

For information
10 June 2004

Legislative Council Panel on Security
Police Measures to Combat Crime Directed at Visitors

PURPOSE

This paper sets out, in response to requests from Members, information on Police measures to combat crime directed at visitors.

PRESENT POSITION

Crime cases against visitors

2. In 2002, 2003 and the first quarter of 2004, a total of 16.57 million, 15.54 million and 4.94 million visitors visited Hong Kong. Among these visitors, only 897, 1 221 and 344 have been reported as victims of crimes in the respective periods. This represents a very low proportion (0.0066%) of the total number of visitors in the 27-month period.

3. Among the crime cases directed against visitors above, the main categories include miscellaneous theft, pickpocketing and deception (including deception cases in retail shops). These accounted for about 65% of the total number of cases.

Complaints against malpractices of retail shops

4. From time to time, the Police also receive complaints against malpractices of retail shops from visitors. The majority of such complaints are related to over-charging and hard selling of expensive items. The Police do not keep separate comprehensive statistics on such complaints from visitors. The **Annex** sets out statistics on the complaints of tourists received by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (which deals with group tourists) and the Consumer Council regarding the service sector in Hong Kong for 2002, 2003 and the first quarter of 2004.

5. It should be emphasized that not all cases of malpractices in retail shops involve the commitment of an offence. From our experience, the shops often agree to settle the disputes with their customers, such as those related to over-charging, on knowing that the latter have reported to the Police, and no further Police follow up is required. However, should any complaint amount to an offence, the Police will undertake the necessary investigation, arrest and prosecution actions, or refer the

case to the Custom and Excise Department where appropriate (such as when the Trade Descriptions Ordinance has been breached).

6. For visitors' complaints received by the Consumer Council, the Council would investigate the cases and undertake mediation as necessary, with a view to resolving the complaints before the departure of the tourists where possible. If the complaints suggest possible elements of fraud or criminal activity, the cases would be referred to the Police or Custom & Excise Department for follow-up investigations. Depending on the merit of each case and the willingness of the victim, the victims may be invited to come back to Hong Kong to assist in the investigation and prosecution efforts, in such case they are provided with the required transportation and accommodation arrangements. The tourists concerned may also be advised by the Consumer Council to take their claims to the Small Claims Tribunal. There are special arrangements for the tribunal to hear visitors' cases within 48 hours.

Measures taken to combat crimes and malpractice targeting visitors

7. The Police often maintain a high profile presence to maintain law and order and to prevent visitors from becoming victims of crime at tourist spots. During long holidays when an upsurge of visitors is expected, the Police will enhance patrol at crime blackspots frequented by visitors. In particular, the Police undertake proactive measures such as anti-pickpocketing operations to combat pickpocketing and miscellaneous theft at places frequented by visitors. From January to April 2004, a total of 224 persons were arrested on suspicion of participating in pickpocketing. In addition, dedicated Police teams have recently put selected shops in tourist areas under observation. Police officers are tasked to approach shoppers who have just patronized these shops with a view to gathering evidence of potential crimes that might have been committed by the shops. The measure has been effective in curbing malpractices.

8. To increase visitors' awareness, the Police have produced anti-crime leaflets, which advise visitors to check the market price and make comparisons before buying, and outlines common malpractices adopted by unscrupulous shops. Visitors are also encouraged to approach the Police in case they suspect that they have been deceived. The leaflets have been made available at immigration checkpoints, ferry termini, the airport, hotels and popular shopping locations for distribution to visitors. In addition, the leaflets have been sent to the visa centres in the Mainland for distribution to applicants who intend to visit Hong Kong.

9. Promoting good business practice and enhancing awareness of consumer rights provide the best safeguard for tourists and consumers. To this end, the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC) promulgated a "Code of Conduct" for tourist guides in 2003. The Code includes, among other things, guidelines governing shopping activities. To enhance visitors' awareness of their consumer rights, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has also published a number of information

leaflets and guide books providing visitors with smart shopping tips. These are distributed at the land boundary crossing points as well as the airport. The HKTb has reinforced its promotion and publicity on the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme in Hong Kong and in the Mainland. Accredited QTS retailers and restaurants have undergone stringent assessment criteria on their quality of service and products before being given a QTS decal, making it easy for visitors to identify shops that they can trust. The HKTb also displays street banners at the popular shopping areas to remind visitors of HKTb visitor hotline and the Consumer Council's enquiry hotline in case they need assistance. The Police work with and provide advice to TIC, HKTb and the Consumer Council as necessary.

CONCLUSION

10. The crime rate against visitors has been very low. The situation in the first few months of 2004 remains stable when compared with the same period in 2003. Only around 70 in one million visitors have been the victims of crime. The situation of malpractices in retail shops is also under check with proactive Police actions, as well as efforts in raising awareness. Nonetheless, the Police will continue to take stern enforcement actions against criminal activities against visitors, and will continue to monitor the trend of complaints received from tourists against malpractices in the service industry in close collaboration with the TIC, HKTb and the Consumer Council.

Hong Kong Police Force
June 2004

Complaints from inbound tourists received by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong

Nature	2002	2003	2004 (Jan - Mar)
Shopping	236	343	99
Tour guides and tipping	42	34	23
Itinerary, accommodation and transportation arrangements	43	19	11
Extra charge	11	9	2
Others	8	11	2
TOTAL	340	416	137

Source: Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong

Complaints from inbound tourists received by the Consumer Council**(i) Breakdown by nature**

Nature	2002	2003	2004 (Jan-Mar)
Price Dispute	312	281	75
Sales Practice	534	519	156
Others	342	432	157
TOTAL	1,188	1,232	388

(ii) Breakdown by service sectors

Sector	2002	2003	2004 (Jan-Mar)
Travel Agents / Hotel Services / Public Transport	57	70	12
Retailers	998	1,006	314
Food and catering	45	57	18
Others	88	99	44
TOTAL	1,188	1,232	388

Source: Consumer Council