

LCQ5: Cultural heritage tourism

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Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (May 30):

Question:

Although the New Territories is an extensive area with rich tourism resources, most local people and visitors to Hong Kong concentrate mostly on visiting the tourism sites around the Victoria Harbour or on a few outlying islands. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it has conducted any systematic studies on the value of the cultural heritage in the New Territories, such as its built heritage, antiquities and monuments, in terms of promoting the development of tourism; if it has, of the results of the studies;
- (b) whether it has examined the reasons for the failure of the aforesaid cultural heritage to effectively attract tourists at present; and
- (c) whether it has conducted any studies on the formulation of an overall policy which will fully exploit such cultural heritage and incorporate local features in order to promote tourism development in the New Territories, thereby boosting the economy and employment in New Territories; if it has, of the results of the studies; if not, whether and when it will conduct the studies concerned?

Reply:

Madam President,

- (a) The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) conducts, from the tourism perspective, assessment of individual attractions (including cultural heritage such as historical buildings, antiquities and monuments) to ascertain their level of tourism value. The main purpose is to map out a promotion strategy to further diversify our tourism products, enrich visitors' travelling experience and attract them to extend their stay in Hong Kong. The assessment mainly includes considerations such as the uniqueness, scale and quality of the attractions; feedback from the travel trade; findings of visitor surveys conducted by the HKTb on the

tourist attractions; availability of tourist spots or attractions in the vicinity to be publicised and promoted as a cluster to achieve synergy; and other factors such as traffic and transport arrangements and supporting facilities, etc. At the same time, the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has made continuous efforts to protect and promote local cultural heritage in Hong Kong. To promote cultural heritage tourism in the New Territories, a number of heritage trails are set up, such as Heritage Trails in Ping Shan, Yuen Long and in Lung Yeuk Tau, Fanling, which promote and introduce various historic buildings for public visits (including tourists). AMO also provides docent services to schools and community organisations so as to improve the public and students' understanding of historic monuments. In April this year, AMO, with the assistance of the Tang Clan in Ping Shan, opened the Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery cum Heritage Trail Visitors Centre introducing traditional culture and customs in the New Territories. On the archaeological aspect, AMO conducted consultancy studies on the archaeological sites at Wiu Yun and Tung Peng Chau to study the ways to utilise the cultural heritage resource there and to promote cultural education and tourism.

(b) Some of our heritage, apart from bringing out the unique historical and cultural background of Hong Kong, is also conducive to diversification of our tourism facilities and attractions. Both overseas visitors, especially those from the long-haul markets, and local residents have interest in heritage and cultural tourism. For example, there were about 190,000 and 30,000 visitors to Ping Shan Heritage Trail and Lung Yuek Tau Heritage Trail last year respectively. Besides, there are about 20,000 visitors to the newly opened Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery cum Heritage Trail Visitors Centre from its opening in mid April 2007. However, there are individual spots which may not be able to attract visitors. This is possibly because of their uniqueness, scale and quality fall short of visitors' expectation, or a result of their remote geographical location as well as the lack of other tourist attractions in the vicinity.

(c) The Government has been striving to develop a wide range of tourist attractions so as to enhance Hong Kong's appeal as a premier destination for visitors. Some of our heritage, apart from bringing out the unique historical and cultural background of Hong Kong, is also conducive to further development of heritage tours and diversification of our tourism products. Various government departments and other organisations, including AMO, Tourism Commission, HKTb and District Councils, always work closely together to study and provide of tourist-related facilities such as directional signs. The HKTb has been promoting heritage tourism to visitors through various channels including its website, information boards, publications and guided tours.

The new tourism products developed by the HKTb in recent years have included heritage-themed itineraries such as the Northeast New Territories island-hopping tour organised under the Nature Kaleidoscope programme. The tour intends to attract visitors to areas like Lai Chi Wo, Kat O and Tap Mun, etc. which are less frequently visited by tourists, thereby enabling them to know more about the culture of fishing villages and the local architecture. In addition, to facilitate visitors to explore systematically the depth and diversity of Hong Kong's culture and history, the HKTb has published a guidebook "Discover Hong Kong by Rail" which aims to promote the heritage itineraries along the Kowloon-Canton Railway (KCR) lines and encourage visitors to take the KCR to explore Hong Kong's local culture, history and traditions. The guidebook highlights the attractions and heritage along the West Rail, East Rail and Ma On Shan Rail, and enables visitors to experience Hong Kong's unique culture and lifestyle through maps of easy-to-follow itineraries. The major attractions include the Che Kung Temple, Tsang Tai Uk clan walled village and Hong Kong Heritage Museum in Sha Tin; the Tai Po Market and Hong Kong Railway Museum in Tai Po; the Lung Yeuk Tau Heritage Trail linking various traditional walled villages in Fanling; and the Ping Shan Heritage Trail in Yuen Long. To make visitors' journeys more enjoyable and interesting, the guidebook contains the history or custom of several sites, such as the legend of Amah Rock in Sha Tin, the history of imperial marriages in Fanling etc. It also promotes the local snacks and traditional treats like Tai Po's sturdy noodles made by bamboo sticks and Yuen Long's "Wife Cake" etc.

In addition, we will cluster the newly opened tourism facilities with the heritage sites nearby for promotion to achieve synergy of the new and old attractions. For example, after the opening of the Hong Kong Wetland Park, the Government, the Yuen Long District Council and the HKTb jointly promote the Park and Yuen Long's attractions including Kam Tin Tree House, Ping Shan Heritage Trail and Lau Fau Shan, etc. under the themes of "cultural tourism" and "gourmet itinerary". The attraction operators, the HKTb and local organisations have also clustered Ngong Ping 360, the Big Buddha, the Po Lin Monastery, the Wisdom Path, Tai O fish villages and temples together to develop a new itinerary so as to promote culture and heritage tourism in the district.

The travel trade has from time to time conveyed to the HKTb the market's feedback on demand for heritage tourism. According to the travel trade, overseas visitors, especially those from the long-haul markets, have great interest in Hong Kong's cultural heritage including historical buildings, antiquities, monuments, etc. These visitors consider that heritage tourism could help them explore the depth and diversity of Hong Kong's history and traditions, thereby enriching their travelling experience. In view of the growing interest in heritage tourism, the Government has been working with the Travel Industry Council of

Hong Kong and the travel trade to provide specialist training for tourist guides under the Government-aided Skills Upgrading Scheme.

In collaboration with the HKTb, the Government will continue to develop and promote the heritage attractions in Hong Kong, including enhancing the itineraries and highlighting our unique historical and cultural background. This will help us promote the diversity of Hong Kong's tourism and strengthen our position as the most popular tourist city in Asia, thereby further boosting Hong Kong's tourism and local economy.

Ends/Wednesday, May 30, 2007

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