spend-to-redeem programme for cruise-to-nowhere itineraries may also benefit around 40 000 local cruise-to-nowhere passengers, cruise lines and travel agents selling relevant packages.