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# 14pc slump in handover tourists blamed on fears of no hotel rooms

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The handover proved a tourist flop with visitors down more than 14 per cent on June last year.

Figures released last night by the Tourist Association showed 789,000 people arrived last month, compared with 919,000

in June 1996. Association executive director Amy Chan Cheng Yi-yim blamed a misconception about hotel room availability.

"Despite our best efforts to assure the world that we had rooms available, many people just presumed we would be flooded with visitors in the lead-up to such an historic event," she said.

Restrictions on entry to Hong Kong imposed by Beijing in the weeks leading to the handover saw mainland arrivals drop by more than 42 per cent.

The numbers of visitors from north Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the South Pacific also dropped, although more people arrived from Taiwan and the

Americas and slightly more from south and southeast Asian countries.

The news came as it was revealed fewer than one in five people attended handover events. A *South China Morning Post* survey showed only 19 per cent took part in activities despite a packed schedule of festivities organised

by the SAR Government and pro-Beijing groups.

Event organisers yesterday blamed the weather and television, saying people might have stayed away so they could watch the celebrations on TV.

Television ratings bear this out. Stations claimed record ratings for the period.

Nearly half the population, 2.99 million, was watching television at midnight on June 30, according to AC Nielsen-SRG figures. An even higher number of viewers, 3.95 million, tuned in between 8 pm and midnight.

More than 1,000 people aged 15 to 64 took part in the *Post* survey between July 7 and 11.