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\$6.3 billion netted, thanks to tourists

HONGKONG'S tourist industry collected more than \$6.3 billion in foreign currency last year. Unofficial Legislative Councillor David Newbigging told the Hongkong Tourist Association (HKTA) annual membership party yesterday.

About 60 per cent or \$3.8 billion came from HKTA members who are mostly shopkeepers and restaurant owners, he said.

The net contribution of the tourist industry was important to both the gross domestic product and to a more favourable balance of trade for Hongkong, Mr Newbigging said.

The next two years might be difficult, he said, but a strong association like the HKTA could show a real contribution by coordinating members' activities and maintaining a healthy growth in their businesses.

He said the medium and long term prospects for the industry are "ever improving", judging by the community's desire to invest in new hotel rooms.

He called on members to improve their competitiveness and increase the variety of goods and services they offer, while always ensuring that courtesy is their watchword.

The HKTA yesterday released figures showing that Hongkong's tourist maintained a high growth rate of 25 per cent in 1979.

Per capita expenditure by tourists in Hongkong increased by 18.5 per cent to \$2,677, which was more than double the nine per cent growth in 1978, the association said.

Hongkong received 2,213,209 visitors last year, according to the HKTA figures.

The higher spending visitors were identified by the HKTA as "non-group travellers with high disposable income, conference delegates, visitors who pursue special interests besides sightseeing and those whose tours are financed by their employers as rewards."

Australians, at about \$3,241 each, continued to be the big spenders, followed by visitors from Japan at \$3,048.

The HKTA findings also showed that 65.9 per cent of visitors' dollars were spent on shopping, 18.7 on hotel accommodation and 8.2 on restaurants outside hotels.