

# 議會主席暢論各種重大問題

## Exclusive interview with TIC Chairman

本刊記者 Staff reporter

(編按：議會主席何栢靈先生去年十二月二十二日連任，任期三年，直至二零零九年。香港的入境業和外遊業這幾年都面對不少難題，本刊為此特別於二零零七年三月初訪問了何先生，以瞭解他對一些業界的重大問題的看法。以下是訪問的撮要。)

(Editor's note: TIC Chairman Mr Ronnie Ho was re-elected on 22 December 2006 for a term of three years until 2009. Both the inbound and outbound industries have faced many challenges during the past few years, and for that The Voice interviewed Mr Ho in early March this year in order to find out his views on several critically important issues the industry had to confront. Here is an excerpt of the interview.)

### 零團費

這幾個月以來，內地來港團的零團費問題成為傳媒的熱點。其實這個問題的歷史也不算短，究竟有沒有甚麼解決的方法？

這個問題很複雜，牽涉到內地不同省市的業者，因此不應期望一下子就能解決。當然，這說到底也要看內地同業的態度，如果他們很積極謀求解決方案，也不能說完全沒有辦法的。

議會自從幾年前開始監管入境旅行社之後，也一併負責處理入境旅客的投訴。但由於這幾年香港變得比較政治化，加上傳媒往往報憂不報喜，因此令人覺得零團費的問題很嚴重。

議會有沒有甚麼具體的方法去處理這個問題？

這個問題始終要靠市場力量去解決。關於零團費的負面新聞，在內地的傳播很廣，因此隨團來港的內地旅客減少了，這由去年第四季的內地團隊數字已經反映了出來。所謂零團費問題，根本就是內地組團社和香港接待社之間的商業行為。話是這麼說，但不管是接待社也好，導遊也好，都應該以良好的態度和恰當的手法去照顧旅客。

內地現在資訊流通的速度非常快，一些大城市的生活水

### Zero-fare tours

News about zero-fare tours from mainland China has been keenly chased after by the media in the past couple of months. This problem, in fact, has been around for quite a while. Are there any methods to tackle it?

This is a very complicated problem because it involves traders in various provinces and cities on the mainland; no immediate solution should be expected. But of course, that also depends on the attitudes of our mainland counterparts. If they try to actively find a solution, I won't say there isn't any around.

When the TIC took up the duty of regulating inbound agents several years ago, it also began to handle complaints from inbound visitors. As Hong Kong has become rather politicised over the past few years, and the media always tend to cover bad news rather than good news, the problem of zero-fare tours appears to be quite serious.

Is there anything specific the TIC can do to tackle the problem?

This problem has to be tackled by market forces. Negative news stories about zero-fare tours have spread really widely on the mainland, causing fewer inbound tours to come here. This can be seen from the number of mainland inbound tours in the fourth quarter of last year. The so-called zero-fare tour is actually a commercial deal between mainland tour operators and Hong Kong receiving agents. But you still have to show good attitudes and adopt proper practices when providing services for visitors, whether you're an inbound agent or a tourist guide.

Information travels very fast in mainland China nowadays, and



準也非常高。那些有錢的人，要購買名牌的話，往往會去歐洲，再加上很多名牌商品也陸續進入內地市場，因此香港單靠購物作吸引的話，恐怕未必可以持續下去。而且內地中產階級的旅遊模式有點像歐洲的旅客，他們很多都有汽車，假期的時候往往會駕車四處旅遊。不過，中國這麼大，很多偏遠地區的生活水準還是比較低的，那裏的居民始終都會參加旅行團，因此內地來港團始終會有一定的數目。

## 外遊旅行社的責任

法庭最近裁定關鍵旅行社要為一個旅行團在外地發生的意外負責。議會開展責任保險研究計劃已有一段日子了，你認為這個計劃對會員會有甚麼幫助？

現在很多同業都非常關注外遊旅行社的責任問題。以關鍵的案件為例，假如外遊旅行社的責任真的包括那麼多事情，而意外的成因卻往往牽涉到很多因素，那麼最嚴重的問題，就是外遊旅行社會變得沒有投資價值。投資者在投資外遊旅行社前會問自己：外遊旅行社要承擔的責任那麼含糊，萬一發生了意外，那我豈不是要負上很多責任？

兩三年前，美國旅行社協會在香港舉行世界旅遊會議，我們當時和美國的同業討論過這個問題，但他們都沒有確切可行的方法。在香港要買責任保險比歐美要難得多，而且不僅是難，還有保額不足的問題。即使想買保額非常巨大的責任保險，但保險公司根本不會接受。

歐美的旅行團很少像香港那樣有領隊帶領，多數的情況都由目的地的旅行社接待，然後旅客再按喜好參加不同的本地團。這樣一來，各方面的契約關係都可以明確界定下來，也就是說，各方面的責任都可以分得清清楚楚。香港的外遊旅行社肯不肯在產品的宣傳和包裝上照着這種經營方式去做，這很難說，但假如有些外遊旅行社做有些卻不做的話，最終會變成大家都不做。同業有時為了競爭優勢，甚至連共同利益都可以放棄。

the standard of living is very high in some big cities there. For those who are rich, they'll go to Europe if they want to buy designer brands. And many famous brands have started to set up shop on the mainland. If our attraction is shopping alone, I'm afraid it may not last long. Also, the travel pattern of mainland middle-class people is somewhat similar to that of European travellers. Many of them have cars, and they often travel around by car during holidays. Having said that, for a country as big as China, the living standard in many remote places is still rather low, and residents there always want to join package tours. So, there'll always be some inbound tours from mainland China.

## Liability of outbound agents

The court has recently ruled that Kwan Kin Travel Services has to be held responsible for the accident of a tour group which happened outside Hong Kong. The TIC has been working on a liability insurance research project for some time. In what way do you think the project will help members?

Many traders are now very concerned about the liability of outbound agents. Take the Kwan Kin case. If the liability of outbound agents has really become so varied, and there're so many causes of an accident, then the most serious problem is that an outbound agent will become a worthless investment. An investor who wants to invest in an outbound agent will ask himself or herself: am I going to bear plenty of liability if there's an accident and the liability of an outbound agent is far from clearly defined?

Two or three years ago when the American Society of Travel Agents held its World Travel Congress in Hong Kong, we consulted our American opposite numbers about this very matter. They didn't have any viable solution either. In Hong Kong, buying liability insurance is much more difficult than in Europe and America. It's not just difficult, but the cover isn't enough as well. Even if you wish to buy liability insurance with cover of a huge sum, no insurance company will take it.

In Europe and America, their tours, unlike Hong Kong's, are seldom accompanied by tour escorts. Their tours are often taken care of by the local receiving agents, and the tour participants will join local tours that they find interesting. In this way, the contractual relationships between various parties are clearly defined, and so is their liability. It's hard to say whether Hong Kong's outbound agents are willing to follow such a business model when promoting and packaging their products. But if some of them are willing to do it and some aren't, then no one will be doing it in the end. Sometimes, our traders are quite ready to dump common interests just for an edge over their competitors.

## 與酒店、航空公司的關係

有不少旅客都投訴香港酒店房間的價錢是「海鮮價」，那就是說房間的價格不住變動。可是，酒店在旺季的時候提高價錢，在淡季的時候降低價錢，全世界的酒店都是這樣經營，不是嗎？

香港的酒店可不是旺季的時候提高價錢、淡季的時候降低價錢那麼簡單呢，而是每個月都有不同價格。這樣一來，入境旅行社就變得很難安排住宿給旅客了。此外，酒店往往不願分配房間給入境旅行社，再加上有同業向酒店包房的問題，這些都不利入境旅行社的經營。

以前酒店會給你一批相連的房間，然後告訴你每天多少錢，在甚麼期間要加多少錢，假如不要房間的話多少天之前要退回等等。這些做法使入境旅行社能夠好好安排接待服務。

香港的外遊旅行社和航空公司這幾年有不少爭執，看起來航空公司好像想擺脫旅行社，直接把機票賣給旅客似的。這是全球的趨勢嗎？

這的確是全球的趨勢。航空公司的高層發現了互聯網和其他資訊科技可以幫助他們售賣機票，而且這些銷售渠道的成本又很低，於是他們都很熱中於利用這些科技。但問題是他們無視不同市場的獨特經營環境，所以產生了不少問題。

此外，現在很多公司的管理人員都受過高深教育，他們都覺得用互聯網訂機票很簡單，所以對旅行社的倚賴就慢慢減少了。以前外遊旅行社要設法和顧客打好關係，但現在這種關係變得薄弱了。

長遠來說，外遊旅行社必須轉型，要成為代表客人尋找旅遊產品的專業服務人員，然後向客人收取服務費，就像律師之類的專業人士一樣。

## Relationships with hotels and airlines

There're quite a number of visitors complaining about the ever-changing rates of hotels in Hong Kong. The rates are up during high season and down during low season. Isn't it the way hotels the world over are doing their business?

Hong Kong's hotels are not merely raising their rates during high season and then lowering them during low season. But rather, they adjust their rates every month. That's why inbound agents find it so difficult to arrange accommodation for visitors. Apart from that, hotels are often unwilling to allot rooms to inbound agents, and some traders have cut deals with hotels guaranteeing to rent a fixed number of rooms in a certain period. All this has made life hard for inbound agents.

In the past, hotels used to give you a series of rooms, and tell you, say, what the daily rates were, how much more would need to be paid during certain periods, when you would need to give back the rooms if you didn't need them, etc. That practice allowed inbound agents to make good arrangements.

Hong Kong's outbound agents and airlines have been fighting quite often during the past few years. It seems airlines are trying to get rid of outbound agents and sell tickets to travellers directly. Is that a global trend?

Yes, that's a global trend. Senior management of airlines are keen to use the Internet and other IT solutions to help them sell tickets ever since they've discovered those IT distribution channels, whose costs are very low. But the problem is they've ignored the unique business environment in different markets. And naturally many problems have arisen.

Also, many managers are now highly educated, and they have no difficulty using the Internet to book tickets themselves. So they don't need to rely so much on outbound agents. Outbound agents used to spend much time cultivating customer relationships. But nowadays, relationships of this kind are disappearing.

In the long run, outbound agents have to change. They have to become professional service people, who help their customers to find travel products and then charge them a service fee, just like other professionals such as lawyers.

## Future prospects and developments

An outbound agent closed down recently, and many travel-

## 未來的展望與發展

早前有一家外遊旅行社倒閉，有很多只是買了機票的旅客都得不到旅遊業賠償基金的賠償，於是社會人士再次要求保障只買機票的旅客。你對這有甚麼看法？


我們曾經和政府討論過這個問題，政府是傾向於提供保障的，但外遊業者的意見則並不統一。假如旅遊業賠償基金連機票也要保障，那麼外遊旅行社就要為賣出的機票繳付印花費，這些成本最終都會轉嫁給旅客。

其實現時保障旅客的機制也不是盡善盡美。舉例來說，旅行團意外緊急援助基金計劃為旅客提供十八萬元緊急財政援助，但規則卻定得太死，很多時出了意外，外遊旅行社即時為旅客墊付了各種費用，但事後卻無法從這個計劃中取回分毫。據我所知，有好幾家旅行社都是這樣。

**選舉委員會這個月就要選出香港的行政長官，你是選舉委員會的委員，你希望新一任特首會怎麼去幫助旅遊業呢？**

說實話，政府的政策和旅遊業未必會有直接的關係。不過，如果政府在諮詢公眾和內部協調的方面，可以做得更好一點，以及加快速度去興建一些必要的基建工程，那麼旅遊業也會得益。此外，政府必須改變現在的思維，不要想着把甚麼都興建成「世界級」的建築物，不然的話很容易把所有項目都變成地產項目。對於新一任特首來說，只要他能夠使社會安定，經濟發展良好，旅遊業自然會增長。業界對於特首的期望是宏觀的，並不是指甚麼具體的政策。

**你對於入境旅行社有甚麼忠告？**

大家都知道澳門近年的旅遊業非常興旺，去澳門的旅客人數越來越逼近香港，很多內地旅客對澳門的興趣都非常大。至於歐美等地的外國旅客，這幾年對中國的興趣越來越濃厚，很多時都會不經香港而直接前往中國旅遊。這些都是對香港旅遊業的不利因素。香港的入境業者真的要居安思危才好，千萬別只顧盯着眼前的利益。

lers who had only bought air tickets were not entitled to any compensation from the Travel Industry Compensation Fund (TICF). The public have requested, again, that travellers who have only bought air tickets should also be protected. What's your view on this matter?

We've discussed it with the Government, and it's inclined to provide protection although the views of outbound agents are divided. If the TICF was to cover air tickets as well, which means outbound agents had to pay a levy for the tickets they sold, then the cost incurred would be shifted to the travellers.

As a matter of fact, the existing mechanism that protects travellers needs to be enhanced. For example, the regulations of the Package Tour Accident Contingency Fund Scheme, which offers up to HK\$180,000 financial assistance to travellers, are just too rigid. Sometimes, an accident happens, and the outbound agent pays all sorts of fees for its customers right away, only to find out that it's unable to claim any money from the Scheme later. As far as I know, several outbound agents were unable to claim the money spent.

**As a member of the Election Committee, which is going to elect Hong Kong's Chief Executive (CE) this month, what do you expect the next CE to do for the tourism industry?**

Frankly, government policy may not have a direct bearing on tourism. But if the Government can do a better job in public consultation and internal coordination, and speed up some necessary infrastructure projects, then tourism will also benefit. Also, the Government must change its current mindset and stop thinking of turning everything into "world-class" structures. Otherwise, everything will become property projects. As far as the next CE is concerned, if he can keep our stability and develop our economy, then tourism will grow. Our expectations are at the macro level, not about any specific policy.

**Do you have any advice for inbound agents?**

We all know Macau has had a really thriving tourism industry in recent years. Its visitor numbers are closing in on Hong Kong's, and mainland travellers are really interested in it. As for visitors from Europe and America and other places, their interest in China has become very strong in the past few years, and they sometimes will just go directly to mainland China without stopping by Hong Kong. These are factors that might affect Hong Kong tourism. Inbound agents really have to be on their guard and stop staring at short-term benefits only. 