

LCQ5: Enhancing the competitiveness of the tourism industry

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (March 13):

Question:

There are views that tourist-oriented regional competition has become exceptionally keen recently. Governments of various places employ all means to compete for tourist resources. Hong Kong is facing new challenges in the new competitive environment, and may experience the predicament of being lagging behind. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that to promote the development of the tourism industry, various local governments in the Mainland have worked in solidarity with the entire municipality and even the entire province to break barriers and remove obstacles among various industries and trades, whether the HKSAR Government can connect various industries and trades as well as mobilize and coordinate resources across the territory, so that various departments will be able to work together to facilitate the development of Hong Kong's tourism industry, thereby getting rid of the predicament of the industry being lagging behind;

(2) as there are views that the major current pursuits of Mainland tourists in travelling are high cost-effectiveness and cosy experience, how the Government can enhance the travel experiences of Mainland tourists with their limited time and budgets as well as encourage and motivate the whole society to foster a cordial and welcoming atmosphere; and

(3) as it is learnt that nowadays, tourists prefer to "check-in" at popular, unique and iconic landmarks and street scenes, and the public opinions and trends presented on the We Media can bring a huge influence, whether the Government has plans to, by tapping on Hong Kong's characteristics and advantages, adopt a more proactive approach to steer Hong Kong's tourism promotional efforts towards a more compassionate and attractive direction, such as opening a We Media account to actively exchange views and interact with netizens?

Reply:

President,

Tourism is one of the major pillars of our economy. Over the past year, business and leisure visitors from the Mainland and around the world have gradually returned to Hong Kong, injecting impetus into the tourism industry. With the concerted efforts of the Government and the travel trade, visitor arrivals reached 34 million last year and there was continuous increase in

the number of visitor arrivals quarter by quarter, revealing a strong recovery momentum of the tourism industry. According to the preliminary figures from the Immigration Department, the number of visitor arrivals in the first two months of this year was approximately 7.83 million, i.e. about 130 000 on average per day. The latter represents a 12 per cent increase compared to the average daily number of visitor arrivals in the fourth quarter of 2023, which was approximately 116 000. During the Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland last month, the numbers of total visitor arrivals reached the level of the same period in 2018 while the number of Mainland visitor arrivals even exceeded the 2018 level. The Financial Secretary proposed in the 2024-25 Budget to set aside a total amount of \$1.095 billion to intensify efforts to promote a number of tourism-related initiatives and projects in the next three years. Besides, we will continue to organise and coordinate various mega events and large-scale activities with characteristics to attract more visitors to Hong Kong.

In respect of the questions raised by the Hon Chan Chun-ying, the reply is as follows:

(1) Joint efforts by different sectors through collaboration and coordination among one another is essential to promoting tourism development. We have established the high-level Tourism Strategy Committee (TSC), chaired by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, to develop strategies to further promote the long-term sustainable development of the tourism industry and enhance collaboration among different stakeholders in the industry. Members include prominent figures and key leaders from the tourism and other related sectors such as culture, sports, retail and catering, etc. The TSC aims at gathering strategic advice to enhance the speed and quality of the development of Hong Kong's tourism industry as well as fostering integrated development of tourism and other related sectors.

In promoting mega event economy, the Government has set up an inter-departmental Mega Events Coordination Group chaired by the Deputy Financial Secretary, with the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism as deputy. Members include representatives from relevant bureaux, departments, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) and other statutory bodies. The coordination group is committed to strengthening the overall planning and coordination of mega events, ensuring sufficient inter-departmental support, taking the initiative to scout mega events to be held in Hong Kong and promoting the mega event economy through a multi-pronged approach, which will further promote tourism development.

In addition, we convene tourism-related high-level coordination meetings as necessary to coordinate tourism-related matters involving different departments, such as the preparation work for receiving visitors to Hong Kong during the Golden Weeks of the Mainland. All relevant government departments are also actively involved in providing necessary facilitation.

(2) Enriching tourism resources in Hong Kong and providing visitors with more new tourism offerings and experiences are of utmost importance. Together with the HKTB, we will promote new thematic travel experiences anchoring seasonal,

festival and mega events as well as integrating Chinese and Western arts, pop culture, wine and dine experiences, outdoor explorations, active sports and more to cater for the interest of wide-ranging visitor segments while developing immersive in-depth tourism activities in the light of the new travel trends. We will also encourage the travel trade to launch a more diversified portfolio of tourism products.

On developing diversified tourism products, the Tourism Commission will continue to work at full steam to roll out tourism projects like "Sai Kung Hoi Arts Festival", "Design District Hong Kong" and "City in Time". We have organised the "Cultural and Heritage Sites Local Tour Incentive Scheme", the "Characteristic Local Tourism Incentive Scheme", and the "Deeper into Hong Kong: Creative Itinerary Design Competition" to encourage the travel trade to design more thematic tours.

Mega events help attract more visitors and enrich their experience. In the future, we will organise more mega events to foster a positive ambience in town and attract visitors to come to Hong Kong, thereby elevating the city's international image. The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau has launched "Art March" as a brand for the first time to promote mega arts and cultural events organised, funded, or supported by the Government, providing citizens and visitors with an enriched artistic journey and generating greater economic benefits through the mega arts and cultural events.

Being the world-famous tourism destination and gastronomic capital, Hong Kong's hotels and restaurants are internationally recognised. Two hotels in Hong Kong were selected as the best five hotels among "The World's 50 Best Hotels 2023", demonstrating Hong Kong's excellent accommodation experience to the world. Hong Kong is also one of the cities with the most Michelin restaurants. In the "Asia's 50 Best Bars" held last year, eight bars in Hong Kong were selected as the best 50. These would help attract visitors to travel to Hong Kong and further enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong's tourism industry.

Besides, following the "Professional Quality Tourism Services Pledge" launched last year, the HKTb will enhance the "Quality Tourism Services Scheme" and roll out a new round of promotion, including producing a reality show in partnership with a TV channel and awarding recognition to the excellent service of frontline practitioners to foster the hospitality culture in Hong Kong by engaging the public and all walks of life.

(3) We note that travellers' preference is changing. More visitors are expecting to enjoy in-depth experiences, and many of them follow the recommendations online to look for authentic local experiences and photo spots. As such, the HKTb invited more than 2 000 trade stakeholders, media, celebrities, key opinion leaders (KOL) from the Mainland, Southeast Asia and Europe in 2023, including the prestigious movie stars from the Hollywood and other regions as well as bloggers with large numbers of followers on social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin, Weibo and Bilibili targeting the Mainland source market to come to Hong Kong to experience the diverse tourism features and share their experience on social media to create positive word of mouth and tell the good story of Hong Kong. The HKTb has accumulated more

than 11 million followers on various social media platforms so far. In the past year, promotional contents on these platforms featured more than 2 billion reach. We will continue to promote Hong Kong on various media channels.

In addition, we would invite guests who come to Hong Kong to participate in mega events, conferences and competitions to experience Hong Kong's unique characteristics. For example, during the LIV Golf Professional Tour just held, the organiser invited many famous golf players to visit the Hong Kong Palace Museum, to taste poon choi and to watch a bian lian (face-changing) performance, to experience Hong Kong's unique traditional culture and the Chinese arts. The golf players shared their personal experience on social media platforms, together with the efforts of the HKTB in promoting the relevant events, to showcase Hong Kong's unique tourism experience to the world.

The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau will continue to work with the HKTB and relevant stakeholders to actively promote the development of Hong Kong's tourism industry, develop Hong Kong's tourism brand, as well as reinforcing and enhancing Hong Kong's status as an international tourism hub.

Thank you, President.