

Speech by SCST at opening session of Seatrade Cruise Asia Pacific 2023 (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, at the opening session of Seatrade Cruise Asia Pacific 2023 today (October 25):

Andrew (President of the Maritime Group for Informa Markets, Mr Andrew Williams), YK (Chairman of the Hong Kong Tourism Board, Dr Pang Yiu-kai), distinguished guests, friends from the global cruise industry, ladies and gentlemen,

A big big welcome to you all from Hong Kong – a cosmopolitan where the east meets the west, a global financial hub, a rising centre of international cultural exchange, and certainly, one of the most photogenic ports for cruise lines. I am most delighted today to celebrate the return of Seatrade Cruise Asia Pacific, after a hiatus of four years. Let me first wish you all a very successful cruise conference and a very enjoyable stay in Hong Kong.

Following the resumption of normal travel earlier this year, our tourism recovers rapidly, with visitor arrivals ballooned some 2.5 times from 4.4 million in the first quarter to 10.4 million in the third quarter. So far, we have welcomed more than 25 million visitors this year.

On the cruise front, Hong Kong was the first port in Northeast Asia to reopen for international cruise travel in January this year. For the coming winter season, our ship calls are back to pre-pandemic level, with 135 ship calls from 24 cruise lines between November this year and April next year. We are most grateful to the support cruise lines have given us.

Indeed Hong Kong has much to offer to our cruise partners and the ease to move around in Hong Kong has never failed to impress visitors. Cruise passengers are dazzled with the many choices we have for their on-shore excursions. We would continue to enhance Hong Kong's attractiveness as a cruise destination which is a major part in our tourism strategy.

We have introduced quite a number of new tourism offerings, these include two world-class museums, Asia's largest contemporary art museum M+ and the Hong Kong Palace Museum at the West Kowloon Cultural District, the upgraded Peak Tram and the crystal cable cars of Ngong Ping 360, new attractions and live performances at the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort and Ocean Park.

Meanwhile, together with our local tourism trade we are also developing attractive itineraries and products filled with cultural and heritage tourism elements, creating authentic neighbourhood experiences for visitors, revitalising rural islands by introducing art elements and island-hopping,

and enriching our green offerings by enhancing our hiking trails.

Hong Kong continues to host many world-class happenings – to name a few, the 2023 Asian Financial Forum in January, Art Basel in March, Hong Kong Rugby Sevens in April, Aviation Day 2023 organised in partnership with the International Air Transport Association in August, and the Belt and Road Summit in September.

Looking ahead, the renowned four-day Wine and Dine Festival organised by the Hong Kong Tourism Board will commence tomorrow evening at the Central Harbourfront. The Festival continues in November with Taste Around Town where more than 300 bars and restaurants will allow locals and visitors to celebrate a unique culinary journey.

And we don't stop there. In December, we will have festive celebrations for Christmas as well as the world famous New Year countdown fireworks at our iconic Victoria Harbour.

Hong Kong is also expanding its reach for potential cruise travellers in Mainland China, particularly the Greater Bay Area where there are nine cities in Guangdong, in addition to Hong Kong and Macao. They together host a total population of over 86 million with a GDP of over RMB13 trillion in 2022.

The West Kowloon high speed rail station now connects Hong Kong via the high speed rail of China with over 70 stations in Mainland China without any interchange. The high speed rail's share in bringing Mainland tourists to Hong Kong has been increasing rapidly, and lately over 20 per cent of Mainland visitors come to Hong Kong via the Rail, making it the most popular visitors' point of entry from Mainland China. Hence, there is a huge potential for "rail-cruise" to develop in Hong Kong.

Another important infrastructure we have is the 55-kilometres-long Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, which provides a new major connecting point with the western part of the Greater Bay Area.

Connectivity overseas is equally important to sustain our "fly-cruise" business. The passenger traffic of our Hong Kong International Airport, which can reach over half the world's population within a 5-hour flight, is expected to achieve full recovery next year, while the Third Runway system to be fully commissioned in the same year will significantly increase both the passenger and cargo capacities for future growth.

Speaking of infrastructure, our Kai Tak Cruise Terminal has made substantial progress over the past few years, a new Mass Transit Railway line serving the district was fully opened in 2021. The Kai Tak Sports Park, which comprises a 50 000-seat Main Stadium and other sports and recreation facilities, is expected to be completed by phases from end of next year. It will be a major venue for international events and hence new opportunities for themed-cruise itineraries. Also, a major trunk road (the Central Kowloon Route) will be completed in 2025 and it will provide a quicker connection between the Terminal and West Kowloon.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board, which drives marketing and promotion of Hong Kong's tourism worldwide, will continue to be the "one-stop shop" for supporting cruise lines' deployment in Hong Kong. We also share cruise industry's vision in driving a more sustainable operation. In tandem with the berthing of the first LNG (liquefied natural gas)-fueled cruise ship in Hong Kong next autumn, relevant Government bureaux are actively exploring the provision of LNG bunkering services for ocean-going vessels. We have also reactivated the study on installation of on-shore power system in the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal.

Last but not least, we firmly believe that cruise lines' deployment in Asia can become a greater success when there is strong partnership of ports in the region in itinerary development. I am confident that this conference will provide a great forum for cruise line executives and members of the trade in the region to share thoughts on re-ignition of cruise operations and build closer collaboration, thereby creating much more business opportunities.

I wish you all a rewarding conference and the best of business.