

SCED speaks on 2020 Wine and Dine Festival and local group tours

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, on the 2020 Wine and Dine Festival and local group tours at a media session after the press conference of the 2020 Wine and Dine Festival today (October 23):

Reporter: How do you think the online Wine and Dine Festival can compensate the usual festivity of the physical festival? Do you have an expectation on the number of participants reached? There are also a lot of worries and criticisms on the mandatory testing of travel agents for the local group tours that the Government is promoting as well as the relative high cost of travel bubbles. How would you comment on that?

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: I think the launching of the Wine and Dine Festival this year through this online and offline format is a good demonstration that Hong Kong can retain this brand name, "Wine and Dine – Best in Hong Kong", as a global attraction of our uniqueness being a wine centre in selling, and a great entertainment centre for good food and good wine. In terms of reaching out, it's more than compensating the number of people who can attend this event because on the web, it's basically boundless. Through all the events, we are reaching out to more in number. But of course if circumstances permit, we should bring the whole event back to Hong Kong. In the meantime, I think this is the best demonstration of how we can strike the balance between containing the disease on the one hand and at the same time maintaining the kind of normalcy, particularly in business, entertainment and the routine of Hong Kong.

As regards the local tourism arrangement, we are finding every ways and means to bring back the space and opportunity for business to resume under the premises of safe and healthy arrangements, as well as to allow some normalcy in business. This needs a lot of re-engineering. I think throughout the world, all are struggling with the same problem. We cannot have a total lockdown. It will bring a detrimental effect to the economy both locally and globally. But at the same time, we cannot open our gate indiscriminately. We've seen examples that premature opening would create troubles. So in the area of local tours which we introduced (and implemented) today, the exemption arrangement, or the travel bubbles we are trying to establish with partners, we try to work within this balance for all. Take the Air Travel Bubble as an example. We emphasise on a very strong (COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction) test to be conducted before and after departure. In place of that, we hope that we can do away the more restrictive quarantine arrangements, allowing people to have more freedom in going around within the city in a safe manner. So I think we will build on these (travel) bubbles, local tour exemptions and events like this to demonstrate to the world that if there is a will, there is a way. In that regard, we need cooperation from both people in the trade, like the travel trade as well as the public who will continue to observe social distancing and maintain public health.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)