

'Direct flight to Central Asia could lift HK tourism'

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The executive director of the Travel Industry Council Fanny Yeung said on Wednesday she believes the planned launch of a direct flight linking Hong Kong and Kazakhstan would further boost the city's tourism industry.

Her remarks came as Cathay Pacific announced it would start operating the route to Kazakhstan's biggest city, Almaty, in the first quarter of next year, significantly cutting the travel time between the two places.

Speaking at a press conference on the upcoming International Travel Expo (ITE), Yeung said the council is pleased to learn about the flight arrangements to tap into the Central Asian market as the region is relatively unexplored.

"We found that the tourism resources [there] are very, very interesting and the scenery is beautiful as well, so definitely it will attract Hong Kong people," she said, adding that the council had led a delegation to the region in 2024.

"Prior to Covid, we [actually] had direct flights to Kazakhstan, but since Covid [they] stopped and didn't reopen again. I am quite positive that it will help us to explore this new destination for Hong Kong residents once the direct flight is available," she told reporters.

Regarding the SAR's tourism outlook, Yeung said she is confident that Hong Kong could welcome about 53 million visitors this year, despite risks arising from the Iran war that has reduced demand from long-haul markets.

"We have less tourists from the long-haul markets, but on the other hand, Hong Kong is also very attractive to mainlanders," she said.

Asia's annual flagship travel fair ITE is set to return to Hong Kong from June 11 to 14 at the Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event is expected to attract over 500 exhibitors from 66 countries and regions, including newcomers Uganda, Mongolia, and Peru.

Edited by Aaron Tam

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