

Travel Agents (Amendment) Bill 2001
Submission from Hong Kong Hotels Association

1. Hong Kong Hotels Association, acting on behalf of its 79 member hotels, has been widely consulted by Tourism Commission, Hong Kong Tourism Board, Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong and other travel related organizations on the proposed Travel Agents (Amendment) Bill 2001.
2. Hong Kong Hotels Association strongly support the proposed Travel Agents (Amendment) Bill 2001 and its proposed provisions and contents.
3. Legislative control and regulation of the operation of inbound travel agents, in line with current legislative control and regulation of the operation of outbound travel agents, is highly desirable for maintaining the high standards of Hong Kong's direct tourism service providers, and protecting the tourism image of Hong Kong. In this regard, the licensing of inbound travel agents, similar to the existing licensing of outbound travel agents, is mandatory. At present, it is not a requirement to obtain a license to operate as an inbound travel agent and this has created considerable business malpractice and unethical practices on the part of some of the inbound travel agents.
4. Without legislative control and regulation of the operation and business ethics of inbound travel agents at large, Hong Kong's tourism image has been significantly affected. There is also no requirement for them to become members of Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, which provides codes of ethics for the operation of travel agency business and monitors the operation of its members closely.
5. Negative publicity about malpractice of some of the inbound travel agents in Hong Kong has given Hong Kong a bad name internationally. The situation has been particularly serious in visitor handling of the China market, which is Hong Kong's largest and highest growth market.
6. Malpractice has resulted in negative customer satisfaction, financial loss of visitors and travel industry partners including hotels, negative international publicity, fraudulent misrepresentation of products and services, harassment and unethical behaviors and loss of business reputation of Hong Kong's tourism operators and Hong Kong as a destination.
7. With tourism being one of the most important industries of Hong Kong and one that Hong Kong relies heavily to propel a sooner economic recovery, the control and regulation of inbound travel agents under the existing Travel Agents Ordinance (Chapter 218) is timely, necessary and long overdue.
8. Hong Kong's future economy is highly dependent on tourism and the massive public and private sector investments in tourism have to be protected by continuous upgrades in the quality and professional standing of our own tourism industry. We must not let a small number of inbound travel agents and those who see the opportunity to operate as one, to take advantage of the absence of legislative control and regulation to operate at will and without due regard to the wider benefits of Hong Kong.