

Chapter 15

Travel and Tourism

Hong Kong's tourism industry had a great year in 2011, with a record of almost 42 million visitors. New attractions at Ocean Park and Hong Kong Disneyland were opened, which further enriched the city's tourism portfolio. The Government also announced that an independent statutory body be established to regulate the tourism industry.

Hong Kong's tourism industry performed particularly well in 2011, registering a record high of 41.92 million visitor arrivals, or 16.4 per cent over 2010.

The Mainland continued to be the largest source of visitors. A total of 28.1 million people from the Mainland visited Hong Kong in 2011, or 23.9 per cent up on 2010. There was also a notable rise in the number of visitors from countries farther away like Russia (+51.5%) and South America (+17.7%) and, nearer home, South Korea (+14.6%).

Major Tourism Developments

While work on boosting family and business travels continued, special effort was made to promote MICE (Meetings, Incentive travels, Conventions and Exhibitions), cruise tourism, mega events and green tourism.

MICE

Hong Kong is a premier MICE destination, offering world-class convention and exhibition facilities and a wide range of tourist attractions. The Government has earmarked \$150 million for promoting MICE tourism over five years, an initiative carried out by the 'Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong', a dedicated office, established under the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) in 2008.

There were 1.56 million overnight MICE visitors to Hong Kong in 2011, a rise of 9.3 per cent over 2010. Hong Kong was selected as the 'Best Business City in the World' by a leading MICE journal for three consecutive years since 2009. Hong Kong hosts some of the world's largest trade fairs, such as the Hong Kong Electronics Fair (Autumn Edition), the Hong Kong Gifts and Premium Fair, and the Hong Kong Watch and Clock Fair.

Other major MICE events held in Hong Kong during the year included CardioRhythm, Combined Scientific Meeting, 28th International Conference of ISQUA, Winefuture Conference, Asian Aerospace, CARTES in Asia, Vitafoods Asia, SIGGRAPH Asia and Mobile Asia Congress.

Also in 2011, Hong Kong won the hosting rights for a number of large-scale MICE events, including the Asian Attractions Expo 2012, Sixth Asia Pacific Heart Rhythm Society Scientific Session (APHRs) cum CardioRhythm in 2013, International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society 2014 and Frozen Food Asia 2012.

Cruise Tourism

The new cruise terminal project at Kai Tak is progressing at full swing. Construction of the terminal began in November 2009, and the terminal building and the first berth are expected to commence operation in mid-2013. The second berth is expected to be completed in 2014.

The HKTb continues to promote Hong Kong as a 'must' cruise destination in the region.

Mega Events

Mega events enrich the travel experience of visitors and add colour and vibrancy to the city. Every year, a number of popular and established events are held in Hong Kong, such as the Rugby Sevens and Hong Kong Marathon. To further promote Hong Kong as an events capital of Asia, the Government set up a \$100 million 'Mega Events Fund' in May 2009 to sponsor non-profit-making organisations to stage large-scale arts, cultural and sports events in the following three years. Since its establishment, a total of 16 events have received funding from it.

In addition, the HKTb organised a number of mega events to attract visitors to the city. These include the annual International Chinese New Year Parade in February, the Cultural Celebrations featuring four traditional Chinese festivals in May, the Hong Kong Summer Spectacular between June and August, under which the Dragon Boat Carnival was held in June, the Hong Kong Mid-Autumn Festival in September, the Halloween Treats in October, the Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival from October 27 to 30, which introduced the Wine and Dine Month in November, and the Hong Kong WinterFest and the New Year Countdown Celebrations in December.

Green Tourism

In November, the HKTb organised the 'Great Outdoors Hong Kong!' programme for the third year, which takes visitors on hikes along different sections of the MacLehose Trail, Hong Kong's longest hiking track as well as hiking trails in other districts. Guided tours are provided free of charge and participants are given a guidebook containing pictures and information of the scenic spots along these trails, the landscapes of the Hong Kong Global Geopark of China, and the outlying islands.

Tourism Infrastructure, Facilities and Products

Hong Kong offers a wide range of attractions to visitors. There is something for everyone — the sightseer, the food lover, the shopper, the family, the businessman, the leisurely traveller, the young and the old.

The most popular spot for sightseers is the Peak, which provides a panoramic view of Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula and the magnificent Victoria Harbour.

Other popular places are the theme parks, temples, heritage sites, natural landscapes, and the numerous shops that have earned Hong Kong the reputation as a 'shoppers' paradise'.

Ocean Park

The redevelopment of Ocean Park is near completion. The Aqua City (featuring one of Asia's largest aquariums), Rainforest (with a man-made habitat of more than 70 tropical animals), and Thrill Mountain (with exciting new rides) were opened in 2011. The last new theme zone, the Polar Adventure, is scheduled to open in mid-2012.

A Symphony of Lights

Another attraction that captivates visitors is the nightly spectacle 'A Symphony of Lights', which the Guinness World Records describes as the world's 'largest permanent light and sound show'. It features interactive lights beamed with music from 44 buildings on both sides of the harbour, revealing a spectacular view of Victoria Harbour at night.

Hong Kong Disneyland

Hong Kong Disneyland has received over 31 million visitors since it opened in September 2005, and has won over 190 awards for being one of the most popular and the best themed resorts in Asia.

Hong Kong Disneyland's expansion, comprising three new themed areas, is proceeding as planned. The first new themed area, Toy Story Land, opened in November 2011. Grizzly Gulch will open in 2012 and Mystic Point in 2013 respectively.

Wetland Park

The Hong Kong Wetland Park is a world-class eco-tourism facility, and is home to a wide assortment of wildlife, including birds, dragonflies, amphibians, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and fish. The park comprises 60 hectares of re-created wetland, exhibition galleries, a visitor centre, a theatre and other facilities, all of which underline the importance of wetland to biodiversity, civilisation and conservation.

Ngong Ping 360

The Ngong Ping 360 cable car takes visitors on a scenic 25-minute ride above sea and land between Tung Chung and the top of Lantau Island, where a Buddhist-themed village is located. It also links up other famous tourist attractions

such as the Tian Tan Buddha, commonly known as the 'Big Buddha', the Po Lin Monastery, the Ngong Ping Piazza, the Wisdom Path, the quaint fishing village of Tai O and enticing beaches on the southern part of the island.

Hong Kong Tourism Board

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is a statutory Government subvented organisation, responsible for marketing and promoting Hong Kong around the world as a preferred travel destination. It comprises 20 members from various tourism-related sectors and community leaders. It works from a head office in Hong Kong and has 16 offices around the world as well as representatives in five source markets.

Information Network

The HKTB has four visitor service centres in Hong Kong, on the Peak, in Tsim Sha Tsui, at the Hong Kong International Airport and the Lo Wu boundary crossing.

A 'Hong Kong Pals Programme', launched in 2009 for visitors to explore Hong Kong in-depth, continues to be popular.

The HKTB website www.discoverhongkong.com receives more than 4.5 million visits per month and offers information in 20 languages. The HKTB also promotes Hong Kong's many attractions and mega events through mobile phones and social networking channels.

Marketing

The HKTB spearheads promotional programmes in major tourist source markets. It started using 'Hong Kong • Asia's World City' as its marketing theme in 2011 to highlight Hong Kong's core attributes: vibrancy, unique fusion of East and West, cosmopolitan lifestyle and trend-setting edge.

Service Quality

Quality Tourism Services

The HKTB's Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme for promoting quality services at shops, restaurants, visitor accommodation facilities and hair salons is widely supported by the industry and has encouraged many in the industry to improve their services. At the end of 2011, some 1 300 local establishments with over 7 500 outlets, had earned QTS accreditation.

Honest and Quality Tourism

The Government works closely with the tourism industry and related organisations to promote honest and quality tourism. After amending the Trade Descriptions Ordinance in 2008 to combat false description of goods and other deceptive trade measures, the Hong Kong Police Force and the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department stepped up inspection and actions against offenders to protect consumers' rights. The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) inspects tour operations and registered shops regularly. It also operates a 'Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Inbound Tour Group Shoppers'. Under the Scheme,

Mainland tour group visitors unhappy with their purchases may return the goods and seek refund within 180 days of purchase, provided the goods are in proper condition.

The Government worked with the TIC to introduce 10 measures in February 2011 to tighten the arrangements for receiving Mainland tour groups in Hong Kong. The measures include key points that must be incorporated in the contract between Mainland travel agents, organising group tours, and the Hong Kong travel agents receiving the groups, promulgated jointly with the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA). A note was also disseminated through the CNTA to raise Mainland tourists' awareness of their consumer rights in Hong Kong.

The HKTB also introduced in 2006 a 'Quality & Honest Hong Kong Tours' arrangement in the Mainland that is guaranteed free of compulsory self-paid activities, guided shopping and imposition of surcharges. These tours were offered at 32 counters in 27 Mainland cities and 52 online travel portals at the end of 2011.

Hospitality initiatives

Hospitality is essential to sustaining tourism. The Government runs a 'Hong Kong Young Ambassador Scheme' to train young people to be polite and helpful to visitors and to develop a strong hospitality culture in schools and in the community. More than 2 200 young people have joined the programme so far and have rendered more than 180 000 hours of ambassadorial service.

Easier Entry for Visitors

Hong Kong is one of the world's most immigration-friendly cities. Travellers from some 170 countries and territories enjoy visa-free access to the city for stays of between seven and 180 days.

The Individual Visit Scheme (IVS), introduced by the Mainland, permits citizens of 49 designated Mainland cities to visit Hong Kong on their own instead of in tour groups. More than 18.34 million Mainlanders visited Hong Kong under the scheme in 2011, representing about 65 per cent of all Mainland arrivals.

The one-year multiple-entry IVS endorsement for Shenzhen permanent residents to visit Hong Kong are being well received. A total of 6.17 million Shenzhen residents visited Hong Kong using this endorsement in 2011.

Protection of Travellers

Travel agents must obtain a licence from the Government to carry out travel business as stipulated in the Travel Agents Ordinance. They are required to be a member of the TIC. The TIC investigates complaints against travel agents and takes disciplinary actions against agents who do not observe its rules. There were 1 606 licensed travel agents at the end of 2011.

A Travel Industry Compensation Fund (TICF) provides ex gratia payments of up to 90 per cent of the loss of tour fares to outbound travellers in the event of a

travel agent default. Two such cases occurred in 2011, and ex gratia payments amounting to \$276,000 were paid to 566 affected travellers.

The TICF also provides emergency financial assistance to outbound travellers injured, or killed, in accidents in the course of an activity arranged by a travel agent.

Travel agents have to assign accredited tourist guides to receive inbound visitors. Hong Kong had 6 278 accredited tourist guides at the end of 2011.

Review of the Operation and Regulatory Framework of the Tourism Sector

To ensure the sustainable and healthy development of the tourism sector, the Government launched a 10-week (April 29 to July 15, 2011) public consultation on a review of the tourism sector's operation and regulatory framework. In particular, the Government sought the views of both the general public and the trade on the options for reforming the tourism sector's regulatory framework, the licensing system for travel agents and the regulations governing tourist guides. A total of 1 249 written submissions were received.

After considering the views collected, the Government announced in December 2011 the setting up of an independent statutory body as the overall regulatory body. The Government will continue to listen to the views of the public and the trade in ironing out the details of the arrangements made under the new regulatory regime.

Tourism Co-operation

Mainland

The Tourism Commission maintains close liaison with the Mainland tourism authorities, and meetings were held regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest, such as regulation of the trade, joint promotions and healthy development of the tourism industry.

Macao

In May, Hong Kong and Macao held their third annual meeting to discuss tourism matters such as joint efforts in developing and promoting 'multi-destination' itineraries.

CEPA

In December, a further tourism liberalisation measure was introduced under Supplement VIII to the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA). It optimises the current '144-hour facilitation visa' policy in Guangdong by relaxing the requirement for foreign visitor group tours to pre-register the outbound control points when they travel to Guangdong through Hong Kong. The relevant Mainland authorities will review the requirement regarding tour size at an appropriate juncture.

Co-operation with other countries and international tourism organisations

Hong Kong is a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Tourism Working Group (APEC TWG), Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and an Associate member of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

In 2011, Hong Kong attended APEC TWG meeting in San Francisco, the US, the 19th Session of the UNWTO General Assembly held in Gyeongju, Korea. The HKTB also attended the PATA Executive Board and PATA Board Meeting in New Delhi.

In 2011, Hong Kong signed a supplemental co-operation agreement with Bordeaux to promote wine-related tourism and to build a closer relationship with the French province.

Websites

Tourism Commission: www.tourism.gov.hk

Hong Kong Tourism Board: www.discoverhongkong.com

Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong: www.mehongkong.com