



Honoring past

Guzang Festival connects people of Miao ethnic group with their roots LIFE, PAGE 9

Services see first growth in five months

BUSINESS, PAGE 5



Protests in US

People show their anger over attacks on Asian Americans

WORLD, PAGE 8

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Travel links with SARs to fully reopen

All curbs on trips between mainland and HK, Macao to be lifted on Monday

By WILLIAM XU and XI TIANQI in Hong Kong

After three years of waiting, travelers between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong and Macao can enjoy quarantine-free, quota-free and test-free cross-border travel starting from Monday, with all checkpoints due to be reopened.

Representatives of various sectors in Hong Kong hailed it as a great boost to the revival of Hong Kong's economy, the deepening of cross-border exchanges and bonds, and Hong Kong's further integration into the nation's development.

According to a circular issued on Friday by the State Council's Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism — the country's top COVID-19 control task force — cross-border travel between the mainland and the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao would fully resume from Monday.

The current quota limit for Hong Kong-mainland travel will be scrapped and passengers will no longer need to make reservations before crossing the border. Group tours between the mainland and Hong Kong and Macao would also resume from Monday.

Travelers from Hong Kong and Macao to the mainland will no longer need to provide proof of a negative test if they haven't traveled to Taiwan or overseas over the past seven days. If they have recently traveled to Taiwan or overseas, they will still need to provide proof of a negative test within 48 hours, the circular said.

From Jan 8, Hong Kong resumed initial stage quarantine-free travel with the mainland, and capped the daily quota of cross-border passengers at 75,000. Currently, eight border control points have reopened so far.

At a news conference on Friday following the national task force's announcement, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu said that all of the city's checkpoints with the mainland will be reopened.

Hong Kong will end the COVID-test requirement for all mainland visitors on the same day. The city will also drop the rapid antigen test for travelers from Macao, as well as the COVID-19 vaccination requirement for overseas and Taiwan-inbound passengers.

Data from Ctrip, an online travel platform, showed that searches for Hong Kong and Macao as destinations increased more than three-fold immediately after the full resumption arrangement was announced, and page views for tour products to the two cities increased 1.8 times. The platform soon launched nearly 100 group travel products for Hong Kong and Macao.

Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, director of the Macao Government Tourism Office, estimated that many mainland tour groups will arrive in the city as soon as the first day of the full travel resumption. She revealed that the office plans to give away 120,000 air tickets this year to attract visitors from the Chinese mainland, Taiwan and overseas regions.

Lei Wai-nong, secretary for economy and finance in Macao, said the city aims to attract about 40 million visitors this year, which is similar to the number in 2019.

Li Lei contributed to the story.

Contact the writers at williamxu@chinadailyhk.com

Inside

See more, page 2

FROM THE FRONT LINE | GUANGDONG

Border volunteers win travelers' praise

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Gu Junsong always refuses the hongbao, or red envelopes, containing small amounts of money, given by Hong Kong compatriots after he has helped them at the Futian Exit-Entry Port in Futian district of Shenzhen, Guangdong province.

"Although hongbao is just a small gift during the Chinese New Year, we are volunteers and should set a good image," said Gu, who is a captain of a volunteer team at Futian Exit-Entry Port bordering Hong Kong.

"I felt pride and happiness when the Hong Kong compatriots said 'thank you' after I offered them a helping hand," he said.

Gu has worked as a volunteer for 17 years.

According to Yi Min, secretary-general of Futian District Volunteer Association, every day since Jan 8 around 130 to 140 volunteers have worked on the front line of Futian Exit-Entry Port.

Most of the volunteers are university students and local residents, and more than half can speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Hakka and English, she said.

More than half are under 45 years old and have worked in other exit-entry ports, major railway stations and airports and transportation hubs on the mainland, Yi said.

Yi said her association is still recruiting volunteers to work on the front line of exit-entry ports in the city as the number of passengers and tourists has soared after the country optimized its COVID-19 measures.

See **Volunteers**, page 3

Fun on ice



Ice and snow sports enthusiasts play curling at a national wetland park in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, on Friday. China is celebrating the first anniversary of the successful hosting of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics on Saturday. CHEN XIAODONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hello Hong Kong's vitality boost gets applause

By WANG YUKE in Hong Kong jenny@chinadailyhk.com

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government's generosity in lavishing international tourists with a banquet of perks and benefits has gained the resounding approval of people across multiple industries, who anticipate an "explosive" increase in business activities and an upbeat mood.

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu announced at the launch ceremony of the Hello Hong Kong campaign on Thursday that the HKSAR government will give away 500,000 round-trip airline tickets to the city, along with an array of special offers and vouchers to lure tourists from across the globe to visit Hong Kong.

The campaign complements a selection of major trade shows and conventions, as well as sports and arts events.

The 500,000 airline tickets mean "500,000 opportunities," said the Hotels, Food & Beverage Employees Association. "Upon their arrival in Hong Kong, the 500,000 lucky tourists will be regaled with the city's 'cosmopolitan, hospitable and enigmatic' ambience," the group said.

The free pickings and perks furnished by the SAR government are an optimal vehicle to reshape the city's likability and positive narrative, which will prompt an affinity and confidence in visitors to the city, said Allen Shi Lop-tak, president of

the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong. He said he expects an "explosive" barrage of business opportunities to land in the city.

The scrapping of the requirement for cross-border travelers to have a negative PCR COVID-19 test and travel quotas to take effect from Monday, which was announced by Lee on Friday, stirred exhilaration in Hong Kong and the mainland, where people voiced their euphoria on social media.

Having weathered a long separation from her daughter who worked for a law firm in Hong Kong, a mother surnamed Song from Beijing

heaved a sigh of relief at the knowledge of the campaign. "The gifts and goodies offered by the campaign, and the upcoming full border reopening are so exciting," she said.

Bruce Pang, chief economist and head of research at JLL Greater China, said, "The measures are bound to lubricate the mobility of people commuting between Hong Kong and the mainland for trade and logistic collaborations, which will expedite the resurrection of Hong Kong's import and export market that thrives on predictability and efficiency."

"Hong Kong's entrepot trade (or re-export trade) between the main-

land and rest of the world and the city's overall export volume will see an exceptional rebound," Pang said.

In addition to the anticipated recovery in tourism, catering and hospitality, retail and recreational sectors, the city's financial services and business services — another two pillar industries of Hong Kong — will surely recover and get a renewed spring in their step, as professionals from the Chinese mainland and abroad will bring their entrepreneurial spirit into the city, he said.

Lauding the government's campaign as a key step to incentivize tourists' consumption and therefore revive the city's economy, Johnny Hon Sei-hoe, the honorary consul for Grenada in Hong Kong and founder of the Global Group, said that if the government can tap into the agency and influence of celebrities on social media for promotional campaigns as Dubai and Singapore have done, it will help to communicate Hong Kong's allure far and wide. "Hong Kong should take a cue from the two cities, stepping out the outmoded zone," Hon said.

He said he expects the private sector to invite high-profile guests and speakers with "pulling power" to grace upcoming conferences and events. Those influential figures are already attracting more visitors, Hon added.

Su Zihan contributed to the story



A promotion video featuring Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu is broadcast at the launch ceremony of the Hello Hong Kong campaign on Thursday. ANDY CHONG / CHINA DAILY

IMF foresees sustainable, high-quality development

By ZHOU LANXU in Beijing zhoulanxu@chinadaily.com.cn

China's economy is not only set to rebound this year but can achieve sustainable, high-quality development with proper policy moves, the International Monetary Fund said on Friday after an annual consultation with China.

Experts at the IMF stressed the need for China to avoid a premature tightening of macroeconomic policies and accelerate key structural reforms as multifaceted challenges remain.

They made the remarks in the Staff Report for the 2022 Article IV Consultation on Friday. An IMF staff team prepared the report following discussions with Chinese officials on economic developments and policies, which ended in November.

"We have seen rapid improvement in mobility (in China) since late last year, which will translate into a

rebound in private consumption," Joong Shik Kang, deputy mission chief for China at IMF's Asia and Pacific Department, told China Daily after the report was released.

Based on this, the IMF has revised up China's growth forecast for 2023 to 5.2 percent, from 4.4 percent in October, Kang said.

"The recovery is good news not only for China but also for the rest of the world," he said, as IMF estimates suggest that for every percentage point of higher growth in China, activity in other economies rises on average by 0.3 percentage point.

But downside risks around this outlook remain, including a slower-than-expected global recovery and deepening stress in the real estate sector, Kang said.

The report suggested that further action is needed to promote market-based restructuring of the real estate sector.

According to the report, a package

of reforms that includes closing productivity gaps between State-owned enterprises and private companies, raising the retirement age and reorienting fiscal resources toward strengthening the social safety net can lift China's level of real GDP by around 2.5 percent by 2027.

This implies that the country's average GDP growth rate can be maintained at about 4.75 percent between 2023-27, indicating that sustainable, high-quality growth "is well within China's reach" with the right policies, the report said.

The report came in as part of the cooperation between China and the IMF. Under Article IV, the IMF holds bilateral discussions with its members to assess their economic health and address financial risks.

China holds 30.48 billion special drawing rights, which is equivalent to \$41.37 billion, as IMF member quotas. The SDR is a supplementary international reserve asset.

While China has actively participated in the formulation of international currency, financial rules and IMF lending to member economies, the institution has provided a great number of suggestions for the country's macroeconomic management and structural reform, according to the Foreign Ministry.

This year it is advisable for China to retain a neutral fiscal policy, Kang said. Fiscal policy will be more effective if the government reorients fiscal resources from infrastructure toward households — for example by increasing unemployment insurance benefits — which will help ensure a durable consumption rebound.

Monetary policy accommodation is necessary amid muted inflationary pressure, he added. However, should COVID-19 containment adjustments lead to a faster-than-expected rise in demand and inflationary pressure, monetary policy will need to adapt quickly.

