

Ombudsman probes enhanced management of countryside ancillary tourist facilities to pursue "tourism is everywhere" (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Mr Jack Chan, today (May 29) announced the launch of a direct investigation operation to examine the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government's management of countryside ancillary tourist facilities to align with its efforts to develop green tourism and the pursuit of the ideas of "tourism is everywhere" and "sightseeing all over Hong Kong".

In recent years, the Government has actively promoted green tourism to attract visitors from around the world to explore Hong Kong's natural landscapes. Some hiking routes, such as Dragon's Back, have been hailed by international media as the best in the city. Country parks and ancillary facilities, including hiking trails, toilets, rubbish bins, emergency distress facilities, drinking water stations, and signage, are primarily managed and maintained by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), while the Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Home Affairs Department are also engaged in related work. In addition, the AFCD, in collaboration with the Tourism Commission, has implemented the Enhancement of Hiking Trails programme since 2018 to improve the ancillary facilities of hiking trails in country parks, which are popular with and appealing to tourists.

However, the Office has noted from media reports the relevant departments' failure to properly manage and maintain ancillary tourist facilities in countryside areas. Issues include inadequate toilets and poor hygiene conditions, and scattered and rarely updated information on transportation and location of toilets and water filling stations in country parks. Moreover, there have been incidents where damaged hiking trails remained unrepaired and neglected, and fallen trees were unremoved for months after typhoons, extremely heavy rain or landslides, posing potential risks to hikers and visitors. Furthermore, the Office has from time to time received complaints about the slow progress of countryside facility maintenance and insufficient supporting resources, such as delays in rain shelter repairs and insufficient publicity for visitor centres.

Mr Chan said, "Proper management of countryside ancillary tourist facilities not only helps protect the safety of hikers and visitors but also enhances the outdoor experience for members of the public and tourists, thereby strengthening Hong Kong's appeal as a green tourism hotspot. I have noticed that, for example, during the recent Labour Day Golden Week with many

people and tourists travelling to the countryside to enjoy the beautiful mountains and coastal scenery of country parks, problems such as garbage accumulation and traffic congestion emerged. I consider it essential to examine how to improve the ancillary facilities in the countryside, so as to ensure that all these facilities function effectively and are maintained in safe and good condition, and information for visitors is accurate and clear. In this light, I have decided to launch a direct investigation operation to examine the work of the AFCD and other relevant departments on the management and maintenance of countryside ancillary tourist facilities, the dissemination of information on hiking activities and countryside facilities, particularly safety-related information for hikers, as well as the division of responsibilities and co-ordination among different departments regarding the management and maintenance of relevant facilities. Where necessary, pertinent recommendations will be made for improvement."

The Ombudsman welcomes views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by June 29, 2025:

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