

Travel and Tourism

The COVID-19 pandemic brought tourism in Hong Kong to a halt in 2020, with overall visitor arrivals plunging by almost 94 per cent, the largest annual drop on record.

Travel restrictions and compulsory quarantine measures implemented by governments worldwide in response to COVID-19 took a heavy toll on tourism in Hong Kong in 2020, with overall visitor arrivals dropping to only 3.57 million.

Despite the pandemic, the government continued to implement various initiatives under the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry, promulgated in 2017. The blueprint sets out the government's strategy to develop Hong Kong into a world-class premier tourism destination.

Support Measures for Tourism Industry

The government introduced a number of measures to support the tourism industry, with a total commitment of over \$2.3 billion from the Anti-epidemic Fund in direct financial support. Coupled with other financial incentive measures including the Travel Agents Incentive Scheme and the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme, the government made a cumulative commitment of about \$2.6 billion of direct financial support to the tourism industry.

Other support measures include the government's waivers of travel agent and hotel licence fees and monthly fixed rent and management fees for the operator of Kai Tak Cruise Terminal; the Hong Kong Tourism Board's (HKTB) waivers of participation fees in travel trade shows and travel missions organised in the Mainland and overseas, and waivers of merchants' membership renewal fees under the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme; and Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong's (TIC) reduction of travel agents' annual membership fees by half, waivers of Mainland inbound tour group registration fees, and subsidies for tourist guides to complete the Continuing Professional Development Scheme in order to renew their tourist guide passes.

New Regulatory Regime

The Travel Industry Authority, a new statutory body responsible primarily for the licensing and regulation of travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts, was established in January. The authority will take over the licensing and trade regulatory functions of the Travel Agents Registry and the TIC when the new regulatory regime is fully implemented.

Major Elements of Inbound Tourism

MICE

Hong Kong is a premier MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) destination, offering world-class convention and exhibition facilities and a diversified range of tourist attractions. The pandemic meant that most MICE events were cancelled or postponed in 2020.

Cruise Tourism

Because of COVID-19, the government suspended immigration services at Hong Kong's two cruise terminals, Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Ocean Terminal, from 5 February. Before that, there were 25 ship calls and total passenger throughput of about 100,000 in 2020.

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. Due to COVID-19, most mega events were postponed or cancelled. Those organised by HKTB in 2020 included the Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival and Hong Kong Winterfest, with the former including an online format in view of the pandemic.

Green Tourism

The Great Outdoors Hong Kong campaign promotes Hong Kong's natural landscape, rich biodiversity, hiking trails, cycling routes, UNESCO Global Geopark and trail running events via HKTB's website, guidebooks, social media platforms, visitor centres and a hotline. To enhance the tourist-friendliness of hiking trails with good tourism potential, the government commenced improvement works to the Lantau Trail Section 2, Dragon's Back and Shing Mun Reservoir Walk in 2020.

Tourism Infrastructure, Facilities and Attractions

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 31 December, 311 hotels and 1,462 licensed guesthouses provided about 86,700 and 12,300 rooms respectively.

Ocean Park

Ocean Park is a premier marine theme park featuring more than 80 attractions. A new animal exhibit, Little Meerkat and Giant Tortoise Adventure, was introduced in 2020 and an all-weather indoor and outdoor waterpark is being developed. The government is reviewing the way forward for Ocean Park.

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.

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort is one of the best and most popular themed resorts in Asia. The resort unveiled the Castle of Magical Dreams in November.

Food Truck Pilot Scheme

The Food Truck Pilot Scheme aims to add fun and vibrancy to tourist attractions and events through 13 food trucks. It will be further extended for another year to 2 February 2022.

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 continued in 2020.

Hong Kong Tourism Board

The HKTB 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 seven 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. The centre at the cruise terminal operates during ship calls. Travel information is also available via HKTB's website (in 13 languages), DiscoverHongKong.com, and social media channels.

Marketing

The HKTB spearheads the promotion of Hong Kong as a preferred travel destination for visitors from around the world. With inbound travel brought to a standstill by COVID-19, the HKTB launched the 'Holiday at Home' campaign to encourage Hong Kong people to rediscover their city and increase local consumption, at the same time showcasing Hong Kong positively to the international audience as a future destination.

Building Safe Tourism Image

In October, the HKTB, in conjunction with the Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency, introduced the Anti-Epidemic Hygiene Measures Certification Scheme, a standardised hygiene protocol for the tourism-related sectors, including inbound travel agencies, attractions, shopping malls and dining and retail outlets. By the end of December, more than 1,500 outlets were certified under the scheme.

Service Quality

Honest and Quality Tourist Services

The government works closely with the tourism industry and related organisations to promote honest and good quality services for tourists. It cooperates with the TIC to protect consumers' interests and ensure the tourism market's healthy development and operation. Laws such as the Trade Descriptions Ordinance are in place to prohibit unfair trade practices and protect consumers' legitimate interests.

The TIC 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 HKTB's QTS Scheme encourages shops, restaurants and visitor accommodation facilities to offer good services. As at 31 December, 1,131 establishments with 7,608 outlets and 228 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 participate in the programme every year.

Easier Entry for Visitors

Hong Kong is one of the world's most visitor-friendly cities. Visitors from some 170 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 1.37 million Mainlanders visited Hong Kong under the scheme in 2020, representing about 51 per cent of all Mainland arrivals.

Protection of Travellers

Travel agents must obtain a government licence and be TIC members to carry out travel business under the Travel Agents Ordinance. Only TIC-accredited tourist guides can be assigned to receive inbound visitors. The TIC investigates complaints and takes disciplinary action against travel agents who do not observe its rules. As at 31 December, Hong Kong had 1,720 licensed travel agents and 6,296 accredited tourist guides.

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 2020, ex gratia payments of around \$4.3 million were paid to 1,048 travellers affected by five 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. No such payments were made this year.

Tourism Cooperation

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, the Macao SAR Government and the governments of the nine Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) jointly established the Tourism Federation of Cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to promote tourism cooperation and development within the region. The Culture and Tourism Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, promulgated in December, sets out the directions for development of the GBA into an exchange hub for culture of the East and the West and a world-class tourism destination.

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.

Websites

Hong Kong Tourism Board: www.discoverhongkong.com
Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong: www.mehongkong.com
Tourism Commission: www.tourism.gov.hk