

Travel and Tourism

Hong Kong's inbound tourism regained growth momentum in 2017, thanks to the concerted efforts of the government, the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the trade, as well as additional government funding of over \$240 million this year to increase the city's competitiveness as a premier travel destination.

Hong Kong received 58.47 million visitors in 2017, registering solid growth of 3.2 per cent over 2016. Mainland arrivals accounted for 76 per cent of the total arrivals, rebounding 3.9 per cent as downward pressure posed by the 'one trip per week' measure largely subsided two years after its implementation. The government's efforts to diversify tourism products and attract high-spending overnight visitors yielded a notable increase in overnight arrivals of 5 per cent, much higher than that of same-day arrivals.

In October, the government released a 'Tourism Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry' to strengthen the city's competitiveness as a major tourist destination in the region and further exploit the potential of its tourism resources. The blueprint sets forth the government's vision to develop Hong Kong into a world-class premier tourism destination and mission to ensure the balanced, healthy and sustainable development of the industry, and maps out 72 short, medium and long-term initiatives underpinned by four development strategies and 13 implementation goals.

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 wide range of tourist attractions. A dedicated office, Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong, works under the Hong Kong 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 2017, 1.93 million overnight MICE visitors arrived, an increase of 1.9 per cent over 2016. Major conventions and exhibitions included the food and hospitality trade show HOFEX, IFX Expo Asia, CardioRhythm, 23rd International Conference on Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Critical Communications World, World Recycling Convention and Exhibition, Cloud Expo Asia, World Sustainable Built Environment Conference, 25th Asian and Oceanic Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Intelligent Transportation Systems Asia-Pacific Forum, Hong Kong International Dental Expo And Symposium, 15th Urological Association of Asia Congress, 46th International Congress and Exposition on Noise Control Engineering, Rhinology World Congress – Hong Kong and Asian Pacific Digestive 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 2017, the terminal handled 186 ship calls involving 161 calendar days. Total passenger throughput exceeded 780,000.

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

Mega Events

A new multi-pronged strategy, adopted in 2017-18, is to support the staging of events varying in scale and nature in Hong Kong, to tie in with the policy objectives of product diversification and attracting high-yield overnight visitors. Different international events were hosted, including the FIA Formula E Hong Kong E-Prix, which was held successfully at the Central Harbourfront in December and drew more high-spending overnight visitors to Hong Kong.

Mega events organised by the board in 2017 included the International Chinese New Year Parade, Hong Kong Dragon Boat Carnival, E-Sports and Music Festival Hong Kong, Hong Kong Pulse Light Show, Hong Kong Cyclothon, Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival, Hong Kong WinterFest and New Year countdown celebrations.

Green Tourism

The Great Outdoors Hong Kong campaign promotes the Hong Kong Global Geopark of China, the natural scenery of outlying islands, hiking trails, cycling routes and other green attractions via the board's website, guidebooks, mobile applications, social media platforms, visitor centres and a hotline. In 2017-18, a pilot scheme was launched to further support the travel trade in promoting in-depth green tourism.

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 end-2017, 277 hotels and 1,469 licensed guesthouses were providing over 78,900 and 12,300 rooms respectively.

Ocean Park

Ocean Park is a world-class marine theme park featuring more than 80 attractions. Development projects under way include an all-weather indoor and outdoor waterpark at Tai Shue Wan and two hotels, namely Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel and Fullerton Ocean Park Hotel Hong Kong, slated for completion in phases from 2018 to 2021.

A Symphony of Lights

Another attraction that captivates visitors is the nightly spectacle 'A Symphony of Lights', which attracts about 1.5 million viewers a year. A brand-new show was launched on 1 December to enhance the night vista of Victoria Harbour and provide audiences with a new experience.

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort

Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, with more than 100 attractions, is one of the best and most popular themed resorts in Asia. A new ride-through attraction, Iron Man Experience, was introduced in January, presenting a story based in Hong Kong, while the resort-style Disney Explorers Lodge, which started operation in April, offered a theme dedicated to the spirit of exploration. Construction is taking place under Hong Kong Disneyland Resort's expansion and development plan, which will bring new attractions progressively from 2018 to 2023.

Food Truck Pilot Scheme

The Food Truck Pilot Scheme aims to add fun and vibrancy to tourist attractions by providing diverse, creative and quality food options to tourists and locals while showcasing good hygiene and food safety. Fifteen food trucks are in operation at various hot spots and events.

Wetland Park

The 61-hectare Hong Kong Wetland Park, a world-class nature-based tourism facility, 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 and Hong Kong International Airport. It takes guests to Ngong Ping Village, which is designed in a Chinese architectural style with themed attractions including Stage 360, 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 1.4km cable-hauled 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.

Hong Kong Tourism Board

The board is a statutory government-subsided organisation that markets and promotes 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 six visitor centres locally, at the airport (two centres), The Peak Piazza, Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Concourse, Lo Wu boundary crossing terminal building 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 through its website, presented in 22 versions using 15 languages, and via its mobile applications and online campaigns on social networking sites. There is also a mobile site with 11 versions to cater for an increased number of clicks via mobile devices.

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 the East-meets-West 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 Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong 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 end-2017, some 1,250 establishments with about 8,000 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 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 in tour groups. About 25 million Mainlanders visited Hong Kong under the scheme in 2017, representing about 57 per cent of all Mainland arrivals.

Protection of Travellers

Travel agents must obtain a government licence and be Travel Industry Council members to carry out travel business under the Travel Agents Ordinance. The council requires in its directive 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 1,737 licensed travel agents and 6,134 accredited tourist guides at the end of 2017.

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 2017, ex gratia payments close to \$895,000 were paid to 398 travellers affected by four default cases. The fund also offers aid in cases of outbound travellers injured or killed in accidents in the course of an activity arranged by a travel agent. It made ex gratia payments of \$22,000 for two accidents that happened in 2017. 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.

New Regulatory Framework

In March, the government introduced into the Legislative Council the Travel Industry Bill, which provides for the establishment of an independent statutory body, the Travel Industry Authority, to regulate travel agents, tourist guides and tour escorts in a holistic manner. The bill is under LegCo scrutiny.

Tourism Cooperation

The government signed the Agreement on Further Enhancement of Tourism Cooperation between the Mainland and Hong Kong with the China National Tourism Administration in August to strengthen tourism exchanges and collaboration, enhance the integrated development of tourism markets, products, information and services, and promote Hong Kong's development as a diversified tourism platform.

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.

Websites

Hong Kong Tourism Board: www.discoverhongkong.com

Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong: www.mehongkong.com

Tourism Commission: www.tourism.gov.hk