



Executive Director's Statement

The Hong Kong tourism industry has been turned on its head since the middle of last year. In the first half of 2019 visitor arrivals continued their upward trend to reach a daily average of 200,000. By the time I took over as Executive Director of the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) in November, however, arrivals had fallen by more than 50% to 88,000 because of the social incidents in our streets, reaching their worst levels since the SARS crisis of 2003.

Such a sharp decline inevitably had a severe impact on tourism-related sectors and Hong Kong's economy, and the priority at the time – before we had an inkling that COVID-19 was around the corner – was to generate business as quickly as possible. The HKTB therefore launched the “Hong Kong is ON” online promotion platform in December, featuring offers from 7,000 outlets in travel, dining, retail, and airlines, including buy-one-get-one-free offers and steep discounts to attract people from short-haul markets and stimulate spending by Hong Kong people.

To counter the impact of the continuing social situation, we could not rely solely on attracting visitors with great deals. We also launched a real-time map to meet the needs of visitors in town and provide them with updated information on traffic conditions and public transport arrangements to minimise inconvenience and make them feel safe throughout their stays in Hong Kong.

The promotional platform was extremely well received and the campaign website attracted 3.8 million page views in just one month. Offers targeting Hong Kong people and some overseas markets sold out fast and the decline in visitor numbers slowed significantly in December, demonstrating the ability of our industry to react quickly and act together effectively to put together hundreds of enticing offers with a short lead time.

As we entered 2020, COVID-19 brought with it an even greater challenge and brought global tourism to a halt. Mutual support is much needed in times of difficulties. I am immensely grateful to the Government, the travel trade, our sponsors, and the community at large for their unfailing support and assistance to the work of the HKTB. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to our Board Members for their guidance and advice, and my colleagues for their hard work and positivity in the face of adversity.

Looking to the future, the HKTB will seize the opportunity brought by the challenges to conduct a holistic and thorough review of Hong Kong's tourism branding and our overall tourism promotion and investment strategies, so as to revitalise the Hong Kong tourism brand and drive long-term, sustainable tourism growth. All these have undoubtedly added a graver weight as well as more exciting challenges to my role than I could possibly have anticipated this time last year. Some of my friends have jokingly suggested I took over as Executive Director at the worst imaginable time. Yet this is the precise time that I feel I can contribute to the development of tourism and make a real difference.

It has been a tumultuous year, and a period of immense difficulty. But the experience of the past 12 months has shown me once again that, however great the challenge, the extraordinary and indefatigable spirit of the Hong Kong people always shines through. It was the spirit that overcame SARS and saw us through the global financial crisis – and it will just as surely lead us safely to the other side of this terrible pandemic and into the brighter, better days that lie ahead.

Dane Cheng

Executive Director, Hong Kong Tourism Board