

Press Release

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PolyU Seeks to Enhance the Role of Travel Trade in Reducing Tourism's Carbon Footprint

The School of Hotel and Tourism Management (SHTM) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) today (17 September) announced the findings of a study on “Enhancing the Role of the Travel Trade in Reducing Tourism's Carbon Footprint”. The study found that though senior management and owners of travel agencies are aware of tourism's contribution to carbon emissions, the limited provision of carbon efficient products is hindering their frontline staff from promoting low carbon tourism to their clients.

The study also found that frontline travel trade staff are equally concerned about the environmental issues, but many of them felt they are not well equipped and qualified to make knowledgeable suggestions for their clients.

Funded by the Council for Sustainable Development of the Hong Kong SAR Government, the study is targeted for frontline travel trade staff in Hong Kong, with the goal of developing a series of professional development programmes to enhance their knowledge, awareness and understanding of tourism's contribution to climate change and how they, as key informants, can influence tourist behaviour.

Dr Barry Mak, Project Leader and Assistant Professor of SHTM, observed, “The Hong Kong travel trade has a general lack of awareness of its contribution to carbon emission and the global climate change issue. As the travel agents and tour operators in Hong Kong are considered as one of the key informants of tourism, it is important to draw their awareness, so that they can play an active role in providing relevant advice and shaping tourists' travel behaviour.”

The project was carried out in two stages. Stage one involved in-depth interviews with owners and senior management of travel agencies in Hong Kong and representatives of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), and detailed questionnaires to over 600 frontline outbound travel trade staff. Senior management and owners believed tourism is a significant contributor to climate change and felt the sector has a role to play in mitigation. However, they felt the responsibility also rely on suppliers to provide more carbon efficient products and the Government should give a lead in tackling the issue.

Among the 632 questionnaires received, the vast majority of the respondents (86.6%) did not receive any formal training about climate change, carbon emissions and their responsibility as a travel trade professional. More than half of them (59.3%) were concerned about environmental issues, familiar with the terminology associated with climate change and they readily admitted their knowledge was limited. 16.6% of them felt they had profound knowledge of climate change while only 2.1% indicated a deep understanding of the issue.

The study also found that the frontline travel trade staff's low awareness and lack of knowledge resulted in ill-informed opinions about climate change and tourism's role in it. Therefore, many frontline staff felt unqualified to inform clients, and they saw the need for formal training in this regard.

In the second stage of the project, travel agencies' owners, senior management, and frontline travel trade staff were invited to training workshops where they were introduced on various tactics and strategies to fill their knowledge gap and constraints.

“Relative training must begin with creating awareness on climate change and introducing its significance for tourism. The training must also emphasise that frontline staff can make a difference. They have to be informed of the range of actions available to them, and to be educated about taking a more proactive role in encouraging their clients to modify their behaviours. Furthermore, senior management will need to be more active in raising the climate change issue to suppliers,” said Professor Bob McKercher, Project Member and Professor of SHTM.”

The project team has developed a digitalised educational toolkit with topics and findings introduced in the training workshops, as well as tactics and strategies offered. The educational toolkit will be provided to TIC for their future use in conducting similar training workshops for other stakeholders and industry members.

“With the development of this toolkit, it will contribute to a more sustainable development of the travel trade industry not only in Hong Kong but also worldwide,” Dr Mak said.

PolyU's School of Hotel and Tourism Management is a world-leading provider of hospitality and tourism education. It was ranked No. 2 internationally among hotel and tourism schools based on research and scholarship, according to a study published in the *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* in November 2009.

With 65 academic staff drawing from 20 countries and regions, the School offers programmes at levels ranging from Higher Diploma to Ph.D. Currently a member of the UNWTO Knowledge Network, the School was bestowed the McCool Breakthrough Award by the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (I-CHRIE) recognising its breakthrough in the form of its teaching and research hotel – Hotel ICON – the heart of the School's innovative approach to hospitality and tourism education.



*In their study, **Dr Barry Mak**, Project Leader and Assistant Professor of PolyU SHTM (right), and **Professor Bob McKercher**, Project Member and Professor of PolyU SHTM, have developed an educational toolkit for travel trade staff which aims to enhance their knowledge of climate change, so as to promote low carbon tourism to travellers.*



Dr Barry Mak remarked that this study helps the travel trade industry to understand more about their role in reducing tourism's carbon footprint, and to take a more proactive role in encouraging their clients to modify tourists' travel behaviours.

Press contact : Dr Barry Mak, Assistant Professor
School of Hotel and Tourism Management, PolyU

Telephone : (852) 3400 2269

E-mail : barry.mak@polyu.edu.hk