

International Business Committee

**Review of Tourism Resources, and the Policy Measures,
Strategies and Projects for the Development of Eco-tourism**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the Government's review of tourism resources, and the policy measures, strategies and projects for the development of eco-tourism.

BACKGROUND

2. Hong Kong is home to a variety of habitats and rich biodiversity. The Government is committed to nature conservation and has established 25 country parks, eight marine parks, a wetland of international importance under the Convention on Wetlands, as well as the Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark (Hong Kong Geopark). Hong Kong's Mirs Bay has been selected as an "Outstanding Example of Beautiful Bays" with an excellent overall score under the Fourth Batch of National Beautiful Bays announced by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in 2025, marking the first time the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has received such commendation in our country.

3. These protected areas not only safeguard the natural environment and provide countryside recreation and outdoor education facilities for the public but also serve as important platforms for promoting popular science. At the same time, these precious natural assets have been well appreciated as part of Hong Kong's tourism appeal. According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB)'s Departing Visitor Survey, in the first half of 2025, around a quarter of overnight visitors indicated that their reason for visiting Hong Kong was to explore the city, enjoy the natural scenery, culture and arts, as well as experience authentic local vibe.

ECOTOURISM RESOURCES AND THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY MEASURES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM

4. Hong Kong has been driving nature conservation forward. In 2004, the Government introduced the New Nature Conservation Policy which identifies

12 ecologically important sites for enhanced conservation, including the Ramsar Site (Mai Po Inner Deep Bay) and Sha Lo Tung. Two incentive schemes, namely the Public Private Partnership Scheme and the Management Agreement Scheme, were launched to sustainably regulate, protect, and manage natural resources that are vital to the conservation of Hong Kong's biodiversity. At the same time, the Government has strengthened the protection and management of country parks and special areas, as well as marine parks and marine reserve, through a series of legislation, including the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208) and the Marine Parks Ordinance (Cap. 476). Sites of high ecological value are now systematically safeguarded.

5. To respect the nature and protect the environment, the Government will showcase Hong Kong's precious ecological resources to the public whenever appropriate but strive to minimise the potential environmental impact which may arise from overtourism so as to ensure the coexistence of ecotourism and nature conservation. In planning popular countryside locations, such as the Hong Kong Geopark, the Government has established principles to avoid the installation of facilities that could harm the park environment. Suitable ancillary facilities will be planned and arranged based on the actual conditions of different sites within the park, including their capacity to accommodate the maximum number of visitor and the ecological sensitivity. In addition, the Government has been implementing measures to promote green tourism, emphasizing on the important messages to visitors such as hiking safety, protection of the countryside environment, as well as "Take Your Litter Home".

6. In view of the recent increase in visitors during the Golden Week holidays, the Government has strengthened the management at popular attractions, such as Sai Kung East Country Park (SKECP) and Sharp Island. For example, during the Labour Day Golden Week holiday in May this year, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) deployed about 120 staff daily at the SKECP and Sharp Island. With the aid of drones, they carried out patrols, law enforcement, as well as publicity and education on camping and hiking etiquette, care for nature, animals and plants. Additional staff were deployed at popular campsites to conduct patrols and they remain stationed day and night during the period. The AFCD enhanced facility cleansing and management at campsites of Sai Kung Country Parks and the East Dam area, published visitor flow information for the East Dam on its website, and implemented temporary crowd control measures during peak hours to prevent overcrowding at the Po Pin Chau Viewing Platform and along the nearby trails. Inter-departmental collaboration also enhanced the public transport services and traffic management in the East Dam area. General public order at the East Dam, campsite usage, hygiene and public order at Ham Tin Wan, Sai Wan and Long Ke Wan were satisfactory and meet the planned objectives. The AFCD decisively

enforced the relevant laws against illegal activities. During the Golden Week in May this year, there were a total of 19 enforcement cases at Sections 1 and 2 of the MacLehose Trail in the SKECP and popular campsites nearby, mainly involving littering and camping outside designated campsites.

7. Currently, the coastal area of Sharp Island is not a marine park or marine reserve. At Sharp Island, the AFCD, in collaboration with non-governmental organisations, has conducted a range of promotional and educational activities, deployed additional staff to patrol the coastline, used drones to regularly monitor visitor activities, and arranged snorkelling and kayaking guides for inshore patrols, reminding visitors not to harm, disturb or collect marine livings, and to enter and exit the water via coral-friendly routes. The AFCD has also been conducting joint patrols with the Hong Kong Police Force, the Marine Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to maintain order and remind visitors not to litter. In addition, during the Golden Week holiday, 20 marine conservation volunteers from Shenzhen, together with AFCD Marine Ambassadors, promoted marine conservation to visitors and participated in a beach cleanup operation at Sharp Island.

FURTHER MANAGEMENT MEASURES

8. To manage visitor flow at countryside hotspots more effectively, the AFCD is assessing the capacity of some popular countryside locations. Drawing on experiences from past Golden Weeks, the AFCD will review long-term management strategies for these hotspots. This includes exploring the introduction of reservation systems and considering the feasibility of designating certain ecologically important sites as part of marine park protected areas. The AFCD will, in the light of actual conditions and needs, continue to strengthen patrols and enforcement, cleansing and management, publicity and education on hiking etiquette, and promote visits to other suitable countryside locations to divert crowds, with a view to ensuring the coexistence of ecotourism and nature conservation. To assist in monitoring and managing visitor flows, the AFCD has installed a total of 86 automatic visitor counters in 12 country parks and two special areas since 2022. These counters continuously and automatically record visitor numbers with infrared technology. The AFCD plans to gradually extend the application to the remaining 13 country parks and two special areas, replacing manual counting.

9. Based on data and observations from the previous Golden Week holidays, the number of visitors at the Po Pin Chau section at Sai Kung East Dam reached the maximum capacity during peak hours on certain days. Therefore, to

manage the number and flow of visitors more effectively, the Government is considering a reservation system for crowd management to protect trails from excessive wear and tear, while enhancing visitor experience by diverting arrivals across different sessions of a day. Since hiking trails in other country parks currently do not require reservation, the Government will consider piloting the system at the Po Pin Chau section to collect data for evaluating its effectiveness.

10. In addition, given the high marine ecological value of the extensive coral communities to the east and west of Sharp Island, the AFCD proposes designating the coral areas located in both east and west side of Sharp Island (including the tombolo) as a marine park for an area of approximately 63 hectares (Annex) to enhance coral conservation and support sustainable recreational use. The AFCD is formulating a comprehensive management plan in parallel and is consulting the public on the proposed designation of Sharp Island Marine Park with the aim to complete the statutory designation process by mid-2027.

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS AND SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS OF ECOTOURISM PROJECTS

11. The AFCD has launched the “Four Peaks” tourism project under the Working Group on Developing Tourist Hotspots, featuring four mountains and islands, namely the Peak, Lantau Peak, Tai Mo Shan and Sai Kung Hoi, all with Hong Kong’s characteristics and magnificent mountain and sea views under the theme “Hills and Sea in the City within Arm’s Reach”. By enhancing supporting facilities and incorporating additional tourism elements, it aims to encourage tourists to explore beyond Hong Kong’s traditional attractions, experience its diverse natural scenery, broaden the green tourism development in Hong Kong and stimulate the economy of surrounding areas. All four attractions feature unique natural landscapes and cultural characteristics. With short and easy routes, convenient public transport and tourist facilities nearby, “Four Peaks” are capable of accommodating more visitors, ensuring sustainable green tourism and providing a high-quality experience in exploring the nature.

12. To support the “Four Peaks” as green tourism attractions, facility enhancement works for the country parks have commenced progressively in the first half of 2025. These include installing additional directional signs and information boards to provide clearer guidance for visitors, repairing hiking trails using the handcrafted trail approach, and providing additional passing places to improve hiking safety. In addition, the AFCD is conducting thematic planting of native flowering plants along the hiking trails to enhance the ecological charm and aesthetic appeal of scenic spots. More basic leisure facilities, viewing points and photo-taking spots will be provided or enhanced at suitable locations to allow

visitors to the “Four Peaks” to experience the natural charm of Hong Kong’s countryside with ease and leisure. The facility enhancement works are expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

13. On the other hand, the AFCD, Tourism Commission, and HKTb have been engaging with the tourism sector and nearby operators of tourist spots to plan itineraries for the “Four Peaks” and develop related tourism products. Regarding promotion of special routes in the “Four Peaks” during the hiking season in the second half of 2026, the AFCD will launch a special campaign, “Four Peaks Stamp Collection Passport”, and a series of “Four Peaks” theme of souvenir collection. To facilitate tourists in planning their itineraries and gaining an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the “Four Peaks”, the AFCD will also launch a thematic website on “Four Peaks” tourism and produce “Four Peaks” tour pamphlets to provide useful information such as information about the attractions, route information, transport arrangements and details on special events. Meanwhile, the AFCD will produce a series of promotional videos with the theme of visiting the “Four Peaks” for broadcast on various social media platforms. The AFCD will further promote “Four Peaks” tourism through diverse channels such as social media platforms and websites of the HKTb and collaborating organisations, as well as the issuance of press releases and display of posters.

14. The “Four Peaks” tourism promotion will include messages on hiking safety and outdoor etiquette and codes to remind visitors to protect the natural environment. The AFCD will closely monitor the conditions of relevant locations and make prior arrangements for the related management work to ensure the coexistence of green tourism and nature conservation.

PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ECOTOURISM

15. In 2024, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau released the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong’s Tourism Industry 2.0, which set out the Government’s commitment to promoting “Ecology + Tourism”, with a view to enabling global visitors to enjoy and experience Hong Kong’s world-class natural beauty at their doorstep, on the premises of respecting the nature and protecting the environment. The HKTb has been committed to promoting green and ecotourism to visitors, enriching their visiting experience to Hong Kong, and encouraging the tourism sector to develop more related thematic and in-depth travel itineraries and tourism products.

16. The HKTb has been showcasing Hong Kong’s unique natural scenery and hiking experiences, while enhancing the promotion of messages

related to protecting the nature and caring for the environment, through its year-round promotional platform “Hong Kong Great Outdoors,” under themes such as hiking, beaches and outdoor activities, and sightseeing and island hopping, via various channels including activity guides, webpages, television productions, social media and mobile applications, thereby balancing needs between conservation and tourism. The HKTb provides short videos and a series of tips on the platform to introduce the safety information of hiking and water sports activities, sets out useful telephone numbers and mobile applications. It also connects with the Hiking Information on Green Tourism of the AFCD’s Enjoy Hiking webpage which encourages visitors to care for the environment, follow safety guidelines and enjoy hiking and water sports safely while exploring the countryside. The AFCD is preparing to disseminate tailored information to Mainland tourists via Xiaohungshu (or “Red Note”), a popular social media platform in the Mainland and Hong Kong.

17. To enhance information dissemination, the HKTb also launches a dedicated webpage on its one-stop travel information platform Discover Hong Kong, with practical travel information for Golden Weeks consolidated, including opening hours and waiting times at major tourist attractions, public transport arrangements and cross-boundary service details, for facilitating both visitors and members of the public to browse information and plan their trips. In addition, the HKTb is collaborating with the AFCD to promote messages on caring for the countryside and hiking etiquette through the HKTb’s Xiaohongshu account.

18. The HKTb also rolls out different promotional campaigns in response to the preferences of source markets and visitors' increasing pursuit of in-depth travel experiences, and actively encourages and propels the tourism sector or other organisations to organise guided tours and green tourism itineraries.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

19. Overtourism has posed challenges to many popular tourist destinations around the world. The sudden influx of tourists during peak seasons has led to various problems, including accommodation, transport, crowd management, damage to cultural heritage and ecological environment, as well as littering and hygienic concerns. There is no one-size-fits-all solutions. Soft approaches include deploying volunteers to answer enquiries from tourists and help them purchase tickets (Kyoto, Japan), deploying Tourist Police to maintain public order (Thailand and Macao, China), charging entry fee instead of free admission in the past (the Pantheon in Rome, Italy, and the Cologne Cathedral in Germany (starting from July 2026)), as well as limiting the number of visitors at

specific time-slots. More rigorous measures include strict law enforcement with heavy penalties, as well as temporary closures of islands and beaches for ecological restoration (Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines).

20. In the context of Hong Kong, our publicity, education and current management effort has sustained most of our visitors' willingness to cooperate. A small number of tourists may lack awareness of protecting marine ecosystems and livings due to their limited exposure to the ocean. Some may believe that organic waste, which can serve as natural fertiliser, needs not be carried away from the countryside. A small number of tourists tend to risk their lives to capture unique shots for posting on social media. These problems are not unique to Hong Kong and the more appropriate way to address them is by strengthening publicity and education.

21. For some overseas attractions, dedicated transport arrangements, capacity control measures, or even entry fees (such as those implemented at national parks) are feasible largely because of their remote locations away from city centres and residential areas, or because they often have only one or a few access points where control of access or fee collection can be implemented in a single or limited entry points. In other cases, at the early stage of planning and development of ecotourism resources, crowd management facilities, viewing points and fee-charging facilities are incorporated in site design already (the relevant example in Hong Kong is the Hong Kong Wetland Park).

22. Hong Kong's country parks are established primarily for hiking and recreational activities. They are meant to be easily accessible to allow members of the public living in bustling urban areas to enjoy the nature and relax. Artificial facilities are kept to the minimum as far as practical. The parks are neither managed in accordance with the concept of paid attractions, nor are they planned and built for access control. This principle of "Easy Access to Nature" is, on the one hand, the unique feature that has long attracted citizens and visitors to the country parks and, on the other hand, will easily create pressure to ancillary facilities once visitor numbers surge within a short period of time. It is a daunting task to strike the balance between preserving the unique characteristics of Hong Kong's country parks and improving their resilience to cope with sudden tourist spikes during peak seasons. Our recommended strategy is to accord priority to the uniqueness of "Easy Access to Nature" together with a series of gradual step-up management strengthening measures proportional to the magnitude of challenges. We will in the first place enhance publicity and public education to imbue the sentiment of cherishing our nature among visitors. Second, we are implementing moderate and precise crowd control (including reservation systems), traffic, hygienic improvement measures complemented by appropriate law enforcement to deter dangerous and destructive behaviour of tourists. Lastly,

the Government will resolve to take more stringent measures if the abovementioned measures are not effective.

ADVICE SOUGHT

23. Members are invited to note the content of this paper, and provide comments regarding the measures above.

Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau
Environment and Ecology Bureau
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Preliminary Boundary of the Proposed Sharp Island Marine Park

