

## Artful encounters

A visitor admires artwork on Tuesday at the Hong Kong Museum of Art in Tsim Sha Tsui, where three new exhibitions have opened. The shows highlight master artist Wu Guanzhong, feature Chinese paintings from the Chih Lo Lou Collection, and present folding fans from the Jing-guanlou Collection. Offering fresh perspectives with innovative displays, the exhibitions showcase the richness of Chinese art and culture. Additionally, an educational art bus will promote Wu's art in schools and engage with local communities.

ANDY CHONG / CHINA DAILY



# HK gears up for festive season

### Citywide celebrations and attractions welcome tourists for unique experiences

By WU KUNLING in Hong Kong  
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Hong Kong is gearing up for the Christmas and New Year holidays with a full slate of events to attract visitors, while interdepartmental preparations are underway, covering event and crowd management, special traffic arrangements and ways to disseminate information.

Even before the festive season kicked off, Hong Kong began to stage festive events, with decorations springing up across the city to attract holidaymakers.

Since mid-November, WinterFest — an event organized by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) — has turned Statue Square Gardens in Central into a wonderland, featuring a 20-meter-tall Christmas tree, a 360-degree immersive light show, starlight boulevard and other enchanting decorations.

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong Winter Carnival — a beloved winter tradition — has returned, transforming the Central harborfront into an amusement park with new rides and more games.

Holiday vibes are also intensifying on the opposite side of Victoria Har-

bour, with the WestK Christmas Town now in full swing in the landmark West Kowloon Cultural District.

Attractions and businesses across the city, such as at Hong Kong Disneyland, Ocean Park and the Ngong Ping 360, have rolled out special holiday events, turning the city into a sea of festive joy.

The HKTB has launched a dedicated webpage to highlight festival event arrangements, which also provides the waiting times at the city's major attractions to help visitors plan their itineraries.

Timothy Chui Ting-pong, executive director of the Hong Kong Tourism Association, told China Daily that the tourism industry's business performance during the year-end season has met expectations, adding that the recent tourism figures have given him a sense of confidence in the sector for the upcoming holidays.

Four Chinese mainland residents — Roride Luo and Piper Hu from Sichuan province, and Chubby Chen and Harvey He from Hunan province — plan to spend Christmas together in Hong Kong, drawn by the city's "strong festive atmosphere

and beautiful scenery".

"I've visited Hong Kong before but always wanted to return, specifically during the Christmas holidays," said Luo, adding that she feels excited about the city's holiday offerings.

On Tuesday, Hong Kong's South-bound Travel for Guangdong Vehicles program was officially launched, allowing approved private cars from Guangdong province to enter Hong Kong's urban area via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, with an initial daily quota of 100 vehicles.

Hong Kong Secretary for Transport and Logistics Mable Chan said she hopes those arriving by car from Guangdong will be able to enjoy Hong Kong's holiday vibes and share their experience of the Christmas and New Year events with others in the mainland.

Arrangements are in place to handle the expected holiday crowds, particularly the influx of tourists for the New Year countdown events.

On Dec 17, Chief Secretary for Administration Eric Chan Kwok-ki chaired a meeting of the interdepartmental working group on festival arrangements, at which he requested all government departments to prepare early — including by actively coordinating boundary control points and transportation and disseminating information effectively.

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao

Bridge and Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang control points will operate a 24-hour service as usual over New Year's Eve/Jan 1. Service hours at other ports on Dec 31 and Jan 1 will be announced following coordination with mainland authorities.

Public transportation operators have been advised to boost their capacity during the holiday period. The MTR Corp — Hong Kong's sole railway operator — will run most lines overnight on the eves of Christmas and New Year. After the New Year countdown events it will also extend services to and from Lo Wu station if the checkpoint's operating hours are extended.

Bus companies will also reserve sufficient vehicles and manpower, especially for cross-boundary services. For instance, after Lo Wu Station closes in the early morning of Jan 1, bus services between Sheung Shui MTR station and San Tin "yellow bus" station will be increased to facilitate passengers using the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang control point.

Police will continue to step up enforcement actions against any taxi drivers who commit offenses, including overcharging and refusing hire. Customs officers will also increase their inspections of shops to combat unfair trade practices.

Gaby Lin and Fu Yinglin contributed to the story.

## Holidays expected to boost city's tourism sector

By GABY LIN in Hong Kong  
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The upcoming Christmas and New Year holidays are expected to draw a surge of visitors to Hong Kong, giving fresh momentum to the city's tourism sector as industry insiders look to steady growth this year.

Early signs of a buoyant festive market have already surfaced with the arrival of visitors over the weekend. The special administrative region welcomed more than 1.15 million arrivals between Dec 20 and 21, according to the Immigration Department's statistics.

Non-mainland arrivals on Saturday alone hit this year's single-day high of around 48,000, underscoring Hong Kong's appeal as a top choice for both family visits and leisure travel.

The holiday travel rush has given a boost to the hospitality sector. Online travel agency Trip told China

Daily that forward bookings for hotels in Hong Kong have shown year-on-year growth, with the New Year holiday period in particular seeing a double-digit increase.

Chinese mainland travelers continue to be the largest source of inbound demand, while international arrivals are steadily increasing, according to the website.

Short-haul markets such as Thailand, Japan, and Singapore are doing well, it said, adding that long-haul markets such as the United Kingdom and Australia are also showing signs of recovery.

"This broad-based rise in non-mainland visitors points to market diversification and reinforces Hong Kong's position as a leading global destination."

Local hotel operator Nina Hospitality told China Daily that occupancy at its branches in Causeway Bay — a prime shopping district — and Wong Chuk Hang, near popular tourist attraction Ocean Park, is

expected to exceed 90 percent during the Christmas period, surpassing last year's levels.

Average room rates are also projected to rise, according to Rinoa Chan, commercial manager at the group. She said currently most bookings are from mainland visitors, while the hotels have also seen a flow of guests from Australia, the United States, and Singapore.

Chan said the hotels remain hopeful about achieving a performance on par with last year's over the Christmas and New Year holidays, while last month's fatal blaze at the Wang Fuk Court apartment complex in Tai Po may weigh on some travelers' willingness to visit Hong Kong.

Timothy Chui Ting-pong, executive director of the Hong Kong Tourism Association, said he is very optimistic about growth during this festive season.

"We already saw crowds in Tsim Sha Tsui and the streets were bustling," he said, citing that holiday

events and campaigns rolled out by the local tourism sector and the SAR government to stimulate demand have delivered notable results.

Chui highlighted that Hong Kong's mild winter temperatures and vibrant festive atmosphere are strong draws for visitors, particularly those from the mainland and across Asia.

"Beyond Christmas, the weekend leading up to New Year's Eve is also likely to mark a peak in arrivals," he added.

Fanny Yeung Shuk-fan, executive director of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, earlier projected that more than 1 million visitor arrivals will be recorded over Christmas, representing a year-on-year increase of about 10 percent. The Christmas holiday last year saw 1,137,455 total arrivals to Hong Kong, according to Immigration Department statistics.

She added that the total number of arrivals for the year is expected to exceed 49 million.

## AI supercomputing center enhances firms' efficiency, service quality

By LI XIAOYUN in Hong Kong  
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**75 percent**

of Pivotal Technologies' video production efficiency has been improved by using AI and the enhanced computing power.

Hong Kong companies deploying artificial intelligence said on Tuesday that access to the city's largest AI supercomputing center has supercharged their research and operations, thanks to its massive computing power, lower barriers to entry and international security standards.

Since coming online in December last year, the AI Supercomputing Centre located at Hong Kong's digital hub Cyberport has been an important driver of the city's technological progress, supplying high-end computing resources to universities, research institutions, and industry players.

Ricoh Hong Kong Ltd, a workplace technology provider, said after tapping the facility's services, response times for large language models were reduced by 40 percent, while efficiency in handling complex queries improved by 25 percent.

Inference costs, namely the computing resources and expenses required for each user request, dropped by about 30 percent, said Vincent Leung, the company's head of presales specialist. Service reliability and stability also improved, as data is fully processed within Hong Kong, eliminating the risk of disruptions previously associated with cross-border data handling.

Pivotal Technologies Ltd, which uses AI to generate visual content such as videos, virtual influencers and KOL (key opinion leader) for its clients' marketing and promotional purposes, also benefitted from the enhanced computing power.

Video resolution has improved, generating time has been cut by more than half, and the ability to produce four videos simultaneously has boosted overall efficiency by about 75 percent, said senior product manager Pedro Ng.

The supercomputing center offers data security and privacy protection that meets international standards — often one of the biggest concerns for corporate users, said Ronald Cheng, director of operations at KBQuest. The digital transformation consulting firm offers AIEN Chat, an enterprise-grade private AI assistant platform designed to enhance office productivity.



Crystal Fok (center), head of business development at Cyberport, poses for a group photo with representatives from local technology companies during a sharing session for the AI Supercomputing Centre project on Tuesday. LI XIAOYUN / CHINA DAILY

## Global chess players to shine at Hong Kong's historic championship

By STACY SHI in Hong Kong  
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The Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Wan Chai has been transformed into an arena for chessboards after the prestigious Hong Kong International Open Chess Championship 2025 commenced on Tuesday, featuring a historic gathering of over 300 elite players from around 30 regions worldwide.

Hosted by the Hong Kong Chess Federation, the week-long event, now in its 13th edition, boasts the largest-ever assembly of grandmasters and international masters in its history. It also marks a pioneering step by integrating

the Eastern Asia Juniors and Girls Chess Championships, creating a unique platform where veterans and young talent compete under one roof.

The lineup of players for this tournament comprises approximately 80 masters certified by the International Chess Federation (FIDE) competing for the championship title. Among them are top players such as the Chinese mainland's Peng Xiongjian, who represented the country in the FIDE World Cup 2025, and India's Abhijeet Gupta, the first player to win the Commonwealth Chess Championship five times.

The championship also serves as

a festival for the chess community. A specially organized "Meet and Greet GM" session, featuring eight grandmasters, will offer chess enthusiasts a valuable chance to interact with top players.

The historic scale of the event has generated palpable excitement among international contenders. The tournament's top-seeded player representing Germany, Maxim Vavulin, participating in his first major event in Hong Kong, shared that he is facing the field with a focused mindset. "I don't have any specific expectations. So for me, it's more like to see how well I can compete in such a strong field," he said.

He praised the organizers for

their efforts in promoting chess, highlighting the media attention and side events like the "Meet and Greet GM" session as crucial for the sport's growth.

Vavulin also offered positive impressions of the event itself: "The venue is excellent and centrally located. So far, the organization has been smooth."

Outside the tournament hall, he also expressed fascination with Hong Kong's unique cultural blend, a mix of Chinese and Western influences evident in its chess community and cityscape. "I will definitely try to have a look at the city, try some local cuisine ... I'm actually also here on New Year's Eve, so let's see how

it's celebrated in Hong Kong."

Two teenage contenders from the mainland discussed their aspirations with a blend of determination and analytical calm.

Twelve-year-old Xue Tianhao, a Woman FIDE Master and three-time World Youth Chess Champion who is considering becoming a professional player, said she hopes to play her best during the tournament.

"My main goal is to raise my rating," said 14-year-old International Master Jiang Haochen, a four-time winner of the Li Chengzhi Cup National Youth Chess Championship.

He said his focus is on achieving

a performance-based norm — a crucial milestone toward earning the grandmaster title. "I believe I have what it takes, but with such a strong lineup here, I know it won't be easy," Jiang said.

Discussing their preparations to challenge higher-rated opponents, Xue emphasized pre-tournament groundwork and increased training volume, while Jiang said he focused on maintaining optimal mental condition.

Both players were impressed by the tournament's international atmosphere and facilities designed for player interaction. "The facilities feel very professional with many spaces for players to discuss games," they observed, acknowledging that such large-scale events significantly elevate the profile of chess.