

SPEECH: HKTB Chairman, The Hon Mrs Selina Chow
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Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be here in Seoul, and to have the great honour to address such an eminent gathering of Chinese entrepreneurs from around the world. I'm equally pleased to have the opportunity to talk to you about Hong Kong's unique culture and heritage, which are appreciated by visitors not only from Asia, but also by the millions from across the globe who travel to our city every year, and which serve as a cornerstone of our appeal as one of the world's leading tourism destinations.

Tourism is a pillar of Hong Kong's economy, a multi-billion-dollar industry that directly and indirectly provides employment to almost 300,000 people in our city. Last year – thanks in particular to overwhelming demand from Mainland China – visitor arrivals to Hong Kong reached a record 21.8 million, which elevated Hong Kong to 7th place on the World Tourism Organisation's ranking of leading destinations. This, I think you'll agree, is an extraordinary achievement for a destination little more than 1,000 square kilometres in size.

This year we've continued to benefit from the highly positive macro environment. Indeed, between January and August, arrivals to Hong Kong stood at 15.1 million, 7.8% more than in 2004 – and we're also benefiting from double-digit increases from the majority of our long-haul markets.

I expect that many of you already know about Hong Kong's newest major attraction – Hong Kong Disneyland – which opened a month ago. What you may not know is that this is just one of a number of major developments that our

Government is putting in place to ensure we have the right infrastructure to meet the strong demand that we expect will grow by more than two-and-a-half times over the next 15 years. Also scheduled to open during the next six months is the Hong Kong Wetland Park, a major new eco-tourism project, the Ngong Ping 360 Journey to Enlightenment, which includes a cable-car link to a new cultural village beside our famous Giant Buddha on Lantau Island, as well as our new AsiaWorld-Expo exhibition and convention centre that is adjacent to the Hong Kong International Airport.

Indeed, it's because of the critical milestone laid down by these and other new tourism developments, and the overwhelmingly positive regional and global outlook for tourism, that the Hong Kong Tourism Board has decided to launch our most ambitious promotion ever – by designating next year as *2006 Discover Hong Kong Year*. This integrated global campaign will bring together our new tourism assets with our existing attractions and products to showcase our city's multi-dimensional attractions, create exciting new experiences for our visitors, and revitalise Hong Kong's image as one of the world's hottest, must-visit destinations.

Although this campaign hinges on the opening of our new tourism attractions, we believe the appeal of *2006 Discover Hong Kong Year* goes far deeper. It's an invitation to our visitors to delve beneath the surface of this city and discover the many "hidden treasures" that make Hong Kong so different, so memorable and so constantly surprising.

These lesser-known jewels extend well beyond our internationally famous shopping and dining, and include our vibrant culture and heritage, the exotic lifestyle of our many outlying islands, and our remarkable contrasts of city, harbour and greenery. Indeed, it's this broad range of attractions – what we call Hong Kong's "four core strengths" – that not only help to create an extraordinarily deep and satisfying experience, but also underlies all of our marketing and promotional activities overseas.

The HKTb already recognises from its extensive market research that Hong Kong's cultural and heritage assets are strongly valued by visitors from key, up-market demographic segments. Surveys of business travellers – who make up 25% of all Hong Kong's overnight visitors, and also tend to stay longer and spend more than their leisure counterparts – reveal that heritage, arts and culture come high on the list of their interests. Similar research among family visitors from our Asian source markets – and especially those from Mainland China, Thailand and India – also shows that heritage and culture are among the key attractions for their outbound travel. As these two high-yield segments are the prime target groups of our *2006 Discover Hong Kong Year* campaign, our finding underline the importance of cultural and heritage assets to Hong Kong's overall product mix.

Our own findings are also borne out in research by the World Tourism Organisation, the global body that oversees tourism policy and strategy, which estimates that some 10% of global tourism arrivals are travelling for the purposes of cultural tourism. Moreover, the WTO states this form of tourism is not only increasing faster than any other segment, but also at a higher rate than the overall growth of tourism worldwide. Apart from the sheer weight of numbers of cultural tourists, they tend to have a higher level of income and education than most travellers, that they take longer trips and opt for more expensive accommodation, and that – like many other tourists – they also like to shop and dine. In other words cultural tourism not only attracts and educates visitors, it also delivers solid benefits to a host destination.

Here in Hong Kong we actively promote and package our cultural and heritage attractions in a number of ways, from the popular Cultural Kaleidoscope programme that we've been organising for many years, to our equally successful calendar of Mega Events. Both offer visitors a variety of activities and experiences that encapsulate Hong Kong's extraordinary legacy of 6,000 years of Chinese culture and more than a century and a half of Western colonial influences.

In the Cultural Kaleidoscope programme, for example, visitors can ride through Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour aboard the Chinese fishing junk called *Duk Ling* –

the last authentic junk in local waters – or take part in Meet the People itineraries, which range from learning *tai chi* and the art of Chinese tea appreciation, to understanding the evolution of the city's architecture and the principles of *feng shui*. We also offer a Museum Pass scheme, which for less than US\$5, offers a week's unlimited access to our 8 excellent museums, which specialise in a wide variety of subjects – from history, heritage, coastal defence, to tea-ware, science and outer space.

Also included in the programme are heritage tours that highlight the intense contrasts of old and new, and urban and rural, that can be found even in the heart of the modern city. Visitors are introduced to walled-village lifestyles and ancestral rituals in the New Territories – the extensive area of countryside that lies between the city and the border with the Mainland – and they can discover more about our rich religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism through visits to monasteries and temples. Classes on Cantonese Opera appreciation are also held at the Heritage Museum.

In addition to Cultural Kaleidoscope activities, visitors are enticed by a year-round calendar of colourful festivals and celebrations. These include the Tin Hau Festival in Yuen Long, the Bun Festival in Cheung Chau, the Buddha-bathing ceremony at Po Lin Monastery on the Lord Buddha's Birthday, exciting Dragon Boat Racing in coastal areas all over Hong Kong during the Tuen Ng Festival and, last but certainly not least, the romantic Mid-Autumn Lantern Celebrations. Special sightseeing tours highlighting all these festivals and more are promoted to visitors from around the world.

For a number of years the Hong Kong Tourism Board has been creating celebrations of Hong Kong's culture and heritage through its Mega Events programme. Such efforts have proved to be a major motivator in driving arrivals and enhancing visitor satisfaction, while raising the city's image as the events capital of Asia, and boosting the financial contribution made by tourism to the economy. By taking part in the

various activities created around each Mega Event, visitors can enjoy a true taste of Hong Kong life by mingling with local residents and joining in the festivities.

Our annual International Chinese New Year Parade, for instance, highlights one of Hong Kong's most vibrant traditional festivals, while WinterFest showcases the city's unique cultural fusion of East and West – and both have proved highly effective platforms for achieving record arrivals in what, not so very long ago, were relatively low travel periods. January and February, when the Lunar New Year occurs and business travel tends to drop, were traditionally our weakest months. The International Chinese New Year Parade, which we launched in 1996, has helped to change that pattern, so that in January last year we welcomed almost 1.75 million visitors, comfortably more than in March, April, May, June or even September.

During *2006 Discover Hong Kong Year*, we'll be further expanding the Mega Events programme with two new events, one themed around the Cheung Chau Bun Festival and the Buddha Bathing Ceremony, and the other around the Lantern Celebrations of the Mid-Autumn Festival, a perennial favourite among children and families.

Of course, there's also our tourism hardware, to which the Government has allocated more than US\$3 billion in funding for new schemes scheduled to open between now and the end of this decade. These include several projects capitalising on Hong Kong's colonial heritage.

On the south side of Hong Kong Island, for example, the waterfront at Stanley village is being renovated, with the re-built, 19th-century Murray House as its centrepiece, while the historic Marine Police Headquarters in Kowloon is being refurbished for tourism purposes. This pioneering project follows an early HKTb study into the adaptive re-use of this elegant 19th-century building, which on completion will not only create a top-class boutique hotel and retail cluster, but also an authentic heritage focus to the busy Canton Road shopping area. A similar development is also planned around the Central Police Station and Victoria Prison on Hong Kong Island.

The Government also recently acquired the Kam Tong Hall, a heritage building in the Mid-Levels on Hong Kong Island, which is currently being refurbished as a museum to Dr Sun Yat-sen. When it opens in November 2006, it will serve as the focal point of the Sun Yat-sen Historical Trail, which links various sites associated with the founding father of modern China.

Among Hong Kong's major forthcoming developments, the Ngong Ping 360 Journey to Enlightenment will combine a cable car ride with a cluster of cultural and heritage attractions on Lantau Island. Centred on the famous Giant Buddha, these will also include a cultural village, Po Lin Monastery and the Wisdom Path – an outdoor wooden replica of the Buddhist Heart Sutra – as well as the nearby fishing village of Tai O, which affords unique glimpses of Hong Kong's living history.

Indeed, the new additions to tourism infrastructure will provide new impetus for visitors to discover Hong Kong's existing attractions and lesser-known treasures, creating a multi-faceted experience that will satisfy all visitors from our targeted markets and demographic segments. Thus, Hong Kong Wetland Park will be the perfect complement to Hong Kong's multitude of walking trails, over 260 islands and our unique "pink" dolphins, while Hong Kong Disneyland will serve as a key element among a range of family "edutainment" offerings that can also include Ocean Park and our wide range of museums.

Even shopping takes on a distinctly cultural dimension in our vibrant street and specialist markets, and in the antique and arts areas around Hollywood Road, voted one of the ten most popular streets in the world, while such everyday means of transport as the Star Ferry, Hong Kong Tramways and the Peak Tram all offer an romantic and nostalgic experience dating back more than 100 years. And to prove that culture and heritage need not be "historic", the Avenue of Stars, which features Hong Kong's world-famous movie industry and opened 18 months ago, has proved a runaway success, attracting 10.6 million visitors – both local and overseas – in its first year of operation. Its popularity can be attributed not only to the many stars it showcases, but also its location as the best vantage point to view the nightly light

show, the Symphony of Lights, the unique presentation that is staged in the most breath-taking harbour in the world, the Victoria Harbour.

The HKTB remains acutely aware that if the remarkable growth of our tourism industry is to continue in the face of growing competition from other destinations around the world, we must sustain the interest of our visitors, and encourage them to stay longer, and make increased return visits with families. While most visitors still regard Hong Kong primarily as a city destination, we're working hard through *2006 Discover Hong Kong Year*, the Mega Events programme and our Cultural Kaleidoscope activities to create a wider awareness of the great diversity of our other attractions.

As distinguished entrepreneurs from the Chinese community around the world, you don't need me to tell you about Hong Kong's advantages as one of the world's leading financial centres, and the Gateway to China and the Pearl River Delta. You'll need no introduction, either, to our world-class infrastructure and transportation system, or the skills, professionalism, creativity and sheer hard work of our people.

These advantages make Hong Kong a great place to for business. But when you come to do business in Hong Kong, please don't miss the chance to sample all the goodies we have to offer for your leisure, our vibrant urban setting, our unique harbour, and our beautiful greenery.

With our new attractions, our tried and tested favourites and a multitude of hidden treasures to explore, there's no better time to visit than *2006 Discover Hong Kong Year*. So next time you come, set aside some time to discover the real Hong Kong, and bring a companion or your family to help you do it. We promise you a wonderful time gaining new insights into Hong Kong, and taking home memories of our extraordinary city to last a lifetime. I look forward to welcoming you.

Thank you.

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