

HAD steps up enforcement actions against unlicensed guesthouses during Labour Day holidays (with photos)

In response to the Labour Day holidays, the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) stepped up enforcement actions against unlicensed guesthouses from late April to early May by conducting day and night surprise inspections and decoy operations at tourist accommodation hotspots. The HAD also launched large-scale inter-departmental joint operations during the holidays to combat unlicensed guesthouses and ensure the safety of lodgers as well as the general public.

A spokesman for the HAD today (May 10) said, "The OLA inspected a total of 246 premises in Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories in the operations. Prosecution will be instituted by the OLA immediately if there is sufficient evidence that the premises concerned are involved in the operation of unlicensed guesthouses. OLA officers also visited a number of private residential estates and buildings, and posted advisory notices in the common areas of the buildings to alert visitors that there were no licensed guesthouses in those buildings. OLA officers also distributed leaflets to appeal to residents to provide information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to the OLA."

Having regard to unlicensed guesthouses soliciting lodgers via online platforms, the OLA has strengthened its intelligence collection by forming a dedicated team to browse web pages, mobile applications, social media, discussion fora, blogs, etc, to track down suspected unlicensed guesthouse activities. The OLA's law enforcement officers will initiate follow-up investigation when information on unlicensed guesthouses is found.

The spokesman stressed, "Operating an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and it can lead to imprisonment as well as a criminal record. Upon conviction, an offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000, two years' imprisonment and a fine of \$20,000 for each day during which the offence continues. In 2018, the OLA conducted over 15 250 inspections and instigated 159 prosecutions, among which 140 were convicted so far, including 37 cases solicited via online platforms."

Apart from conducting special operations during festive seasons, the OLA continues to combat unlicensed guesthouses held out via online platforms through public education, such as broadcasting Announcements in the Public Interest on TV and radio. Starting from the end of March this year, the OLA also conducted publicity through major Internet search engines on the Mainland and overseas to facilitate tourists' access to the information provided by the OLA in the course of planning their trips, so that they can make use of the search functions on OLA's website to distinguish whether the guesthouse reserved is licensed or not.

Tourists and members of the public should report any suspected unlicensed guesthouses to the OLA by the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaeng@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

