

LCQ6: Tackling problems brought about by inbound tour groups to local communities

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Cheng Chung-tai and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (January 16):

Question:

In recent years, a large number of Mainland inbound tour groups have arranged their tour group members to have meals and go shopping in districts such as Tsuen Wan, Tsing Yi, Hung Hom and To Kwa Wan. Some residents in those districts have relayed that visits by tens of thousands of tourists daily have given rise to a number of problems, which include eateries and shops catering for people's daily needs in the districts being replaced by shops dedicated to receiving tourists, traffic obstruction arising from illegal coach parking, as well as environmental hygiene and noise problems caused by tourists littering and yelling on the streets. As a result, the daily lives of the residents have been gravely affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific indicators taken into account by the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau in considering whether there is a need to divert the tourists in a certain district to other districts;

(2) as many residents consider that the various government departments have not actively addressed the problem of tourists affecting residents' daily lives, and tackling such problem is not the main duty of the Travel Industry Authority to be set up, of the specific measures the Government has put in place to improve the living environment of the districts concerned so that residents' daily lives can resume to normal; and

(3) given that the Government has, through the system for application for liquor licences, prevent liquor-selling premises from causing problems such as fire safety, environmental hygiene and noise problems, with a view to striking a balance between the commercial interests concerned and peace for the residents, whether the Government will regulate tourism-related shops in a similar manner?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the sustainable and healthy development of the tourism industry. Whilst ensuring that the industry develops in a stable and orderly manner and brings about benefits to society,

we are constantly seeking to minimise as far as possible the impact of tourist activities on the local community. In response to the question raised by the Dr Hon Cheng Chung-tai, my reply is as follows.

(1) On increasing tourist attractions and diverting tourists, one of the strategies in the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry published in 2017 is to nurture and develop tourism products and initiatives with local and international characteristics. Our concrete objectives are to unearth the tourism characteristics of different districts to cater for the needs and preferences of different visitor segments, and to divert tourists to different districts for sightseeing and shopping, thereby enhancing economic gains and benefiting various districts.

The Government has been developing new tourist attractions in various districts and taking forward projects under various themes with local characteristics, on cultural and creative tourism, as well as green tourism. Over the past two years, the Government, in collaboration with organisations such as the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), Hong Kong Design Centre, and Hong Kong Comics and Animation Federation, rolled out the revitalisation of Dr Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail and "Old Town Central" in Central and Western District, as well as the "Design District Hong Kong" project and "Hong Kong Neighbourhoods – Sham Shui Po" campaign in Wan Chai and Sham Shui Po Districts respectively, to promote both tourism and the local cultural characteristics of the districts concerned for energising local economies.

On cultural tourism, a number of facilities in the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) will be completed in phases, including the Xiqu Centre to be officially open on January 20, 2019 and museum facilities in the pipeline. WKCD will be a new integral cluster of tourist attractions. In addition, the annual business event featuring design, culture and art under "Business of Design Week" and Art Basel held in March are new offerings rolled out in recent years to attract tourists. HKTB has been promoting various activities in relation to traditional festivals with local distinctive characteristics, which can also entice tourists to patronise different districts of Hong Kong. On green tourism, in addition to the Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark founded earlier, tourist attractions concerning natural ecology and geology in the New Territories East have become places of interest to some tourists.

In respect of theme parks, the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort is taking forward its expansion and development plan, with new attractions to be rolled out in the next few years. The Ocean Park is taking forward its all-weather water park project, which is expected to be completed by 2021.

(2) The Government has been pragmatic in tackling problems brought about by inbound tour groups to local communities, and maintaining close liaison with the travel trade, Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), district personalities and Legislative Council Members to implement various targeted mitigation measures.

The Tourism Commission, together with relevant Government departments

and TIC, meet with trade representatives from time to time to keep an eye on their arrangements in receiving inbound tour groups. Before peak periods of Mainland visitor arrivals, including the Chinese New Year and National Day Golden Week, the Tourism Commission convenes inter-departmental meetings to strengthen visitor crowd control measures.

Besides, TIC issues notices and liaises with the trade from time to time to urge them to observe order and use information technology in strengthening control on visitor and vehicular flow, and to encourage coaches to use proper parking spaces. Through on-site inspection, advisory letters, meetings, etc., TIC follows up with the trade members concerned on their arrangements to receive inbound tour groups. TIC is also examining to enhance the "Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Inbound Tour Group Shoppers" by requiring registered shops serving inbound tour groups for designated shopping to put forward and implement visitor crowd management measures, with a view to further reducing the inconvenience caused by inbound tour groups to certain districts.

On coach parking, the Government has been providing additional pick-up/drop-off spaces and parking spaces for coaches at appropriate locations, including tourist and shopping hotspots, and letting car parks for coach parking on short-term tenancies. The Police also steps up enforcement action at illegal parking blackspots and deploys more manpower to enhance control.

On crowd management, in case a relatively large number of tourists gather in certain areas causing congestion or noise problems, the Police will, on a need basis, deploy more manpower to maintain order and public safety.

Moreover, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will enhance the cleansing of streets and public toilets at popular gathering spots for visitors to keep the cityscape clean, step up inspection at blackspots and strengthen law enforcement.

(3) The Travel Industry Ordinance was passed by the Legislative Council in November 2018 after two years of scrutiny. It provides for the establishment of a statutory body, the Travel Industry Authority (TIA), and empowers TIA to formulate an administrative scheme to regulate shops that inbound tour groups are arranged to patronise.

The Government will recommend TIA to conduct on-site inspection before registering a shop to which inbound tour groups are arranged to patronise, with a view to ensuring that the premises is suitable for receiving tourists, or that appropriate visitor and vehicular flow control measures have been put in place. The Government will also recommend TIA to deploy more manpower to conduct on-site inspection in affected areas, as well as formulate suitable administrative measures against local receiving travel agents or shops that are unamenable to repeated advice, willfully non-co-operative and fail to manage inbound tour groups' visits to shops. Such agents or shops will be subject to sanction such as disciplinary orders through investigation and disciplinary proceedings. When formulating the administrative scheme, TIA

will holistically consider different factors, including industry development, TIC's regulatory experience and stakeholders' views, etc.