

Government approves conditional exemption of organising local group tours

The Government announced today (October 20) that the Executive Council has approved conditional exemption for licensed travel agents to organise local group tours of not more than 30 persons (inclusive of working staff) under the group gathering restrictions as stipulated in the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) starting from this Friday (October 23). Such local group tours must be in strict compliance with the undertakings on anti-epidemic measures to safeguard public health.

The relevant local group tours must comply with a list of requirements which include:

- prior registration with the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC);
- travel agents must sign the Anti-epidemic Undertakings for Local Tours (see Annex), and strictly adhere to various anti-epidemic measures targeting local group tours, which cover the arrangements for tour participants, itineraries, transportation, meals, attractions and working staff of the travel agents to safeguard public health; and
- the local group tour itineraries must cover the designated green spots of the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme, or any of the some 50 tour itineraries under the "Free Tour" programme launched by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB).

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, said, "The tourism industry is one of the hardest hit sectors under the epidemic. Both inbound and outbound tourism have grinded to a complete halt. On the premise that the travel trade would endeavour to safeguard hygiene and health as well as put in place vigorous health protection measures, this conditional exemption arrangement would ensure that the local group tours would be well managed. This will on the one hand extend support to the travel trade and practitioners of the related sectors (e.g. tourist guides and tour escorts, the transport trade or even the catering sector), while on the other hand give the public the confidence to join local group tours during the epidemic."

TIC is responsible for the execution of the arrangement. This includes monitoring the compliance of the undertaking, acting on complaints, and conducting surprise checks on sites.

If a travel agent violates the undertaking, the concerned local group tours will no longer be eligible for incentives under the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme or HKTB's "Free Tour" programme. The travel agent will also be suspended from registration with TIC for local group tours for a month.

To allow travel agents to make full use of the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme, Mr Yau said that the Government will extend the application deadline for the Scheme from end of December 2020 to March 7, 2021.