

Licensed travel agents can resume organising local group tours with conditions

The Government announced today (April 27) that the Executive Council has approved that, subject to the condition of licensed travel agents pledging strict compliance with the Anti-epidemic Undertakings for Local Tours, the holding of local group tours of not more than 30 persons (inclusive of frontline working staff) can be resumed with conditions pursuant to the group gathering restrictions as stipulated in the prevailing Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) starting this Thursday (April 29).

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, said, "The tourism industry is the hardest-hit sector under the epidemic. With the stabilisation of the epidemic and the active co-operation of the trade, the Government has been making every effort to help it explore business opportunities. Allowing the resumption of organisation of local group tours with conditions, coupled with the extension of the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme (GLIS) announced earlier and the upcoming launch of the Second Round of the 'Free Tour' programme by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), will enable the gradual resumption of business and provide reliefs to the tourism trade and practitioners of related sectors (e.g. tourist guides and tour escorts, the transport trade and even the catering sector) while safeguarding public health and infection control. The public will rest assured when joining the tourism activities."

The tourism trade agrees to adopt more stringent anti-epidemic measures in order to resume the organisation of local group tours. The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) will revise the Undertakings set earlier to include more stringent public health and anti-epidemic measures as follows:

1. Vaccination of working staff: Requiring travel agents to ensure that all working staff accompanying and receiving the local group tours have received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine prior to receiving any local group tours, except for those who due to health reasons have declared such a condition to the travel agents with the production of a medical certificate, and provide proof of the negative result of a nucleic acid test (the relevant specimen must be a combined nasal and throat swab) within seven days prior to receiving the group tours. The relevant records must be retained to facilitate inspection and follow-up by the relevant persons when necessary.
2. Enhanced contact tracing: Requiring local group tour participants to scan the "LeaveHomeSafe" QR code whenever they board a means of transport and enter a venue (including attractions and restaurants) that displays such a QR code, so as to facilitate more efficient contact tracing by the authorities when necessary.

Apart from the above new requirements, other major requirements in the Undertakings will remain unchanged, including prior registration with the TIC by the travel agents and their signing of the Undertakings for strict compliance with the anti-epidemic measures listed therein, which cover the arrangements for tour participants, itineraries, transportation, meals, attractions and working staff of the travel agents to safeguard public health. Itineraries must cover the designated green spots of the GLIS, or any of the tour itineraries under the "Free Tour" programme of the HKTB.

The TIC will continue to be responsible for execution of the above arrangement, including monitoring and conducting spot checks on the travel agents' compliance with the Undertakings regarding the registered group tours. If a travel agent violates the Undertakings, the local group tours concerned will no longer be eligible for incentives under the GLIS or the HKTB's "Free Tour" programme. The travel agent will also be suspended from registration with the TIC for local group tours for a month.