

Speech by SCST at opening ceremony of 36th International Travel Expo and 17th MICE Travel Expo (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, at the opening ceremony of the 36th International Travel Expo and the 17th MICE Travel Expo today (August 18):

K S (Managing Director of TKS Exhibition Services Limited, Mr K S Tong), distinguished guests, consuls general, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and a very warm welcome to everyone joining us today for the opening of the 36th International Travel Expo, or ITE in short, and the 17th MICE Travel Expo. It gives me great pleasure to be here in my new capacity as the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism of the HKSAR (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) Government.

ITE is certainly a veteran in the international travel arena. With a history of more than three decades, it has become a renowned home-grown travel trade event of Hong Kong. Together with the MICE Travel Expo, the twin shows have built a solid reputation for providing a well-established platform for the travel and MICE sectors to connect with and to expand their business contacts as well as showcase their latest and finest products. This year, under the theme of "Reconnect & Recovery", the twin shows have attracted over 100 exhibitors from around the globe, which is a testimony of the eagerness of the trade from all over the world to welcome visitors again.

Like the trade, the HKSAR Government is also sparing no effort in preparing for the return of visitors when circumstances permit. We start by going local via the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme. This scheme creates job opportunities for practitioners while fostering the development of new itineraries to tap into the growing appetite for nature and wellness. We are also making preparations for launching a new Cultural and Heritage Sites Local Tour Incentive Scheme later this year to encourage the industry to develop more tourism products with cultural and heritage elements.

Our efforts to enhance our tourism offerings haven't stopped despite the pandemic. After the opening of M+ at the West Kowloon Cultural District in last November, we have recently welcomed another much-anticipated arts and cultural landmark, the Hong Kong Palace Museum. This collaborative project between the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority and the Palace Museum in Beijing promotes the study and appreciation of Chinese arts and culture as well as fosters dialogue between world civilisations. Not only does the opening of the Hong Kong Palace Museum signify an important milestone for Hong Kong to develop into a hub for arts and cultural exchanges between China and the rest of the world as outlined in the National 14th Five-Year Plan, it also provides a key platform for us to promote Chinese culture to "go

global".

Arts and culture aside, we are giving our world-class Hong Kong Wetland Park a facelift, and we have completed the upgrading of 10 hiking trails and are embarking on another 10 in the coming few years to keep on offering our visitors new eco-tourism experiences. Our two major theme parks are also keeping up their momentum in enhancing attractiveness. Under its multi-year expansion plan, Hong Kong Disneyland has been rolling out a series of new attractions including, the recently transformed Castle of Magical Dreams, a new night time spectacular show "Momentous", and a new Frozen-themed area is in the making. As regards Ocean Park, its Water World, which was opened in last September, is Asia's first all-weather, year-round water park offering enticing experiences with 27 indoor and outdoor attractions.

These are just some examples of Hong Kong's tourism offerings and there are more to come to the delight of our visitors. With our belief that arts and culture, creative industries, sports, and tourism can well complement and reinforce one another's development, I am leading the newly established Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau to foster synergy and accelerate Hong Kong's development in those areas through better policy integration and co-ordination.

Of course, it would not be possible for us to revive and sustain the tourism industry without quarantine-free travel. The HKSAR Government has been closely monitoring and assessing the pandemic situation and latest trends in order to formulate an anti-pandemic strategy that achieves the best outcome with the least cost. In the past few months, different measures have already been introduced to facilitate travellers' visits to Hong Kong while keeping the pandemic at bay, such as suspending the route-specific flight suspension mechanism, refining the health declaration system, and introducing options of self-paid transport services for inbound travellers to designated quarantine hotels, etc.

We are fully aware of the community's wish to see the resumption of quarantine-free travel and to welcome friends from near and far again. And we are equally aware of the difficult situation that the core tourism sector has been facing for more than two-and-a-half years. We will continue to follow targeted strategies and formulate measures with a view to protecting the safety and health of citizens while striving to expand opportunities for the tourism sector. To this end, we have adopted a relaxed "3+4" quarantine arrangement for inbound travellers since last week, under which the compulsory quarantine in designated quarantine hotels has been shortened from seven to three days, followed by medical surveillance for four days. At the same time, we have introduced a Red and Amber Code system to the Vaccine Pass to differentiate persons with higher risk of infection, which further demonstrates our targeted efforts in achieving the greatest anti-epidemic effect with the least economic impact.

In closing, I wish the twin expos another year of resounding success and all of you the best of health and business. Thank you.