

LCQ9: Large number of Mainland tourists staying overnight in local camp sites and beaches

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (May 23):

Question:

It has been reported that during the Labour Day holiday of the Mainland (commonly known as "Labour Day Golden Week") this year, a large number of Mainland residents came to Hong Kong under the arrangement of a number of Mainland travel agencies, and set up tents and stayed overnight at designated camp sites and locations where the erection of tents was not permitted (e.g. beaches). Such a situation not only caused nuisance to the residents in the vicinity of the camp sites, but also affected environmental hygiene and natural ecology. In reply to an enquiry raised by me on related issues last year, the Government indicated that it would step up law enforcement actions and communicate with the relevant Mainland authorities. However, the problem is still worsening. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures and follow-up actions taken by the authorities so far since the occurrence of the aforesaid situation last year;

(2) whether it has conducted investigations into cases in which organisations not holding a travel agent's licence were suspected to be running the aforesaid business; if so, of the details of the law enforcement actions taken in the past 12 months by the authorities, and the respective numbers of prosecutions and convictions concerned; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it reviewed, in the past three years, the booking arrangement adopted for the various designated camp sites and the supply and demand of camping areas; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether it will consider capping the number of persons on the camp sites so as to provide campers with a better camping experience and avoid causing excessive nuisance to the surrounding environment; and

(4) given that more and more local residents and Mainland tourists are interested in going to Hong Kong's countryside for recreational purpose, whether the authorities will make available more designated camp sites and install additional facilities at existing camp sites to meet the demand; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the sustainable and healthy development of the tourism industry. While ensuring the industry's stable and orderly growth, we also seek to minimise as far as possible the impact of tourist activities on the local community. With the relevant bureaux and departments consulted, our reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu is as follows:

(1) In May 2017, after noticing a number of Mainland tourists had camped at Cheung Chau Tung Wan Beach, Mui Wo Silver Mine Bay Beach and Pui O Campsite on Lantau Island, the Tourism Commission (TC) immediately wrote to the then China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) (the present Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT)) reporting to them the situation and urging them to, through appropriate channels in the Mainland, remind the travel trade and travellers to pay attention to and comply with relevant rules and regulations in Hong Kong. The then CNTA replied in June 2017, vowing to step up training for tourist guides and pre-departure education, so as to make sure the travel trade and travellers were well aware of the relevant information. TC also collaborated with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in stepping up inspections at various popular campsites and reminding travellers to abide by relevant rules and regulations.

Prior to the 2018 Labour day Holiday, after noticing the flock of Mainland tourists into Ham Tin Wan and Sai Wan in Sai Kung, TC immediately notified AFCD, which sent officers to inspect the sites, as well as came up with contingent staffing arrangements to ensure sufficient manpower was deployed to patrol the area throughout the Holiday, to advise and educate individuals involved in inappropriate behaviours, and to step up site cleansing.

TC convened an inter-departmental meeting in early-May to explore ways to more effectively cope with similar incidents. The meeting agreed TC would step up liaison with various Mainland tourism authorities (including the MoCT, the Guangdong Province Tourism Administration, the Guangzhou Tourism Authority and the Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Culture, Sports and Tourism, etc.) with a view to keeping in view the travel trends of Mainland tourists, and identifying and reporting destinations that they would likely visit to Home Affairs Department and other relevant departments in various districts for advance planning. AFCD, LCSD and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department would too from time to time review their site management and staffing mechanism, including deploying staff to step up management of tourist flows at popular destinations during peak arrival seasons of Mainland tourists, such as the Chinese New Year Golden Week and National Day Golden Week, as necessary, so as to minimise the impact of tourist activities on the local community.

(2) We understand the Mainland camping groups visiting Hong Kong during the past two Labour day Holidays were organised by Mainland corporations or tourists themselves, and no Hong Kong receiving agents were involved. TC has written to the MoCT and other relevant Mainland departments expressing

concerns on the issue and urging them to look into the case and follow up on any corporations or individuals proven in violation of relevant Mainland rules and regulations. In the meantime, the Travel Agents Registry would continue to maintain close communication with the travel trade and refer any information on suspected unlicensed travel agent business cases to the Police for criminal investigation.

(3) and (4) There are currently 44 designated campsites in Hong Kong, of which 41 are within country parks, under AFCD's jurisdiction and open to the public (including travellers, similarly hereinafter) on a first-come, first-served basis. Out of the remaining three, which are under LCSD's jurisdiction, Chong Hing Water Sports Centre, as a recreational spot integrating facilities for day camping, overnight camping and water activities, requires reservation. Pui O Campsite on Lantau Island offers designated camp bays indicated by markings and an open lawn camping area, of which the former are open for priority reservation by Hong Kong residents during Labour day, National Day and Chinese New Year Holidays and, open to public use with on-site registration on a first-come, first-served basis as the latter is, during other times of the year. As regards the Tuen Mun Butterfly Beach Park Campsite, it also offers designated camp bays that are open for public use with on-site registration on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Government conducts review on the use of campsites from time to time, and improves their facilities and explores increasing camping locations based on the needs of countryside visitors and the conditions of individual locations. Inasmuch as LCSD is concerned, the registration rates of campsites under its jurisdiction reached around 80 per cent on average in the past three years, and the department has carried out regular maintenance work on the facilities concerned depending on the situation.

As for AFCD, to meet public demands for camping activities in country parks, the department recently improved the facilities and services of various campsites based on their usage and popularity, including designating two new campsites in Sai Wan and Tai Mong Tsai in Sai Kung in 2014 and 2015 respectively, as well as conducting improvement work on the camping ground of Wan Tsai campsite in Sai Kung in 2016 and extension work on the camping area of Chung Pui campsite in Tai Po in 2017. Furthermore, the department has commissioned a consultancy study to explore the enhancement of recreation and education potential of country parks with an aim to meeting public needs. In respect of overnight facilities in country parks, the consultancy will explore the feasibility of introducing a reservation system for designated campsites in country parks. AFCD expects public consultation to be conducted under the study within 2018.