

Travel and Tourism

Due to factors including the escalation of the China-US trade conflict and, since June, the social unrest in Hong Kong, the tourism sector of Hong Kong was hit hard in 2019, with overall visitor arrivals reversing to a notable drop of 14 per cent.

Overall visitor arrivals grew strongly by 13.9 per cent year on year in the first half of 2019, followed by a notable drop of 39.1 per cent in the second half, reflecting the impact of the China-US trade conflict and, since June, the social unrest in Hong Kong. In 2019 as a whole, the number of visitors decreased 14.2 per cent to 55.91 million, among whom Mainland visitor numbers declined 14.2 per cent to 43.77 million.

Despite the industry downturn, the government is pressing ahead with the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry, promulgated in 2017. The blueprint sets forth the government's vision to develop Hong Kong into a world-class premier tourism destination and its mission to ensure the balanced, healthy and sustainable development of the industry, as well as four development strategies supported by short, medium and long-term initiatives.

New Regulatory Regime

During the year, the Legislative Council passed the Travel Industry Ordinance (Commencement) Notice 2019, after which the Chief Executive made appointments to the Travel Industry Authority, a new statutory body responsible primarily for the licensing and regulation of travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts. The government expects that the authority, upon establishment, will take about two years to complete all preparations before taking over the licensing and trade regulatory functions of the Travel Agents Registry and the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong respectively for the full implementation of the new regulatory regime.

Major Tourism Developments

The city makes special efforts to promote MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions), cruise tourism, mega events and green tourism, while boosting family and business travel.

MICE

Hong Kong is a premier MICE destination, offering world-class convention and exhibition facilities and a diversified range of tourist attractions. It 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. Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong is an office working under the Hong Kong Tourism Board to promote MICE tourism.

Overnight MICE visitors decreased 14.2 per cent to 1.69 million in 2019, affected by the China-US trade conflict and the social incidents locally. Major conventions and exhibitions held in 2019 included the International Baccalaureate Global Conference; Airports Council International Asia-Pacific/World Annual General Assembly, Conference and Exhibition; Cloud Expo Asia, Hong Kong; Data Centre World, Hong Kong; Congress of the Asia Pacific Initiative on Reproduction; Asia Pacific Life Insurance Congress; Asia Funeral and Cemetery Expo and Conference; International Exhibition of Food and Drink, Hotel, Restaurant and Foodservice Equipment, Supplies and Service; Rise Conference; Forbes Under 30 Summit Asia; Digital Media Asia; and Hong Kong FinTech Week.

Cruise Tourism

The Kai Tak Cruise Terminal can simultaneously accommodate two mega cruise ships with a gross tonnage of up to 220,000 tons each. In 2019, the terminal handled 175 ship calls involving 162 calendar days. Total passenger throughput exceeded 840,000.

The government and the board promote regional cooperation of the cruise industry through the Asia Cruise Cooperation, which leverages the synergy among the partnering ports via an incentive scheme named Asia Cruise Fund; joint promotion events and major industry events, so as to drive ship deployment to Hong Kong and foster its position as a regional cruise hub.

Mega Events

The government adopts a multi-pronged strategy to support the staging of events varying in scale and nature, so as to tie in with the policy objectives of product diversification and attracting high-yield overnight visitors. International events hosted in the city include the Hong Kong E-Prix, held in March.

Mega events organised by the board in 2019 included the Hong Kong Pulse Light Festival, International Chinese New Year Night Parade, E-Sports and Music Festival Hong Kong and Hong Kong New Year Countdown.

Green Tourism

The Great Outdoors Hong Kong campaign promotes the Hong Kong Unesco Global Geopark, the natural landscape, hiking trails, cycling routes, trail running events and other green attractions via the board's website, guidebooks, social media platforms, visitor centres and a hotline. In 2019, the government launched a pilot arts, historical, cultural and green tourism project on Yim Tin Tsai island in Sai Kung. To enhance the tourist-friendliness of hiking trails with good tourism potential, the MacLehose Trail Section 1, Peak Trail and Double Haven Country Trail were improved by end-2019.

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 theme parks, temples, heritage sites, the natural landscape, and the many shops that have earned Hong Kong the reputation as a shoppers' paradise. Accommodation options are also extensive, ranging from licensed guesthouses and youth hostels to luxury hotels. As at the year end, 303 hotels and 1,520 licensed guesthouses were providing about 84,100 and 12,700 rooms respectively.

Ocean Park

Ocean Park is a premier marine theme park featuring more than 80 attractions. In 2019, it rolled out the new Wild Twister ride. Under development are a Meerkat attraction, an all-weather indoor and outdoor waterpark at Tai Shue Wan and Fullerton Ocean Park Hotel Hong Kong.

A Symphony of Lights

Another attraction is the nightly spectacle 'A Symphony of Lights', a multimedia light and sound show staged on both sides of Victoria Harbour that draws about 1.5 million viewers a year. To celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, a special edition was staged in October, offering a fresh visual experience through celebratory messages, fireworks and festive animations on the LED panels of buildings. The show was enhanced on 1 December, with the participation of 42 buildings and three attractions, namely the World Dream Cruise Ship, Avenue of Stars and Hong Kong Observation Wheel, and a special edition of the show was staged during the Hong Kong New Year Countdown.

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort is one of the best and most popular themed resorts in Asia. Under its multi-year expansion plan, the resort launched the Ant-Man and The Wasp: Nano Battle! interactive adventure in March. Other items coming on stream in the next few years include an expanded castle with day and night shows, and two themed areas based on the *Frozen* and Marvel intellectual property.

Food Truck Pilot Scheme

The Food Truck Pilot Scheme aims at adding fun and vibrancy to tourist attractions and events through 14 food trucks. It has been extended for two more years to 2 February 2021.

Wetland Park

The 61-hectare world-class Hong Kong Wetland Park is home to a wide assortment of wildlife, including birds, dragonflies, amphibians, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and fish. The recreated wetlands, exhibition galleries, theatre and other facilities all underline the importance of wetlands to civilisation and biodiversity conservation.

Ngong Ping 360

The Ngong Ping Cable Car offers a spectacular 25-minute journey with views of the flora and fauna of North Lantau Country Park, Tung Chung Bay, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB)

and Hong Kong International Airport. It takes guests to Ngong Ping Village, which is designed in a Chinese architectural style with attractions including Motion 360 and Walking with Buddha. The Tian Tan Buddha, Po Lin Monastery, Ngong Ping Piazza and Wisdom Path are other attractions.

Peak Tram

The Peak Tram is a funicular railway that began running from Garden Road in Central to The Peak in 1888. It offers a unique view of the ridgeline and skyscrapers of the city. Major upgrading works began in 2019.

Hong Kong Tourism Board

The board is a statutory government-subsidised organisation that markets Hong Kong round the world as a preferred travel destination. It comprises 20 members who represent various tourism-related sectors and communities. In addition to its Hong Kong head office, the board has 15 offices worldwide and representatives in six source markets.

Information Network

There are seven visitor centres locally, at the airport (two centres), The Peak Piazza, Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Concourse, Hong Kong West Kowloon Station, HZMB Hong Kong Port and Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, whose visitor centre operates during ship calls.

Visitors can check out travel recommendations from locals through the Hong Kong Pals programme. Travel information is also available from the board via its website, mobile applications and social media. The website presents 22 market versions covering 15 languages, while the mobile site comes in 11 versions to address increased demand for mobile browsing.

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 'Best of all, it's in Hong Kong' as a destination brand to highlight that, from world-class attractions to neighbourhood culture, Hong Kong warmly welcomes the world to experience the best it has to offer.

Service Quality

Honest and Quality Tourist Services

The government works closely with the tourism industry and related organisations to promote honest and quality services for tourists. It cooperates with the council to protect consumers' interests and 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.

The council 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 not satisfied with their purchases to return the goods and seek refunds within 180 days of purchase, provided the goods are in proper condition.

The board's Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme encourages shops, restaurants and visitor accommodation facilities to offer good services. It enjoys broad support; as at the year end, 1,239 establishments with 8,179 outlets and 378 rooms 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 the community. About 250 young people render ambassadorial service on the programme every year.

Easier Entry for Visitors

Hong Kong is one of the world's most immigration-friendly cities. Travellers from some 170 foreign countries and territories enjoy visa-free access for stays of seven to 180 days. The Mainland's Individual Visit Scheme permits residents of 49 designated Mainland cities to visit Hong Kong on their own instead of travelling in tour groups. About 25 million Mainlanders visited Hong Kong under the scheme in 2019, representing about 57 per cent of all Mainland arrivals.

Protection of Travellers

Travel agents must obtain a government licence and be council members to carry out travel business under the Travel Agents Ordinance. The council specifies that only tourist guides it accredits can be assigned to receive inbound visitors. The council investigates complaints and takes disciplinary action against travel agents who do not observe its rules. Hong Kong had 1,742 licensed travel agents and 5,988 accredited tourist guides as at end-2019.

The statutory Travel Industry Compensation Fund provides ex gratia payments of 90 per cent of the loss of outbound fares to outbound travellers in the event of a travel agent default. In 2019, ex gratia payments close to \$1.6 million were paid to 953 travellers affected by six default cases. The fund also offers aid in cases of outbound travellers who sustain injuries or death in accidents in the course of an activity arranged by a travel agent. In 2019, it made an ex gratia payment of \$36,000 for one accident that happened in 2018.

Tourism Cooperation

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism are implementing the Agreement on Further Enhancement of Tourism Cooperation between the Mainland and Hong Kong to strengthen collaboration in market regulation, joint promotion and information exchange. In 2019, the HKSAR Government, the Macao SAR Government and the governments of the nine Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area jointly established the Tourism Federation of Cities in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to promote tourism cooperation and development within the region.

As a global player, Hong Kong is a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Tourism Working Group and the Pacific Asia Travel Association, and an associate member of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation.

Support Measures for Tourism Industry

The government is working closely with the board, the council, the tourism trade and other stakeholders in introducing measures to alleviate operating pressure on the industry amid the austere business environment. These measures include the Travel Agents Incentive Scheme rolled out jointly by the government, the board and the council to provide travel agents with cash incentives based on the number of travellers they serve; the government's waivers of travel agent and hotel licence fees; the board's waivers of the trade's participation fees in travel trade shows and travel missions organised in the Mainland and overseas, and waivers of merchants' membership renewal fees under the QTS Scheme; the council's waivers of travel agents' annual membership fees and Mainland inbound tour group registration fees, and its subsidies for tourist guides to complete the Continuing Professional Development Scheme in order to renew their tourist guide passes.

Websites

Hong Kong Tourism Board: www.discoverhongkong.com

Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong: www.mehongkong.com

Tourism Commission: www.tourism.gov.hk