

# The city that never stands still

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Hong Kong has emerged as one of Asia's fastest-growing tourism destinations over the last decade, with visitor numbers rising 16.4 per cent since 2009 alone, and arrivals reaching 40 million in the first eight months of this year: a 12.3 per cent annual increase. As a result, tourism is now one of the main pillars of the city's economy, contributing almost 5 per cent toward GDP and employing around quarter of a million people, or 6 per cent of the workforce.

Travel and tourism is one of Hong Kong's so-called four-pillar industries. The Hong Kong SAR government and its agency the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) carefully monitor travel and tourism in Hong Kong as well as continuously investing in its development. The government researches inbound tourism in order to understand the situation and help develop the industry. Moreover, it aggressively promotes Hong Kong as a travel and tourism destination to players in the global travel and tourism industry by holding conferences all over the world and

updating its website in various different languages. In addition, the government also invests substantial amounts of money in improving Hong Kong's tourist attractions such as its theme parks.

To further strengthen Hong Kong's international brand, the Hong Kong Tourism Board is focused on distinguishing the city from its regional competitors in Greater China, Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea, all of which have increased investment in their tourism sectors.

## Cruise market keeps growing

Recognising the growing potential of the cruise market, the government is pressing ahead with plans to make Hong Kong a leading regional cruise hub. Located at the site of the former airport in East Kowloon, the first berth of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal opened to cruise liners in June 2013, with the second berth coming into operation this year, and is able to accommodate the largest cruise ships in the world.



Shop till you drop: The glittering malls and boutiques of Central

“There is huge regional and global demand for cruise tourism, and Hong Kong intends to capture a significant slice of the market,” says Dr Peter Lam, chairman of the HKTB, adding that Hong Kong is actively participating in international cruise conferences to build up networks with neighbouring ports and cruise companies: earlier this year the HKTB and Taipei’s tourism bureau launched the world’s first ever Asia Cruise Fund, which pools regional resources to attract more cruise lines to deploy ships to Asia. In November, Hong Kong is to be the host city of Cruise Shipping Asia-Pacific for the first time, the world’s only annual cruise event focused on the entire Pan-Asia cruise market.

With four venues that can handle up to 3,000 guests each, along with a 23,000-square-metre rooftop garden with views across to Hong Kong’s famous skyline, the HKTB believes the new cruise terminal will also persuade MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) groups to include cruise travel in their trips to Hong Kong.

#### **Promoting the Hong Kong experience**

As well as enjoying the sights of Hong Kong, growing numbers of visitors are showing an interest in experience-based travel, combining entertainment and culture with a desire to meet local people.

“We have joined hands with performing arts groups and the tourism sector to leverage our arts and

cultural products to enrich visitors’ nightlife and travel experience,” says Dr Lam.

The HKTB actively promotes cultural and arts activities such as the Hong Kong Arts Festival, the Hong Kong International Film Festival and large-scale arts exhibitions in various local museums. The West Kowloon Cultural District, now under construction, will also boost the city’s status as Asia’s arts capital.

In addition, the HKTB is promoting traditional Chinese customs and festivals such as the Tin Hau Festival parade in Yuen Long and Cha Kwo Ling, the Tam Kung Festival in Shaueiwan, the Cheung Chau Bun Festival and the Birthday of Lord Buddha celebrations at Po Lin Monastery. “These four traditional festivals were bundled under the ‘Hong Kong Cultural Celebrations’ promotion in April and May and visitors were encouraged to take part in the celebrations in different districts,” says Dr Lam.

#### **Eco-tourism potential**

Leveraging Hong Kong’s ecological diversity, Dr Lam says the HKTB is promoting green tourism in the Northeast New Territories and outlying islands: “In fact, 40 per cent of Hong Kong is conserved as country parks. Many of these green havens are in the New Territories, which includes the city’s hinterland and more than 200 islands, but others are within walking distance of Hong Kong Island.”

In 2009, the HKTB launched the ‘Great Outdoors

**At the same time as benefitting from the Mainland as a major source of visitors, Hong Kong is positioning itself as the gateway to China**



Time, please: the former Kowloon-Canton Railway Clock Tower, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon

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Hong Kong!’ campaign to promote the Hong Kong Global Geopark of China, the natural scenery of outlying islands, popular hiking trails, and other green attractions.

The HKTB is increasingly promoting Hong Kong as an all-year-round destination. Among the highlights aimed at attracting international visitors are the Mid-Autumn Festival in September, which includes the spectacular Tai Hang Fire Dragon Dance. October sees the Hong Kong Open, one of the most important tournaments in Asian golf. Later in the month is Hong Kong’s Wine and Dine Festival, a four-day outdoor party that Forbes Travel Guide now includes among the top 10 international food and wine festivals. Using 3D projection mapping, music, sound and light, the two-week Hong Kong Pulse 3D Light Show is held in November, December, February and March. The multimedia show takes place at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui, coinciding with the Wine & Dine Festival, Hong Kong WinterFest, and the Chinese New Year Celebrations.

### Digital strategy

To further improve visitors’ experience the HKTB has pioneered the use of digital technology to create a strategy to help visitors explore Hong Kong’s culture, cuisine, and heritage.

This encompasses smartphones, social media, and the internet, including its award-winning website DiscoverHongKong.com, along with designated social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and

Instagram, as well as tailor-made apps.

“We are the first in the industry to launch a cross-channel digital travel guide, it’s called 3-in-1 My Hong Kong Guide, and integrates web portals, mobile applications and social media that can be used on both personal computers and mobile devices,” says Dr Lam, adding: “With this handy digital guide, visitors can plan their itinerary on HKTB’s website with their friends before the trip, retrieve the itinerary on their mobile devices and start exploring Hong Kong when they arrive using this one-stop digital platform. Users can also receive location-specific information and offers in town, and share their travel experience on social media using this application.”

At the same time as benefitting from the Mainland as a major source of visitors, Hong Kong is positioning itself as the gateway to China, taking advantage of ambitious infrastructure projects.

These include the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL), aimed for completion in 2015; the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, scheduled to be commissioned in 2016, which will be a mega sea crossing linking the SAR with Zhuhai and Macao; the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Express Line; and SkyPier, a cross-boundary ferry terminal, providing high-speed ferry services for transit passengers travelling to and from eight ports in the PRD and Macao. In the near future, improved rail and road links will bring Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Macao and other regional population centres within a one-hour circle. **F**



Hong Kong’s Heritage Fiesta offers visitors an opportunity to explore lesser-known examples of the city’s heritage