

Travel and Tourism

The tourism sector experienced a challenging year in 2015, with total visitor arrivals declining after a decade of rapid growth. In response to this, the Hong Kong Tourism Board received more than \$90 million of additional government funding to strengthen the promotion of the city as a premier destination.

Hong Kong welcomed 59.3 million visitors in 2015, slightly below the 60.8 million the year before. The slowdown as compared with previous years was mainly due to the currency depreciations of neighbouring destinations and their relaxation of visa policies for Mainland visitors, which enhanced their tourism appeal. The Mainland continued to be Hong Kong's largest source of visitors, representing around 77 per cent of total visitor arrivals.

Major Tourism Developments

While work on boosting family and business travels continued, the city made special efforts 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. It has a dedicated office, the Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong, under the Tourism Board to promote MICE tourism. The city hosts some of the world's largest trade fairs, such as the Hong Kong Electronics Fair, Hong Kong Jewellery and Gem Fair, Hong Kong Gifts and Premium Fair, and Hong Kong Watch and Clock Fair.

In 2015, the city received 1.72 million overnight MICE visitors, a decline of 5.2 per cent over 2014. It was once again selected as the 'Best Business City in the World' by a leading MICE journal.

Major conventions and exhibitions held during the year included Watches & Wonders Asia Haute Horlogerie 2015, Art Basel, Worlddidac Asia Hong Kong 2015, HxGN Live Asia 2015, UFI Open Seminar in Asia 2015, 6th World Glaucoma Congress 2015, Spine Summit Asia Pacific – Hong Kong 2015, Rise Conference 2015, Asian Attractions Expo 2015 and IFX Expo Asia 2015. Major events coming up in the next two years include IFX Expo Asia 2016, the 16th World

Congress of Anaesthesiologists 2016, Million Dollar Round Table Experience and Global Conference 2016, 26th International Congress of the Transplantation Society 2016, 55th Orient and Southeast Asian Lions Forum 2016, 38th Asia Pacific Dental Congress 2016, World Sustainable Built Environment 2017, and 25th Asian and Oceanic Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology 2017.

Cruise Tourism

The Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, built on the site of the former Kai Tak airport runway and commissioned in June 2013, is capable of accommodating two cruise ships with a gross tonnage of up to 220,000 tons each. In 2015, the terminal handled 56 ship calls involving a total of 75 days. Total passenger throughput exceeded 260,000. The number of ship calls is expected to continue to increase in the coming years.

The board will continue to promote regional co-operation of the cruise industry with neighbouring ports through the Asia Cruise Fund, launched in April 2014. The fund provides incentives for cruise lines to include ports in the region, including Hong Kong, in their itineraries.

Mega Events

Hong Kong recognises that large-scale events enrich visitors' travel experience and add colour and vibrancy to the city. The government's Mega Events Fund has supported 27 events since being established in 2009 to encourage the staging of such events. In April 2012, the Legislative Council's Finance Committee approved \$150 million to extend the fund's operation for a further five years to attract more mega events.

Mega events organised by the board in 2015 included the International Chinese New Year Parade, Hong Kong Dragon Boat Carnival, Hong Kong Pulse 3D Light Show, the debut Hong Kong Cyclothon, Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival, Hong Kong WinterFest and New Year countdown celebrations.

Green Tourism

The board's Great Outdoors Hong Kong campaign promotes the Hong Kong Global Geopark of China, the natural scenery of outlying islands, hiking trails and other green attractions. These attractions continued to be showcased in 2015 via various channels, including the board's official website, guidebooks, mobile applications, social media platforms, visitor centres and a hotline.

Tourism Infrastructure, Facilities and Products

Hong Kong has something for everyone – the sightseer, the food lover, the shopper, the family, the businessman, the leisure traveller, the young and the old. Topping the popularity list of sightseeing spots is The Peak, which provides a panoramic view of Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula and Victoria Harbour. Other attractions include the theme parks, temples, heritage sites, natural landscape, and the many shops that have earned Hong Kong the reputation as a shoppers' paradise. Accommodation options are also aplenty, ranging from

licensed guesthouses and youth hostels to luxury hotels. As at the end of 2015, 253 hotels and 1,356 licensed guesthouses were providing more than 73,800 and 11,700 rooms, respectively.

Ocean Park

Ocean Park is a world-class marine theme park featuring more than 80 attractions. Development projects under way include its first hotel, Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel, and an all-weather indoor cum outdoor waterpark at Tai Shue Wan, scheduled for completion by 2017 and 2018, respectively. Besides, the park is also conducting a tender exercise for the development of its second hotel.

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'. Interactive lights are beamed with music from 47 buildings on both sides of the harbour, revealing a spectacular view of Victoria Harbour at night.

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort has received more than 58 million visitors since it opened in September 2005, and has won over 460 awards as one of the most popular and best themed resorts in Asia. The resort launched its 10th anniversary celebration in 2015 and is now constructing a new area based on Marvel's *Iron Man* franchise and a hotel with the spirit of exploration as its theme. These are expected to be completed in 2016 and 2017, respectively.

Wetland Park

The Hong Kong Wetland Park, a world-class eco-tourism facility, is home to a wide assortment of wildlife, including birds, dragonflies, amphibians, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and fish. The park comprises 60 hectares of recreated 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 the Buddhist-themed Ngong Ping Village is located. Thematic attractions offered at the village include Stage 360, Motion 360 and Walking with Buddha. The Tian Tan Buddha, commonly known as the Big Buddha, the Po Lin Monastery, the Ngong Ping Piazza and the Wisdom Path are other famous attractions in the area.

In February 2015, US website CNN.com named Ngong Ping 360 among '10 of the world's most amazing cable car experiences'.

Hong Kong Tourism Board

The board is a statutory government-subsidised 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, the board has 15 offices worldwide and representatives in six source markets.

Information Network

There are five visitor centres locally: on The Peak, in Tsim Sha Tsui, at the Hong Kong International Airport, at the Lo Wu boundary crossing and (during ship calls) at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal.

Visitors can check out travel recommendations from locals through the Hong Kong Pals Programme, launched in 2009. Apart from this, travel information is available on the board's website in 22 versions and 15 languages. In 2015, the website was improved further to facilitate visitors' pre-trip planning and ease of getting travel information while in Hong Kong, and to integrate better with social media platforms. The board also promotes the city's many attractions and events through mobile applications and online campaigns via social networking sites.

Marketing

The board spearheads the promotion of Hong Kong in major tourist source markets and strives to offer the best experiences for visitors. It adopts 'Hong Kong • Asia's World City' as a destination brand to highlight Hong Kong's dynamism, cosmopolitan lifestyle and cultural diversity. Visitors can experience a vibrant living culture with a variety of attractions and a blend of East and West.

Service Quality

Honest and Good Quality Tourist Services

The government works closely with the tourism industry and related organisations to promote honest and quality services for tourists. The Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong inspects tour operations and registered shops regularly. It also operates a Refund Protection Scheme for Registered Shops, which allows Mainland tour group members who are unhappy with their purchases to return the goods and seek refunds within 180 days of purchase, provided the goods are in proper condition.

The government works with the council to enhance consumer protection and to ensure the healthy development and operation of the tourism market. Laws such as the Trade Descriptions Ordinance are in place to prohibit unfair trade practices and protect the legitimate interests of consumers, both visitors and local residents alike.

The board's Quality Tourism Services Scheme encourages shops, restaurants and visitor accommodation facilities to offer good services. It enjoys broad support; by the end of 2015, some 1,260 local establishments with about 8,240 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 3,100 young people have joined the programme so far, rendering more than 280,000 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 for stays of between seven and 180 days.

The Mainland's Individual Visit Scheme permits residents of 49 designated Mainland cities to visit Hong Kong on their own instead of in tour groups. About 28 million Mainlanders visited Hong Kong under the scheme in 2015, representing about 61 per cent of all Mainland arrivals. Upon the Hong Kong government's request, the central government on 13 April announced replacing the multiple-entry Individual Visit Endorsements for permanent residents of Shenzhen with 'one trip per week' Individual Visit Endorsements with immediate effect. In 2015, about 12.58 million Shenzhen residents visited Hong Kong using their one-year multiple-entry permits or the new 'one trip per week' permits.

Protection of Travellers

Travel agents must obtain a government licence and be Travel Industry Council members to carry out travel business. The council investigates complaints and takes disciplinary action against travel agents who do not observe its rules. There were 1,746 licensed travel agents at the end of 2015.

The Travel Industry Compensation Fund 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. An ex gratia payment of \$2,700 was paid to one traveller affected by a default case in 2013. The fund also provides emergency financial help to outbound travellers injured or killed in accidents in the course of an activity arranged by a travel agent. Ex gratia payments totalling close to \$160,000 were made in 2015 for three accidents that happened in 2011, 2013 and 2015. Travellers must submit their applications within 24 months from the date of loss arising from a travel agent default or an outbound accident, and the review starts once all necessary documents are produced.

Travel agents must assign accredited tourist guides to receive inbound visitors. Hong Kong had 6,938 accredited tourist guides at the end of 2015.

New Regulatory Framework

Following a review of the regulatory framework in 2011, the government decided to set up an independent statutory body, the Travel Industry Authority, to regulate travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts. The government is pressing ahead with the drafting of new legislation for the early establishment of the new body and implementation of the new framework.

Tourism Co-operation

Mainland

The government maintains close liaison with Mainland tourism authorities and holds meetings whenever necessary to discuss matters of mutual interest, such as the regulation of the trade, joint promotions and development of the industry.

Macao

Hong Kong and Macao maintain 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 and the Pacific Asia Travel Association, and an associate member of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation.

Websites

Hong Kong Tourism Board: www.discoverhongkong.com

Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong: www.mehongkong.com

Tourism Commission: www.tourism.gov.hk