

Chapter 15

Travel and Tourism

Hong Kong continues to be a magnet to visitors from around the world, with its many attractions appealing to a wide range of interests. Whether sampling Hong Kong's many restaurants and shops, visiting museums and galleries, hiking in a country park, or attending a major sporting or cultural event, there is something for every visitor to enjoy.

Hong Kong registered a record high of 48.62 million visitor arrivals in 2012, an increase of 16 per cent over 2011. Mainland visitors reached 34.91 million in 2012 and continued to be the largest source of visitors to Hong Kong, 24.2 per cent up over 2011. There was also a notable rise in the number of visitors from countries farther away like Russia (plus 41.8 per cent) and, nearer home, the Philippines (plus 7.6 per cent) and South Korea (plus 5.6 per cent).

Major Tourism Developments

While work on boosting family and business travels continued, special efforts were made to promote MICE ('Meetings, Incentives, 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 'Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong' (MEHK), a dedicated office established under the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), is tasked to promote MICE tourism for Hong Kong.

There were 1.61 million overnight MICE visitors to Hong Kong in 2012, a rise of 2.8 per cent over 2011. Hong Kong was selected as the 'Best Business City in the World' by a leading MICE journal for the fourth consecutive year. Hong Kong hosts some of the world's largest trade fairs, such as the Hong Kong Electronics Fair, the Hong Kong Jewellery and Gem Fair, the Hong Kong Gifts and Premium Fair, and the Hong Kong Watch and Clock Fair.

Major conventions and exhibitions held in Hong Kong during the year included NuSkin Regional Convention, FDI Annual World Dental Congress, Vinexpo Asia-Pacific, Asia Contemporary Art Show, Asian Attraction Expo, JCI Asia-Pacific Conference, Hong Kong

International Art Fair and International Cotton Association Trade Conference. Also in 2012, Hong Kong won the right to host a number of large-scale MICE events, including USANA Asia-Pacific Convention 2013, SIGGRAPH Asia 2013, China New Energy Vehicle Show 2013, E-Commerce 2013, Wikimania 2013, 38th Asia-Pacific Dental Congress 2016, 2017 CFA Institute Annual Conference, 33rd Asia-Pacific Academy of Ophthalmology Congress 2018 and Asia-Pacific Congress on Clinical Microbiology and Infection 2018.

Cruise Tourism

Construction of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal continues, and the terminal building and the first berth are expected to commence operation in mid-2013, with the second berth due for completion in 2014. In March, Worldwide Cruise Terminals Consortium (a joint venture of Worldwide Flight Services, Royal Caribbean Cruises Limited and Neo Crown Limited) was appointed the operator of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal.

The Central People's Government's announcement in June 2012 that Mainland tour groups taking cruises from Hong Kong to Taiwan can also visit Japan or Korea on the same cruise will enable cruise operators to offer more attractive itineraries.

Mega Events

In recognition of the fact that large-scale events enrich visitors' travel experience and add colour and vibrancy to the city, the Government established the Mega Events Fund (MEF) in 2009 to encourage the staging of such events in Hong Kong. In April, the Legislative Council's Finance Committee approved \$150 million to fund the MEF for a further five years to attract more mega events to Hong Kong. Since its establishment, the MEF has provided funds to 21 events.

In 2012, the HKTB organised a number of mega events to attract visitors to the city, including the International Chinese New Year Parade; the 8th International Dragon Boat Federation Club Crew World Championships, which brought in more than 5,000 athletes from some 180 club crews based in 21 countries and regions; the Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival; the Hong Kong WinterFest; and the New Year Countdown Celebrations.

Green Tourism

In November, the HKTB organised the 'Great Outdoors Hong Kong!' programme for the fourth year, which took visitors on a number of Hong Kong's hiking trails. Guided tours are provided free of charge and participants are given a guidebook to these trails, 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 attractions include the theme parks, temples, heritage sites, natural

landscape, and the numerous shops that have earned Hong Kong the reputation as a 'shoppers' paradise'.

Ocean Park

Ocean Park is a world-class marine themed park featuring more than 70 attractions. Its Master Redevelopment Plan was completed when the latest attraction, Polar Adventure, opened in July. In November, the park won the Applause Award, the highest honour in the theme park industry. Future plans include the re-tender of the Ocean Hotel and the development of a new integrated theme zone in the Tai Shue Wan area with the main focus on an all-weather indoor cum outdoor water park.

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 45 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 38 million visitors since it opened in September 2005, and has won over 210 awards as one of the most popular and best themed resorts in Asia. A new themed area, Grizzly Gulch, opened in July 2012 and another, Mystic Point, is scheduled to open in 2013, completing the expansion at this stage.

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 and the Wisdom Path.

Hong Kong Tourism Board

The 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. In addition to its Hong Kong head office, it has 16 offices overseas and representatives in six 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 at the Lo Wu boundary crossing.

A 'Hong Kong Pals Programme', launched in 2009 for local residents to share their recommendations with visitors, continues to be popular.

The HKTB website www.discoverhongkong.com offers travel information in 21 versions and 14 languages. In 2012, the HKTB rolled out a new version of the website, with new features to facilitate visitors' pre-trip planning and to integrate better with social media platforms. The HKTB also promotes Hong Kong's many attractions and events through mobile applications and online campaigns via social networking sites.

Marketing

The HKTB spearheads promotional programmes in major tourist source markets. It continued using 'Hong Kong – Asia's World City' as its marketing theme in 2012 to highlight Hong Kong's vibrancy, fusion of East and West, cosmopolitan lifestyle and the wide variety of tourist attractions and experiences.

Service Quality

Honest and Good Quality Tourist Services

The Government works closely with the tourism industry and related organisations to promote honest and good quality services for tourists. The Hong Kong Police Force and the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department carry out inspections and enforcement action to protect consumers' rights. In July, amendments to the Trade Descriptions Ordinance were enacted, targeting common unfair trade practices. The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) inspects tour operations and registered shops regularly. It also operates a 'Refund Protection Scheme for Registered Shops' which allows Mainland tour group visitors unhappy with their purchases to return the goods and seek a 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's 'Quality & Honest Hong Kong Tours' from the Mainland are guaranteed free of compulsory self-paid activities, guided shopping and any surcharges. These tours were offered in 27 Mainland cities at the end of 2012.

The HKTB's Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme to promote good quality services at shops, restaurants, visitor accommodation facilities and hair salons is widely supported and by the end of 2012 some 1,320 local establishments with over 7,800 outlets had earned QTS accreditation.

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 2,400 young people have joined the programme so far, rendering more than 200,000 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 Mainland's Individual Visit Scheme (IVS) permits citizens of 49 designated Mainland cities to visit Hong Kong on their own instead of in tour groups. More than 23 million Mainlanders visited Hong Kong under the scheme in 2012, representing about 66 per cent of all Mainland arrivals. In 2012, 9.83 million Shenzhen residents visited Hong Kong using the one-year multiple-entry IVS endorsement for Shenzhen permanent residents.

Protection of Travellers

Travel agents must obtain a licence from the Government and be members of the TIC to carry out travel business. The TIC investigates complaints against travel agents and takes disciplinary action against agents who do not observe its rules. There were 1,671 licensed travel agents at the end of 2012.

The 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. In 2012, \$33,000 was paid to 82 travellers affected by three cases of default in the previous two years. 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. Ex gratia payments amounting to \$77,000 were made in 2012 for two accidents in 2011.

Travel agents have to assign accredited tourist guides to receive inbound visitors. There were 6,748 accredited tourist guides in Hong Kong at the end of 2012.

New Regulatory Framework for the Tourism Sector

Following a review of the tourism sector's regulatory framework in 2011, the Government has decided to set up an independent statutory body to regulate travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts. The Government has commenced the drafting of the new legislation and other relevant work for the establishment of the statutory body. It is expected that the draft legislation could be introduced into the Legislative Council around mid-2014.

Tourism Co-operation

Mainland

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

In June, further tourism liberalisation measures were introduced under Supplement IX to the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA). Supplement IX allows Hong Kong travel agents established on a wholly-owned or joint venture basis in the Mainland to apply to operate group tours to Hong Kong and Macao for Mainland residents. It also allows one qualified Mainland-Hong Kong joint venture travel agent to operate outbound group tours for Mainland residents on a pilot basis to destinations beyond Hong Kong and Macao (excluding Taiwan).

Macao

Hong Kong and Macao have maintained close co-operation in developing and promoting 'multi-destination' itineraries which include both places as well as other neighbouring cities.

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 2012, Hong Kong attended the APEC Tourism Ministerial Meeting in Khabarovsk, Russia, the APEC TWG meeting in Taiwan, and the Joint Meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific and the UNWTO Commission for South Asia in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The HKTB attended the meetings of the PATA Executive Board and PATA Board held in Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Hong Kong.

In 2012, Hong Kong and Germany signed a declaration of intent to co-operate in wine-related businesses, including wine-related tourism.

Websites

Tourism Commission: www.tourism.gov.hk

Hong Kong Tourism Board: www.discoverhongkong.com

Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong: www.mehongkong.com