

LCQ13: Services for cruise travellers visiting Hong Kong

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Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, in the Legislative Council today (April 22):

Question:

I have received complaints that when a mega cruise liner arrives in Hong Kong and is berthed at the Kwai Chung Terminals, very often only a few immigration officers will go on board the liner to handle the travellers' immigration clearance, and hence travellers have to wait for hours to undergo such procedure. Moreover, as other vehicles are not allowed to enter the Kwai Chung Terminals area, travellers have to first ride in the vehicles arranged by the cruise liner company to Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry Pier and then change to other means of transport to their destinations. The aforesaid arrangement not only dampens the travellers' enthusiasm for travelling, but also takes up their sightseeing and shopping time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether last year, it had reviewed the arrangement of the immigration clearance procedure for cruise travellers visiting Hong Kong and the berthing facilities for cruise liners; if so, of the results of the review; if not, whether it will proceed with the review immediately; and

(b) of the measures in place, prior to the commissioning of the first berth of the new cruise terminal at Kai Tak in mid 2013, to improve the services for cruise travellers visiting Hong Kong as well as to step up the relevant complementary measures, so as to minimise the inconvenience caused to them?

Reply:

President,

Our reply is set out below:

(a) Depending on individual circumstances and taking into account the requests of cruise operators, the Immigration Department (ImmD) will exercise flexibility in arranging the immigration clearance of mega cruise vessels. The arrangements include:

(i) boarding the cruise vessel at the last port-of-call prior to its arrival in Hong Kong

In response to a request by the cruise operator and taking into account the number of visitors and crew members, ImmD will dispatch a suitable number of officers to board the cruise vessel at the last port-of-call prior to its arrival in Hong Kong. ImmD officers will conduct immigration clearance for the visitors and crew members during the cruise vessel's journey to Hong Kong, so that the visitors can disembark immediately after the berthing of the cruise vessel in Hong Kong. The cruise operator will be responsible for the travel expenses of the ImmD officers.

(ii) boarding the cruise vessel in Hong Kong waters

If there are no other arrangements for the cruise vessel, ImmD will board the cruise vessel in Hong Kong waters when it sails through Junk Bay or Round Island (Ngan Chau) Pilot Boarding Stations, and conduct immigration clearance for the visitors and crew members. This would help save time, and facilitate the visitors to disembark as soon as possible after the berthing of the cruise vessel.

Furthermore, before the arrival of each cruise vessel, ImmD will obtain the list of visitors and crew members from the local shipping agency and conduct part of the immigration clearance procedures in advance to shorten the waiting time for the visitors.

For departure arrangements, ImmD will obtain the list of visitors and crew members from the local shipping agency and conduct part of the departure clearance procedures in advance to expedite the process. And, depending on the number of visitors and crew members, ImmD will arrange a suitable number of officers to board a cruise vessel four hours prior to its departure to perform departure clearance.

The Government will continue to actively engage the cruise industry on the arrangements for immigration clearance with a view to providing efficient and quality services to our visitors.

(b) The Tourism Commission (TC) has been actively engaging the cruise industry, and co-ordinating with the relevant departments to provide quality supporting facilities and services to visiting cruise vessels and their passengers. Under the Advisory Committee on Cruise Industry (ACCI), a Working Group on Interim Berthing Arrangement has been set up to consider and formulate interim berthing arrangements and support measures for cruise vessels before the completion of the new cruise terminal.

For cruise vessels which exceed the berthing capability of the Ocean Terminal or have conflicts in schedules and require alternative berthing locations, TC will facilitate the vessel calls and assist in the liaison between the local shipping agencies of the cruise operators and the relevant departments such as the Lands Department, Marine Department, Transport Department and Police as necessary. This includes the introduction of a set of "Streamlined Procedures for Applying for a Temporary Multiple-Visits Waiver for Berthing Cruise Vessels at the Container Terminal" since November 2006 to facilitate container terminal operators in applying for the berthing of cruise vessels at their facilities. In September 2008, the Government promulgated to the industry a set of guidelines on "Streamlined Procedures for Arranging Temporary Anchorage and Tendering for Cruise Vessels" to facilitate cruise operators in arranging mid-stream operations more expeditiously.

TC works closely with the relevant departments, cruise operators, shipping agencies and travel agents on the berthing arrangements to devise the most appropriate arrangement for each vessel call in order to facilitate the embarkation and disembarkation of passengers. The Hong Kong Tourism Board also arranges cultural performances, and sets up temporary visitor enquiry and service counters, etc. on cruise passengers' arrival in Hong Kong so that they can experience the hospitality of Hong Kong.

Given the special operational environment and transport needs of container terminals, we need to ensure the safety of the cruise passengers, minimise the number of non-container terminal vehicles, and reduce the waiting time of cruise passengers at container terminals for transportation. We consider the arrangement of feeder buses by shipping agencies to transport cruise passengers in and out of container terminals the safest and most appropriate arrangement. The arrangement is also widely accepted by the industry.

We will continue to maintain close liaison with the cruise industry and gather their views through ACCI and other channels to further enhance Hong Kong's supporting facilities for the berthing of cruise vessels and services to cruise passengers.

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