

LCQ4: Mainland tourists visiting Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kwok-fan and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

Under the Individual Visit Scheme (IVS), Mainland residents living in cities covered by IVS may visit Hong Kong after obtaining an endorsement for individual visit (i.e. the G endorsement) issued by the Mainland's Public Security Bureau Office, while residents in other Mainland places visiting Hong Kong are required to obtain an endorsement for group visit (i.e. the L endorsement) and enter Hong Kong in tour groups. However, the Mainland authorities have not imposed a requirement on the minimum number of persons constituting an inbound Mainland tour group (IMTG), such that one person may also constitute a tour group. Besides, it has been reported that same as IVS visitors, Mainland residents with the L endorsement may now visit Hong Kong on their own and are no longer required to enter Hong Kong in tour groups (such as tour groups organised in Shenzhen on an ad hoc basis). The aforesaid arrangements have rendered the L endorsement tantamount to the G endorsement. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed the pressure on the tourist facilities in Hong Kong brought about by the arrangements of not imposing a requirement on the minimum number of persons constituting an IMTG and allowing Mainland residents with the L endorsement to visit Hong Kong on their own; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as the Government indicated in July last year that it would relay to the Mainland authorities concerns of Hong Kong people about such arrangements, of the replies received and follow-up actions taken by the Government; and

(3) as the Government indicated in January this year that it had all along maintained close liaison with the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong to understand the situation of IMTG, of the details of the liaison work (including the frequency and scope); whether it will discuss with the Mainland authorities the setting up of a reciprocal notification mechanism between government departments so as to grasp right away the information relating to Mainland tourists visiting Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the sustainable and healthy development of the tourism industry. Whilst ensuring that the industry brings about benefits to society, we also continuously seek to minimise as far as

possible the impact of tourist activities on the local community.

In response to the question raised by the Hon Lau Kwok-fan, my reply is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government has been maintaining close liaison with the Mainland authorities on the arrangements for Mainland visitors to visit Hong Kong. The Mainland authorities have not indicated any change in policies concerning Mainland visitors' entry to Hong Kong.

In fact, the Government has been keeping a close watch on the situation of Mainland visitors coming to Hong Kong. In 2018, the total visitor arrivals to Hong Kong rose 11.4 per cent year-on-year, of which overnight visitor arrivals rose 4.9 per cent year-on-year. Nevertheless, we notice that, in the past three years from 2016 onwards, the percentage of Mainland visitors arriving with a group visit endorsement (commonly known as L-permit) out of the total Mainland visitors remained at around 15 per cent every year.

That said, in view of the increase in overall Mainland visitor arrivals to Hong Kong, the Government has been joining hands with different stakeholders to implement various targeted measures to minimise the impact of tourist activities on the local community.

Before peak periods of Mainland visitor arrivals, including the Chinese New Year and National Day Golden Weeks, the Government will convene inter-departmental meetings to co-ordinate amongst departments the enhancement of visitor crowd control measures. Meanwhile, the Government has been pragmatic in tackling problems brought about by inbound tour groups to the local community. It has been maintaining close liaison with the travel trade, the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), district personalities and Legislative Council Members to implement various targeted mitigation measures, including encouraging tour coaches to use proper parking spaces, appealing to the trade to observe order when receiving tour groups and use information technology in strengthening control on visitor and vehicular flows, etc. The Tourism Commission, together with relevant Government departments and the TIC, also meets with trade representatives from time to time to follow up on their arrangements in receiving inbound tour groups.

Furthermore, the Government, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) and the travel trade, will continue to take forward the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry published in 2017, including nurturing and developing tourism products and initiatives with local and international characteristics, so as to cater for the needs and preferences of different visitor segments and divert tourists to different districts for sightseeing and shopping.

The Government will continue to take forward tourism projects with local characteristics in different districts, such as the "Revitalisation of Dr Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail", "Old Town Central" and "Design District Hong Kong" projects, as well as the "Hong Kong Neighbourhoods – Sham Shui Po" district promotion campaign successively launched over the past two years.

On cultural tourism, a number of facilities in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) are being completed in phases, including the Xiqu Centre opened in early 2019 and the museum facilities in the pipeline. This will help make the WKCD a new integral cluster of tourist attractions. The 2019-20 Budget also suggests allocating additional funding to the HKTB so as to further promote Hong Kong as a premier tourism destination, enhance publicity on Hong Kong's major festivals and events, and entice visitors to experience Hong Kong's local culture in different districts, etc.

On green tourism, we will continue to promote its development in Hong Kong in accordance with the principles of nature conservation and sustainable development, including launching a new pilot art cum cultural, heritage and green event at Yim Tin Tsai of Sai Kung in end-2019. The 2019-20 Budget also suggests allocating additional funding to the Tourism Commission such that it, together with other relevant Government departments, will roll out various new initiatives, including improving the facilities of country trails in the vicinity, commissioning a consultancy study for enhancing the facilities of the Hong Kong Wetland Park, etc.

As regards theme parks, the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort is taking forward its expansion and development plan for launching new attractions during 2018 and the next few years. Ocean Park is also taking forward its all-weather water park project, which is expected to be completed by 2021.

The abovementioned measures will help divert visitors to different districts and enhance Hong Kong's tourist receiving capability.

(3) At present, the TIC, as the industry's regulatory body, enforces clear guidelines requiring that travel agents in Hong Kong must, whenever receiving any Mainland inbound tour group, register with the TIC and provide information about the tour group in advance. In this regard, the TIC reports to the Government on the situation of Mainland inbound tour groups visiting Hong Kong from time to time. It also participates in the inter-departmental meetings convened by the Government before peak periods of Mainland visitor arrivals, such that relevant Government departments and attraction operators can grasp the estimated number of tour groups visiting Hong Kong during the holidays and make corresponding arrangements.

In addition, the Government has been maintaining close liaison with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and other local tourism authorities in the Mainland, and exchanging information on the situation of Mainland visitors to Hong Kong through the communication mechanism between both sides, as well as stepping up promotion and education targeting the trade as necessary. Before peak periods of Mainland visitor arrivals, including the Chinese New Year and National Day Golden Weeks, the Government appeals to the Mainland authorities to strengthen the management of visitor flows in collaboration with Hong Kong, as well as to disseminate in the Mainland public notices to remind visitors of various points to note when visiting Hong Kong. The Government also learns from the Mainland visitors' travel patterns from time to time so as to notify relevant bureaux or departments for their corresponding actions

as necessary.