

LCQ8: Individual Visit Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

The Central Government announced in February and May of this year to optimise the Individual Visa Scheme, expanding the scheme to 10 more cities (the 10 cities), creating a boost to the Hong Kong's tourism trade. Some members of the tourism trade are of the view that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government should optimise the use of resources to enhance the promotional works in the aforesaid new source market and set corresponding performance indicators. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

1. the total number of inbound visitors from the 10 cities in the third quarter of this year, and its comparison with the third quarters of last year;
2. the items and expenditures involved in the promotional work rolled out by the Government in the 10 cities, as well as the performance indicators for such works; and
3. what are the plans that the Government have in the future to collaborate with the tourism trade to conduct business negotiations and trade visit to the 10 cities, so as to attract more overnight visitors from the Mainland to Hong Kong.

Reply:

President,

Individual Visa Scheme (IVS) was expanded to Qingdao and Xi'an on March 6, 2024, and further expanded to Taiyuan, Hohhot, Harbin, Lhasa, Lanzhou, Xining, Yinchuan and Urumqi on May 27, 2024. The scheme is currently implemented in 59 cities in the Mainland, covering all provincial capitals in our country, which allows more Mainland residents to explore Hong Kong's unique appeals as a tourism destination more flexibly and conveniently.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung is as follows:

(1) The following table tabulates the total number of inbound visitors from the aforementioned 10 cities in the third quarter of 2023 and 2024, along with a comparison between the third quarters of the two years:

	Total number of inbound visitors from the aforementioned 10 cities		
	July	August	September
2023	41 147	47 696	34 826
2024	49 274	59 471	35 039
Comparison between the third quarter of 2023 and 2024	+16.3 per cent		

(2) To attract more residents from the 10 cities to visit Hong Kong, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) and the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) have rolled out a series of promotional activities including:

(i) Promptly after the expansion of IVS to Xi'an and Qingdao, I led a delegation with the HKTB to visit these two cities in mid-March of this year to conduct promotions. This included holding briefing sessions to introduce the latest tourism products of Hong Kong to local travel agencies and other trade representatives. The briefing sessions were attended by more than 100 local media and trade representatives. Additionally, the HKTB launched outdoor advertisements in popular commercial districts of both cities to introduce new travel experiences in Hong Kong, resulting in a total exposure of 23.8 million views;

(ii) After the expansion of IVS to all provincial capitals, the HKTB arranged for 20 trade representatives from eight cities, which includes Taiyuan, Hohhot, Harbin, Lhasa, Lanzhou, Xining, Yinchuan and Urumqi to visit various classic and trendy art and cultural attractions in Hong Kong in June of this year. The itinerary covered the Peak, theme parks, M+ and the Hong Kong Palace Museum in the West Kowloon Cultural District, as well as a city walk in Central, allowing an in-depth exploration of Hong Kong's local culture. On June 16 this year, I also introduced Hong Kong's latest tourism resources to Mainland media representatives who visited Hong Kong via the inaugural sleeper train of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL), and welcomed visitors from various Mainland cities to explore Hong Kong in depth. Subsequently, the HKTB continued to maintain close cooperation with local travel agents, launching unique products for IVS tours to Hong Kong. The HKTB also exclusively designed in-depth cultural and artistic tours as well as family-friendly travel products to meet the diverse needs of different types of visitors;

(iii) Since April this year, the HKTB, has distributed nearly 30 000 sets of discount vouchers, each valued at HK\$200, to visitors from the 10 cities through travel agents and airlines, stimulating visitors' spending in Hong Kong;

(iv) From late June to mid-August this year, the HKTB, in collaboration with relevant HKSAR Government Offices in the Mainland, visited Harbin, Lanzhou, and Urumqi to conduct offline activities like exhibitions and online

promotions on social media platforms. These activities showcased Hong Kong's year-round events with characteristic, special programmes and offers during the summer to local residents of those cities, achieving an audience reach of over seven million, generating a total exposure of more than 18 million views; and

(v) The HKTB utilised promotions on social media by collaborating with Mainland short video platforms and inviting influential key opinion leaders to create micro-videos about Hong Kong tourism, generating word-of-mouth publicity. Depending on the circumstances of different markets, the HKTB also made use of channels popular among visitors in those cities to promote immersive, in-depth tours themed around "City walks" and activities appealing to the young generation, aiming to "soft sell" Hong Kong with fresh content and attract more visitors. The audience reach of the promotions on social media platforms exceeded 15 million while the number of views of short videos surpassed 42 million.

Based on the nature of the promotional works, the HKTB will continue to set various indicators, such as the number of visitors to the website, the audience reach, and the views of videos on social media, to assess their effectiveness. Since the aforesaid promotional activities have been subsumed under the HKTB's promotional efforts across various areas, it is difficult to quantify the relevant expenditures separately.

(3) The CSTB has been committed to promoting close collaboration within the travel trade, working together to promote Hong Kong tourism in the Mainland and overseas to attract more overnight visitors to Hong Kong, including ongoing participation in Mainland and overseas tourism promotional activities with representatives of the Hong Kong travel trade through the HKTB. For example, in November this year, the HKTB, together with representatives from the Hong Kong's travel trade, will attend the China International Travel Mart in Shanghai, which is organised by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. In addition, through provision of funding, the CSTB also supports the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) in organising trade visits. Since the resumption of cross-boundary travel, the TIC has made use of the CSTB's funding to lead trade delegations to visit the nine Greater Bay Area cities, the Belt and Road cities as well as other Mainland cities respectively with a view to promoting business co-operation between Hong Kong and different cities. We will continue to encourage and support the TIC in organising more trade visits to destinations including the newly added cities applicable under IVS, so as to assist the travel trade in "bringing in, going out" and engaging in business collaborations and exchanges with trade representatives of different cities, thereby exploring business opportunities and promoting two-way tourism exchanges.