

MESSAGES FROM CHAIRMAN & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Chairman's Message

Hong Kong's tourism industry has been turned upside down in the past year. First, visitor arrivals fell by nearly 40% in the second half of 2019 because of the social incidents. Then, from early 2020, the world was progressively and rapidly impacted by the emergence of COVID-19. The pandemic has not only affected tourism in Hong Kong but has brought the global tourism industry to a standstill, grounding travellers worldwide and sending shockwaves throughout the retail, catering, hotel, as well as convention and exhibition industries.

With strict quarantine conditions in place, visitor numbers to Hong Kong have faded to practically zero in recent months, plunging us into a situation far bleaker than during the 2003 SARS crisis. As I write this message, the global pandemic continues to spread and recovery for the tourism industry still seems to be a long journey in the context of the uncertain situation in some parts of the world.

However, I am confident visitors will return to Hong Kong when the pandemic eases and international travel resumes. Despite the difficulties we faced, Hong Kong was rated the world's most popular city for visitors for the ninth consecutive year in 2019 by the UK-based Euromonitor International, a world-leading independent provider of strategic market research. The past nine years have not always been smooth for our tourism industry. Yet the achievement reflects the appeal of Hong Kong as a destination with diverse experiences, an unmatched air traffic network and top-class infrastructure.

Above all, it reflects the irrepressible spirit of the Hong Kong people and our incredible ability to stand up to any challenge. Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, Hong Kong citizens have worked together to fight the virus, united in their determination to use innovation and experience to find solutions to carry us through the darkest of days. This spirit also infuses our tourism industry. And there is every reason to believe that Hong Kong people will actively lead the way when we emerge into a new normal for world travel when the global epidemic is under control.

Our airport, our public transport network, and our exhibition venues, for instance, have strengthened their disinfection routines. Hotels, restaurants and tourism related businesses, with the support of the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), have introduced new protocols and procedures to ensure the health of all customers. Tourism attractions meanwhile have put in place new booking arrangements. All of these important steps have been taken with one goal in mind: To ensure that the Hong Kong public and visitors feel safe in our city.

Although there are greater immediate challenges for us all, tourism matters to Hong Kong. The industry brings in hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue every year and is a key pillar of our economy. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Hong Kong SAR Government for its support for our tourism industry and the HKTB, providing to us the resources to face up to fiercer regional competition and to win back visitors in the post-pandemic era.

The livelihoods of around 800,000 citizens depend upon our tourism industry directly or indirectly, with many serving in front line positions. Their wellbeing has an impact on countless families throughout our city, and thus I would like to seek your continued steadfast support in striving for the recovery of the tourism industry.

Hong Kong has weathered many storms in the past, and we have always emerged stronger. With determination, resilience and our can-do spirit, I am certain we will ride out this very massive storm. We look forward to Hong Kong emerging into a new era of growth and prosperity for our tourism industry, and to the future success of the economy of our extraordinary city.

Dr Pang Yiu-kai, GBS, JP
Chairman, Hong Kong Tourism Board



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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