

Hong Kong targeting family and luxury sector

A WHOLE new generation will know Hong Kong as one of the locations for *The Dark Knight* – the latest Batman movie. Others will know the former British Territory for its contrasts – luxury sports cars fighting for street space alongside handcarts being pushed by old people; awesome rural vistas, mountains and outlying islands nestling cheek by jowl with streets that never sleep; a unique combination of 150 years of colonial influence and 5,000 years of Chinese tradition. Hong Kong is all of this and so much more.

Visitor numbers are down in Asia's self-styled world city, falling 1.4 per cent year on year in October to 2.53 million – as the world tightens its belt as a result of the economic downturn.

Numbers declined by 15 per cent from the Americas, 12 per cent from Europe, Africa and the Middle East and 5 per cent from south and south-east Asia.

However, visitor arrivals from Russia, increased 11 per cent, while those arriving from New Zealand rose nearly 12 per cent. Tourist arrivals in the January to October period rose 6 per cent to 24.3 million compared with the corresponding period in the previous year, and with the Middle East making up only a tiny fraction – around half a per cent – of its visitors, Hong Kong recently appointed Dubai-based GAA-Marta Consulting as its official representative in the Middle East region.

The appointment will enable the



Harbour view

Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) to further tap the Middle East market, which is identified as one of the most promising emerging visitor source markets for Hong Kong.

"We will strategically target family visitors and luxury leisure segments in the GCC," said James Tien, chairman HKTB, "and our promotion will anchor on Hong Kong's core strengths in sightseeing and shopping as well as family-friendly attractions such as theme parks."

In the past three years, arrivals from the Middle East have recorded

exceptional growth, achieving an average escalation of nearly 25 per cent. According to surveys of the HKTB, per capita spending of the overnight Middle East tourists reached \$830 in 2007, the fourth highest among all markets.

As well as concentrating on boosting visitors from the Middle East, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Regional Government (HKSARG) is enhancing Hong Kong's appeal as a centre of excellence for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) with the HKTB, Trade Develop-

ment Council, and Exhibition and Convention Industry Association strengthening their collaboration and stepping up promotional efforts.



Every year Hong Kong hosts over 100 major exhibitions that attract some 800,000 international and mainland visitors, and this special administrative region has been rated

the world's freest economy for the 14th consecutive year by the Heritage Foundation, an American conservative think tank based in Washington, D.C.

Its strategic location and the two-way flow of mainland and international exhibitors and trade show visitors make Hong Kong a strategic platform for global business facilitation; and the HKTDC had just announced a \$15.5 million package to help bring in more international buyers to its trade fairs.

So the HKTB has launched a new 'Meetings and Exhibitions Hong Kong' (MEHK) office to promote Hong Kong overseas as a MICE destination and provide one-stop support for event organisers. The new body is a response to the government's additional injection of \$19 million over the next

five years to promote the convention and exhibition industry in Hong Kong.

MEHK plans to leverage on the development of mainland China and to ride on the Cathay Pacific/Dragonair merger to develop programmes that include Hong Kong and the mainland.

The new body will also aim to enhance service and product offerings for meeting and incentive organisers, and to identify and develop unique venues, such as museums, for corporate hospitality. ■

By Brian Salter