

“Cruise-to-nowhere” itineraries can resume under set of health control protocols from end-July

The Government announced today (May 26) that cruise lines are expected to resume, for Hong Kong residents, "cruise-to-nowhere" (CTN) itineraries, which do not involve ports outside Hong Kong, at end-July 2021 the earliest on the condition that they strictly comply with a set of health precautionary measures specifically designed for cruise travel.

"With the stabilising COVID-19 epidemic situation in Hong Kong since mid-February this year, the public, the cruise trade and the tourism industry have strong aspirations for the gradual resumption of cruise travel which has been suspended for more than 15 months since February last year. The resumption of CTN itineraries under prudent health precautionary measures can strike a proper balance between public health protection on the one hand, and the public aspirations for some form of leisure travel on the other. CTN itineraries underpinned by health control safeguards will offer an additional safe vacation option for the community as from the coming summer," the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, said.

The health precautionary measures, which have been worked out in consultation with relevant bureaux and departments (B/Ds) as well as the cruise trade, include:

- (a) all incoming crew members are required to comply with the prevailing quarantine and testing requirements for travellers entering Hong Kong (see Note 1);
- (b) all crew members must be fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines recognised by health authorities before commencement of a cruise journey, except for those not suitable to do so with valid medical proof. Non-local crew members who have not been vaccinated prior to entry into Hong Kong may receive vaccinations for free in Hong Kong, and they have to be fully vaccinated before they can serve on a cruise journey. Cruise lines will strictly implement the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for crew members;
- (c) all fully vaccinated crew members are still required to undergo a COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) nucleic acid test shoreside and obtain a negative result every 14 days. Meanwhile, crew members who are not suitable for vaccination due to medical grounds must undergo every seven days a COVID-19 PCR nucleic acid test shoreside and obtain a negative result, as well as undergo every three days testing at on-board facilities and obtain a negative result;
- (d) all passengers must be fully vaccinated (see Note 2), except for those not suitable to do so with medical proof or aged below 16, before commencement of a cruise journey;

(e) all passengers have to undergo a COVID-19 PCR nucleic acid test within 48 hours prior to boarding and obtain a negative result;

(f) cruise lines are required to adopt a maximum 50 per cent passenger capacity on a cruise ship, comply with the respective sets of hygiene, social distancing and contact tracing measures for various similar premises and facilities in force under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), and promulgate contact tracing mechanism for journeys; and

(g) passengers are required to use the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application to scan the QR code of the cruise ship before boarding. After boarding, they must also follow the social distancing and contact tracing mechanism executed by the cruise lines.

There will be a robust contingency management mechanism catering for fluctuations of the local epidemic situation. In the event that there is a suspected case on board during a cruise journey, the journey will be suspended at once and the cruise ship will return to the cruise terminal in Hong Kong. Relevant B/Ds will invoke contingency management measures based on an epidemiological investigation and laboratory findings, having regard to the circumstances of the case and relevant health guidelines. Such measures may include requiring the concerned passengers and crew members to undergo testing, medical surveillance and/or quarantine.

"Given the nature of a cruise operation, considerable lead time is required for cruise lines to prepare for resumption of CTN itineraries. The announcement today enables the tourism industry, in particular cruise lines, to make preparations for the resumption immediately by arranging their cruise ships and crew members to come to Hong Kong. In fact, cruise lines interested in resuming CTN itineraries have already indicated that they will arrange crew members suitable for vaccination or those already vaccinated to serve in Hong Kong to the extent possible. Hong Kong residents who have yet to be vaccinated may wish to do so as soon as possible in order that they may join CTN itineraries. The relevant B/Ds will, in the meantime, continue to work in tandem with the cruise lines in the coming few weeks on the detailed execution plan and on-board inspections," Mr Yau said.

Relevant further information will also be uploaded to Tourism Commission's website before CTN itineraries resume.

Note 1: Such requirements include those under the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap. 599C), the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap. 599E) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) where applicable.

Note 2: For both the Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine (CoronaVac vaccine) and Fosun Pharma/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Comirnaty vaccine), "fully vaccinated" in general means having received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine 14 clear days ago.