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Guidelines on the handling of cases involving registered shops suspected of breaching undertakings by the Committee on Shopping-related Practices

I. Procedures for handling registered shops suspected of breaching their undertakings

- 1. If the TIC has received a complaint or has learnt from other channels that a registered shop is suspected of breaching any one or more of its undertakings, it will send a letter to the shop in writing by post and fax (if a fax number has been supplied), and request the shop concerned to submit information and/or written representations to the TIC within 21 days from the day following the date of the letter from the TIC.
- 2. If there is evidence that the shop is suspected of breaching any one or more of its undertakings, the case will be referred to the Committee on Shopping-related Practices for consideration. The TIC will issue a notification of suspected breach of undertakings to the shop by post and fax (if a fax number has been supplied). A copy of the "Guidelines on the handling of cases involving registered shops suspected of breaching undertakings by the Committee on Shopping-related Practices" and information on the case will also be sent to the member together with the notification of suspected breach of undertakings, which will specify that the shop may provide mitigating reasons if it admits a breach of any one or more of its undertakings or it may provide explanations if it refuses to admit any breach of any such undertakings. A copy of the notification of suspected breach of undertakings will be sent to the member concerned for reference.
- 3. The shop may give a written reply to the TIC within 14 days from the day following the date of the notification of suspected breach of undertakings, in order to either admit a breach of any one or more of its undertakings or dispute the breaches alleged.
- 4. On receipt of the written reply from the shop within the specified time advising that it intends to dispute the breaches alleged, the TIC may further follow up the case by such means as requesting the shop concerned to provide evidence to support its representations within five working days from the day following the date of the notification of request for evidence issued by the TIC. The TIC may also take such steps as it may deem fit to verify the truth or otherwise of the representations provided by the shop.
- 5. If, in the process of following up the case, evidence unfavourable to the shop becomes available to the TIC, the TIC will issue a notification of unfavourable evidence to the shop and allow it to respond on one occasion to the evidence within five working days from the day following the date of the notification of unfavourable evidence.



- 6. Information on the case collected by the TIC will be organised and submitted to the Committee on Shopping-related Practices for consideration. All information regarding the identity of the shop will be concealed in the documents submitted to the Committee in order to ensure fairness. The Committee will consider all the information and representations submitted by the shop and other relevant parties when making a decision.
- 7. If the shop refuses to offer a refund for such reasons as the items concerned being damaged or there being wear and tear because of use, the Committee on Shopping-related Practices may send the items to its expert panel for assessment. The expert panel consists of representatives from the relevant trades.
- 8. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides that the shop has breached any one or more of its undertakings, the TIC will issue a notification of the Committee's decision to the shop by post and fax (if a fax number has been supplied), informing it of the decision of the Committee. If the shop intends to lodge an appeal, it shall do so according to Section VII.
- 9. For the purpose of the Refund Protection Scheme, the term "shop" and "registered shop" also includes a reference to any person (including but not in any way limited to any authorised person, director, manager, officer, partner, employee, agent and representative) who acts on behalf of such a shop.

II. Committee on Shopping-related Practices

- 1. The majority of the members of the Committee on Shopping-related Practices shall be from outside the trade. Its convenor shall be an independent director and one of its two deputy convenors shall be a trade director and the other deputy convenor shall be an independent director.
- 2. The quorum for meetings of the panel set up under the Committee on Shopping-related Practices for handling cases of suspected breach of undertakings is, including the convenor or the deputy convenor of the committee, five members present. Seven members will be invited to each panel meeting on a rotation basis. Among those present at a panel meeting, non-trade members shall constitute the majority.
- 3. Panel meetings shall be chaired by the convenor of the Committee or, in his/her absence, the deputy convenor who is an independent director.

III. Penalties imposable on registered shops found to have breached any one or more of their undertakings

1. The Committee on Shopping-related Practices may impose any of the following penalties on a registered shop:



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- (1) issuing an advice letter requiring it to act or cease to act in a particular manner;
- (2) giving demerits to it (see Section V);
- (3) suspending its registration for a specified period;
- (4) revoking its registration.
- 2. When deciding on the penalty to be imposed, the Committee on Shopping-related Practices will consider any one or more of the following:
 - (1) the severity of the case;
 - (2) the history of breaches of undertakings by the shop within the past two years;
 - (3) whether it was an intentional breach of the undertaking or undertakings concerned;
 - (4) in the event that the shop has admitted any breach of undertakings, whether it has expressed regret, or adopted remedial measures;
 - (5) the explanations provided by the shop;
 - (6) the conduct of the shop in responding to the alleged breach of undertakings; and
 - (7) all the surrounding circumstances of the case.
- 3. The registration of a registered shop shall be revoked if it refuses to implement the decision (such as not offering a refund to the visitor concerned or his/her representative) made by the Committee on Shopping-related Practices or the Appeal Board.
- 4. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides to suspend or revoke the registration of a registered shop and to forbid members to arrange for visitors to patronise it, the TIC will prohibit all members from arranging for visitors to patronise it. Members which continue to arrange for visitors to patronise it will be penalised. If a registered shop whose registration has been suspended continues to receive inbound group visitors, its registration will be revoked.
- 5. If a registered shop is suspected of committing any acts or omissions which contravene the laws of Hong Kong, the case will be referred to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

IV. Situations where there are suspected or confirmed violations of the relevant laws

1. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 2 below, if it has come to the TIC's attention that a registered shop is suspected of: (1) selling, storing or possessing on its business premises any goods in circumstances which contravene the laws of Hong Kong, or (2) committing on its business premises any acts or omissions which contravene the Trade Descriptions Ordinance or any other applicable laws of Hong Kong; and in the event of (1) or (2) being investigated by the relevant law-enforcement agencies, then the



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Committee on Shopping-related Practices may, after taking account of the nature and severity of the case, suspend the registration of the shop and require members to stop arranging for inbound visitors to patronise the shop concerned until further notice. If the registration of a registered shop is suspended under such circumstances, its name, address, contact telephone number and the reason for and date of suspension of registration will be posted on the TIC website until such time when the shop concerned is cleared (whether by way of judicial decision or otherwise (for example, the investigation carried out by the relevant law-enforcement agencies is discontinued without charges being laid)) of: (a) having sold, stored or possessed on its business premises any goods in circumstances which contravene the laws of Hong Kong, or (b) having committed on its business premises any acts or omissions which contravene the Trade Descriptions Ordinance or any other applicable laws of Hong Kong, after which the website posting will be deleted.

- 2. Paragraph 1 above shall have no application until such time as the TIC is notified in writing by the relevant law-enforcement agencies (such as the Hong Kong Police Force, the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department or otherwise) that a registered shop is:
 - (a) suspected of engaging in (1) or (2) as provided in paragraph 1 above; and
 - (b) under investigation as a result.

In the event of receiving such a notification, the TIC will communicate details of the notification that it has received to the shop concerned and request the shop concerned to submit a written response to the TIC within 21 days from the day following the date of the communication issued by the TIC. After receipt of the written response from the shop, the TIC will, if it is satisfied that the two conditions as provided in (a) and (b) of this paragraph are fulfilled, notify the shop to provide a written representation to the TIC within 14 days from the day following the date of such notice. Information on the case, including the written representation from the shop, will be submitted to the Committee on Shopping-related Practices after the expiry of the 14 days, irrespective of whether a written response has been submitted by the shop, in order for the Committee to decide, after taking account of the nature and severity of the case, whether to suspend the registration of the shop in accordance with paragraph 1 above and require members to stop arranging for inbound visitors to patronise the shop concerned until further notice. If the Committee decides to suspend the registration of the shop, such a decision will not be enforced until after:

- (c) the shop has decided not to lodge an appeal in accordance with Section VII; or
- (d) in the event of an appeal being lodged by the shop in accordance with Section VII, the original decision of the Committee has been upheld by the Appeal Board.



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- 3. Subject to the provisions of paragraph 4 below, if a court or enforcement authority has ruled that a registered shop: (1) has sold, stored or possessed on its business premises any goods in circumstances which contravene the laws of Hong Kong, or (2) has committed on its business premises any acts or omissions which contravene the Trade Descriptions Ordinance or any other applicable laws of Hong Kong, then the Committee on Shopping-related Practices will, after taking account of the nature and severity of the case, penalise the shop by issuing an advice letter to it, giving demerits to it, or suspending or revoking its registration. If the registration of a registered shop is suspended or revoked, its name, address, contact telephone number and the reason for and date of suspension or revocation of registration will be posted on the TIC website for two years, after which time the website posting will be deleted.
- Paragraph 3 above shall have no application until such time as the TIC is 4 notified by the relevant law-enforcement agencies in writing that a court or enforcement authority has ruled that a registered shop has engaged in (1) or (2) as provided in paragraph 3 above. In the event of receiving such a notification, the TIC will communicate details of the notification that it has received to the shop concerned and request the shop concerned to submit a written response to the TIC within 14 days from the day following the date of the communication issued by the TIC. Information on the case, including the written response from the shop, will be submitted to the Committee on Shopping-related Practices after the expiry of the 14 days, irrespective of whether a written response has been submitted by the shop, in order for the Committee to decide, after taking account of the nature and severity of the case, whether and how to penalise the shop including the issuing of an advice letter to it, giving demerits to it, or suspending or revoking its registration. If the Committee decides to penalise the shop, such a decision will not be enforced until after:
 - (a) the shop has decided not to lodge an appeal neither in accordance with Section VII nor in accordance with applicable law; or
 - (b) in the event of an appeal being lodged by the shop in accordance with Section VII and/or in accordance with applicable law, the original decision of the Committee has been upheld by the Appeal Board and/or the original decision of the court or enforcement authority concerned has been upheld by higher courts.
- 5. The provisions of this Section IV of these guidelines are not intended in any way to limit or restrict the application of any other provisions of these guidelines.

V. Demerit System for Registered Shops

1. If, within any period of three consecutive months, the TIC has received a total of 10 or more refund complaints against a registered shop (including referrals from such bodies as the Consumer Council and the Hong Kong Tourism



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Board) and the Committee on Shopping-related Practices has substantiated the complaint cases by finding any one or more of its undertakings to have been breached, then the registered shop will be given an additional 10 demerits on top of the demerits which may be imposed in each complaint case. A refund complaint refers to a case where a refund request is not handled in accordance with the requirements of the Refund Protection Scheme.

2. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices considers that a registered shop has breached any one or more of its undertakings and decides to give demerits to it, the number of demerits to be given will be decided by making reference to the following demerit table:

	I. Undertaking breached	Maximum demerits for 1st breach within 2 years	Maximum demerits for 2nd breach within 2 years	Maximum demerits for 3rd or any subsequent breach within 2 years
1	A court or enforcement authority having ruled that a registered shop has sold, stored or possessed on its business premises any goods in circumstances which contravene the laws of Hong Kong, or has committed on its business premises any acts or omissions which contravene the Trade Descriptions Ordinance or any other applicable laws of Hong Kong	30	30	30
2	Compelling visitors to make purchases	30	30	30
3	Failing to notify the TIC in writing of any change to the authorised person, registered address, company name, contact telephone number or business hours seven days before receiving visitors	30	30	30
4	Refusing to offer a refund before intervention by the TIC	15	30	30
5	Violating regulations about refunds in the Refund Protection Scheme	15	30	30
6	Refusing to allow the public to freely enter and leave its business premises or refusing to allow personnel of the TIC or law-enforcement agencies to conduct inspections throughout business hours	15	30	30
7	Failing to check the Tourist Guide Pass of each tourist guide who takes tour groups to the shop	15	30	30
8	Refusing to provide the TIC with information about the receiving agents, the	15	30	30



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	tourist guides and the time when tour			
	groups enter and leave the shop			
9	After receipt of a letter from the TIC, failing to respond in writing before the deadline, to visitors' enquiries, complaints or questions concerning the Refund Protection Scheme	15	30	30
10	 Under the Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Mainland China's Inbound Tour Group Shoppers, the front of the receipt not printed with the phrases: "香港旅遊業 議會入境旅客服務熱線: (852)2807 0707" [Inbound tourist service hotline of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong: (852)2807 0707] and "六個月百 分百退款保障(貨品必須沒有損壞,亦 沒有因使用而導致的損耗)" [Six-month, full refund protection (the purchased item shall be undamaged and there shall be no wear and tear because of use)] in accordance with the rules stipulated by the TIC from time to time ^{Note 1} Under the Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Overseas Inbound Tour Group Shoppers, the front of the receipt not printed with the phrases: "香港旅遊業議會入境旅客 服務熱線: (852)2807 0707 Inbound tourist service hotline of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong: (852)2807 0707" and "十四天百分百 退款保障(貨品必須沒有損壞,亦沒有 因使用而導致的損耗) 14-day, full refund protection (the purchased item shall be undamaged and there shall be no wear and tear because of use)" in accordance with the rules stipulated by the TIC from time to time ^{Note 2} 	10	15	25
	The receipt not legible or not clearly listing details of the sold items ^{Note 3}	10	15	25
12	The receipt or voucher not stating information about the company such as its name, address, contact telephone number, etc, or not bearing its company stamp	10	15	25
13	Mentioning such bodies as the TIC, the Government or the Hong Kong Tourism Board for promotional purposes without	10	15	25



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	prior written approval			
14	 Under the Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Mainland China's Inbound Tour Group Shoppers, failing to post in prominent places (including at least the entrance and the cash register) inside the shop the Chinese version of the poster about the Refund Protection Scheme provided by the TIC Under the Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Overseas Inbound Tour Group Shoppers, failing to post in prominent places (including at least the entrance and the cash register) inside the shop the Chinese and English versions of the poster about the Refund Protection Scheme provided by the TIC 	10	15	25
15	Not giving visitors an explanation of the Refund Protection Scheme (Registered Shops) for Mainland China's Inbound Tour Group Shoppers	5	10	20
16	Not making a refund within seven days after receiving the item returned	5	10	20
17	After receipt of sold items eligible for a refund, failing to make a full refund in cash immediately and failing to issue visitors or their representatives with a written acknowledgement of receipt of sold items ^{Note 4}	5	10	20

- 3. The TIC Executive Office will record the demerits according to the decision of the Committee on Shopping-related Practices or the Appeal Board.
- 4. Once imposed, demerits are valid for two years, counting from the date when the Committee on Shopping-related Practices finds the case substantiated or any other specified date. In other words, the demerits given for each breach will be erased after two years. Demerits erased on expiry will be deducted from the total number of demerits.
- 5. If a registered shop has accumulated 10 demerits, the TIC Executive Office will immediately issue a reminder to it.
- 6. If a registered shop has accumulated 20 demerits, the TIC Executive Office will notify the Inbound Committee, the Mainland China Inbound Tour Affairs Committee and the members concerned of the situation.
- 7. If a registered shop has accumulated 30 demerits or above, the Committee on



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Shopping-related Practices will hold a meeting to determine whether to suspend or revoke its registration and whether members will still be allowed to arrange for visitors to patronise it.

- 8. If there are other cases relating to a registered shop pending deliberation by the Committee on Shopping-related Practices while the registration of the shop concerned is suspended, then any demerits to be given in such other cases will be counted from the date when the registration is resumed and will also be valid for two years.
- 9. If the shop files an appeal and the Appeal Board decides that the case is substantiated, the demerits will be counted from the date when the Committee on Shopping-related Practices finds the case substantiated or any other specified date and will be valid for two years. If the Appeal Board decides that the case is not substantiated, the demerits will be erased.
- 10. If there is a need, the TIC Executive Office will notify tourism organisations of various places of the demerit records of registered shops.

VI. Notification of decisions of the Committee on Shopping-related Practices and retention of records of breaches

- 1. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides to penalise the registered shop which is found to have breached any one or more of its undertakings, the TIC will notify it in writing by post and fax (if a fax number has been supplied) of the Committee's decision and grounds, its right to appeal against the decision and the appeal procedures. If, apart from penalising the shop, the Committee decides to give it demerits for the breach, it will also be notified of the number of demerits given for the breach in the case and the total number of demerits accumulated within the past two years (if any). A copy of the notification will be sent to the member concerned for reference.
- 2. All records of breaches will be kept in the file of the registered shop concerned. However, when deciding on the penalty to be imposed on the shop, the Committee on Shopping-related Practices will only make reference to the shop's record of breaches for two preceding years.
- 3. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides that the registered shop has not breached any of its undertakings, the TIC will also notify it and the member concerned in writing of the decision.

VII. Appeals against decisions of the Committee on Shopping-related Practices

1. Any registered shop desirous of appealing against the Committee on Shopping-related Practices' decision shall within 14 days (from the day following the date of notification of the decision from the TIC Executive Office) give notice of appeal or apply for extending the period for lodging an



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appeal for an additional period of not more than 14 days in writing to the TIC. The notice of appeal shall be given with an appeal fee of HK\$1,000. The notice of appeal or application for extension of the appeal period shall be addressed to "TIC Executive Director". The Appeal Board will decide whether the appeal fee paid by the appellant is to be forfeited, or repaid to the appellant wholly or in part.

2. Details of the appeal procedures are available from the TIC website (<u>www.tichk.org</u> \rightarrow "The Council" \rightarrow "Composition" \rightarrow "Appeal Board") or the TIC Executive Office.

VIII. Announcement of cases of breaches by registered shops

- 1. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices penalises a registered shop by giving demerits to it, or suspending or revoking its registration, then its name and address and the reason for and date of the penalty will be posted on the TIC website, the details of which are stipulated in paragraphs 2 to 5 below. However, the name and other relevant information of a registered shop having only been issued with an advice letter will not be so posted.
- 2. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides to suspend or revoke the registration of a registered shop with immediate effect (namely that the registration will remain invalid pending an appeal), then the penalty imposed on the shop will be posted on the TIC website immediately and members will be required to stop arranging for visitors to patronise the shop immediately. If the shop files an appeal, the fact that an appeal has been filed will also be posted on the TIC website.
- 3. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides to suspend or revoke the registration of a registered shop (namely that the registration will still be valid pending an appeal), and the shop does not within 14 days (from the day following the date of the notification of the decision from the TIC) give notice of appeal or apply for extending the period for lodging an appeal for an additional period of not more than 14 days in writing to the TIC, then the penalty imposed on it will be posted on the TIC website and members will be required to stop arranging for visitors to patronise it after the appeal period ends. If the shop files an appeal, the penalty imposed on it will be posted on the TIC website and members will be required to stop arranging for visitors to patronise it after the Appeal Board also decides to suspend or revoke the registration.
- 4. If the registration of a registered shop is suspended or revoked, its name, address, contact telephone number and the reason for and date of suspension or revocation of registration will be posted on the TIC website for two years, after which time the website posting will be deleted.
- 5. If the Committee on Shopping-related Practices decides to give demerits to a registered shop, and the shop does not within 14 days (from the day following



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the date of the notification of the decision from the TIC) give notice of appeal or apply for extending the period for lodging an appeal for an additional period of not more than 14 days in writing to the TIC, then its name and address and the reason for and date of the penalty, as well as the name of the receiving agent involved, will be posted on the TIC website. If the shop files an appeal, the penalty imposed on it will be posted on the TIC website after the Appeal Board also decides to give the demerits to it. Information on the demerits will be deleted from the TIC website after two years.



<u>Note 1</u>:

The rules stipulated by the TIC regarding the phrases: "香港旅遊業議會入境旅客服務熱線: (852)2807 0707" [Inbound tourist service hotline of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong: (852)2807 0707] and "六個月百分百退款保障(貨品必須沒有損壞,亦沒有因使用而導致的 損耗)" [Six-month, full refund protection (the purchased item shall be undamaged and there shall be no wear and tear because of use)] printed on the front of receipts (see sample below) are as follows:

- 1. The refund protection phrase shall be clearly printed in Chinese in a separate position on the front of receipts.
- 2. The Chinese version of the refund protection phrase shall be printed with a font size not smaller than 10 points.
- 3. Registered shops shall not print any provisions on receipts which are in contradiction to the Refund Protection Scheme.

The above rules remain valid until otherwise notified.

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<u>Note 2</u>:

The rules stipulated by the TIC regarding the phrases: "香港旅遊業議會入境旅客服務熱線: (852)2807 0707 Inbound tourist service hotline of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong: (852)2807 0707" and "十四天百分百退款保障(貨品必須沒有損壞,亦沒有因使用而導致的 損耗) 14-day, full refund protection (the purchased item shall be undamaged and there shall be no wear and tear because of use)" printed on the front of receipts (see sample below) are as follows:

- 1. The refund protection phrase shall be clearly printed in Chinese and English in a separate position on the front of receipts.
- 2. The Chinese and English versions of the refund protection phrase shall be printed with a font size not smaller than 10 points.
- 3. Registered shops shall not print any provisions on receipts which are in contradiction to the Refund Protection Scheme.

The above rules remain valid until otherwise notified.

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be smaller than 10 points



<u>Note 3</u>:

The following details of the sold items shall be listed on invoices or receipts:

Details of the sold item		Remarks		
i.	Description (e.g. watch), brand name, date of sale and price of the sold item	If the sold item does not have any brand name, the registered shop need not state it on the invoice or receipt.		
ii.	Place of manufacture / origin	If the registered shop does not know the place of manufacture / origin, it shall state "place of manufacture / origin unknown" on the invoice or receipt.		
iii.	Model number	If the sold item does not have any model number, the registered shop need not state it on the invoice or receipt.		
iv.	Repair and maintenance services	This requirement is only applicable to electronic products, audio-visual products, and watches and clocks.		
		If there are repair and maintenance services for the sold item, the registered shop shall state on the invoice or receipt the address(es) and telephone number(s) of the place(s) where such services are available; if there are no repair and maintenance services for the sold item, the registered shop shall state "no repair and maintenance services" on the invoice or receipt.		
v.	Functions	Functions listed in the user manual of the sold item are taken as the reference.		
		If the sold item does not have any function, the registered shop need not list them on the invoice or receipt.		
vi.	Accessories	If the sold item does not have any accessories, the registered shop need not list them on the invoice or receipt.		
vii.	Fineness, weight and/or descriptions of the sold item	This requirement is only applicable to sold items which contain fei cui and natural fei cui, diamonds, gold and gold alloy, platinum, etc (details to be listed on the invoice or receipt are subject to the types of the sold items).		

Please note that:

1. Registered shops which sell digital audio players, digital camcorders, digital cameras, mobile phones, portable multimedia players, fei cui and natural fei cui, diamonds, gold and gold alloy, platinum, etc shall comply with the requirements of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362) and its subsidiary legislation. For details of the statutory requirements, please refer to the Government's web page at



<u>http://www.legislation.gov.hk/eng/home.htm</u>. If any registered shops are suspected of violating the law, the TIC will refer their cases to the Customs and Excise Department. The above details shall be printed on invoices or receipts in Chinese.

<u>Note 4</u>:

2.

After receipt of sold items eligible for a refund, registered shops shall issue visitors or their representatives with a written acknowledgement of receipt of sold items unless a full refund is made in cash immediately. The acknowledgement of receipt of sold items, which may be a copy of the original receipt or a designated form for refund (with no requirements for its format), shall specify all of the following items:

- *1. the name, address and contact telephone number of the registered shop;*
- *2. the date of receipt of the returned item;*
- 3. information on the returned item, including its description (e.g. watch), brand name and quantity, the receipt number and the date of purchase;
- 4. *the refunded amount;*
- 5. the method of refund such as through the credit card or bank account of the payer, or through the receiving agent; and
- 6. *the signature of the authorised person of the registered shop or the company stamp.*

The above rules remain valid until otherwise notified.

February 2016