

LCQ17: Developing visitor sources from Middle East and ASEAN

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

The Chief Executive has proposed in the 2024 Policy Address to develop visitor sources from the Middle East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In addition, many organisations in the community have recently proposed to further develop Hong Kong into a Muslim-friendly tourist city to attract tourists from the Middle East and ASEAN regions. Such proposals include allocating resources to introduce a subsidy scheme for Halal-certified restaurants (the Subsidy Scheme) and encouraging hotels to strive to become Muslim-friendly hotels. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the authorities will allocate additional resources to assist restaurants, hotels and tourist attractions, etc. in obtaining Muslim-related certification, thereby making Hong Kong a Muslim-friendly tourist city; if so, of the details;
- (2) apart from allocating additional resources, whether the authorities will introduce new measures, such as the Subsidy Scheme, and encouraging more restaurants and hotels to become Muslim-friendly restaurants and hotels, so as to attract more Muslim tourists to visit Hong Kong; if so, of the details;
- (3) as regards Muslim tourists from regions such as the Middle East and ASEAN, whether the authorities have plans to conduct further publicity and promotion in the future, so as to make Hong Kong their premier tourism destination; if so, of the details; and
- (4) in respect of high-spending Muslim tourists, whether the Government will introduce measures or encourage the tourism, hotel or catering sectors to launch high-end tourism products or mega event packages, etc., to attract them to visit Hong Kong; if so, of the details (including what new plans are in place)?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive has announced in his 2024 Policy Address that the Government will develop visitor sources from the Middle East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), actively encourage various sectors of the community to enhance tourism-support measures for creating a

friendly environment for visitors. The Middle East and ASEAN markets have large population of Muslims. We will actively encourage various sectors of the community to enhance Muslim-friendly tourism-support measures, including compiling a list of restaurants offering halal food; encouraging more commercial establishments to provide appropriate facilities, such as worship facilities in hotels; and stepping up staff training to strengthen their knowledge on receiving visitors from different cultural backgrounds. At the same time, we will continue to step up promotions in Muslim source markets to attract more Muslim visitors to Hong Kong.

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Vincent Cheng, in consultation with the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the reply is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) have been promoting Hong Kong to become a Muslim-friendly travel destination. CrescentRating, an internationally recognised halal travel certification authority, was commissioned to assess hotels, attractions and meetings, incentive travels, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) venues based on categories and standards on par with international benchmarks while taking into account Hong Kong's actual situations. So far, more than 40 hotels, attractions and MICE venues have successfully applied for and been awarded the rating from CrescentRating. For restaurants, the HKTB works with local Halal certification authority, Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong, to promote the existing accreditations in the city and encourage food and beverage establishments to apply for certification. The number of certified restaurants has increased from about 100 at the beginning of the year to more than 130. Recently, a high-end establishment became Hong Kong's first fine-dining Chinese restaurant to receive Halal-friendly certification, providing Muslim visitors with more of the city's premier cuisine.

In respect of training, the HKTB invites tourism industry partners to participate in briefings and training sessions, while encouraging them to pursue Muslim-friendly rating and promoting Halal accreditations for restaurants. This helps them understand the dining, accommodation, attraction, and MICE facility requirements for visitors from the Middle East and ASEAN countries. Through obtaining rating or certification, the trade can enhance their service standards to better cater for visitors from these regions.

We have been encouraging different tourist attractions to continue to improve supporting facilities, especially Muslim supporting facilities, to create a more friendly environment for visitors. The HKTB has been providing assistance throughout the rating assessment by CrescentRating, including registration and certification procedures. For example, Ngong Ping 360 (NP360) and Ocean Park were awarded a Rating of Accredited Attraction – Gold, by CrescentRating, in recognition of their efforts in creating a Muslim-friendly environment for visitors. NP360 has set up prayer rooms at Ngong Ping Village, equipped with prayer garments for ladies, prayer mats, Quran, Tasbih and other prayer amenities for use. Besides, ablution facilities and

water-friendly washrooms are also available at Ngong Ping Village. A Halal restaurant can also be found in Ngong Ping Village to provide dining option for Muslim visitors to enhance their travel experience. For Ocean Park, there is a newly set-up prayer room with better equipment, and Halal-certified restaurants for Muslim visitors. Besides, Hong Kong Disneyland Resort has a Halal-certified restaurant and a Quiet Room inside the Park, while Halal-certified menus are also available at hotel restaurants. The Kai Tak Cruise Terminal will also set up a prayer room for use by visitors early next year.

Besides, the Transport and Logistics Bureau advised that they would help encourage the Airport Authority Hong Kong and taxi fleets to provide service information in Arabic.

The Government will continue to adopt diversified strategies to develop visitor sources from the Middle East and the ASEAN, promote Hong Kong to become a Muslim-friendly travel destination, and attract more Muslim visitors to Hong Kong.

(3) We leverage different channels to attract Muslim visitors to Hong Kong, including a webpage dedicated to Muslim visitors on HKTB's DiscoverHongKong.com website, which consolidates travel information on food, accommodation, prayer facilities, cultural experiences and activities suitable for Muslim visitors. Contents will be constantly updated with the latest information to ensure visitors and the trade can keep abreast of Hong Kong's latest offerings. The webpage is available in 4 languages, i.e. English, Malay, Indonesian and Arabic.

We have launched a series of promotional campaigns targeting countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, to attract more visitors to come to Hong Kong, including:

(i) Leading the largest trade delegation ever to the Middle East, with over 30 Hong Kong trade representatives from travel agencies, attractions and hotels to the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai. This premier travel trade exhibition provided a platform for establishing networks with trade partners from the Middle East and exploring collaboration opportunities;

(ii) Signing Memorandums of Understanding with Emirates Airlines, the region's leading carrier, and Dnata Travel Group, a top online travel agency in the Middle East, to collaboratively promote Hong Kong as a preferred destination for Middle East visitors;

(iii) Launching a new premium travel guide – "Travel in Luxe ¼ Hong Kong", showcasing high-end tourism experiences across four main themes: arts and culture, Hong Kong exploration, family experiences and exclusive concierge services;

(iv) Organising familiarisation trips for Middle East travel trade and media representatives to experience Hong Kong's diverse tourism offerings firsthand; and

(v) Conducting promotional activities in Saudi Arabia with Hong Kong trade representatives, capitalising on the relaunch of direct flights between Hong Kong and Riyadh of Saudi Arabia in late October this year to intensify marketing efforts.

As for Southeast Asia, we also joined hands with the Department of Culture and Tourism of Guangdong Province and the Macao Government Tourism Office to organise a promotional event for the Greater Bay Area tourism brand "Greater Bay Area – Connecting Great Experiences" in Jakarta, Indonesia. The event showcased the rich tourism resources in the Greater Bay Area to the Indonesian market and introduced Hong Kong's Muslim-friendly tourism offerings.

Moving forward, we will continue to strengthen training for the trade and encourage them to join Muslim-friendly accreditations, while expanding promotions in Muslim source markets through social media and other channels. Additionally, more Muslim trade and media familiarisation visits will be organised to utilise their networks in positioning Hong Kong as a Muslim-friendly destination.

(4) Hong Kong's tourism industry is mature with many travel agents in the market providing personalised themed itinerary planning and other services for high-spending clients. With reference to visitors' budget and preferences, travel agents tailor-make itineraries of different themes and contents, so as to provide tourists with high-quality travel experiences and attract high-spending Muslim visitors. For instance, to attract visitors having a preference in high-end tourism experiences and specially curated itineraries, the HKTB collaborated with the travel trade and launched in May this year a new guidebook "Travel in Luxury Hong Kong" featuring a wide range of the city's distinctive lifestyle travel experiences. Some examples of these experiences include whole-venue blocked-out theme park exploration, VIP-exclusive interactions in attractions, accommodation in luxurious suites in star-rated hotels. The guidebook also introduces other exquisite services, which are of great interest to high-spending visitors, such as private jets, helicopters, yachts, VIP group reservation of the Peak Tram, exclusive shopping at luxury brand stores and more. The luxury travel experience guidebook enables high-spending Muslim visitors to plan their trip to Hong Kong. We will continue to adopt a multi-faceted strategy, including encouraging the trade to tailor high-end dining and travel experiences for Muslim visitors, to enrich their travel experience, extend their stay and increase their spending in Hong Kong.