

Ease travel curbs for integration

Industry executives hail mega bridge, examine next steps to improve Bay Area's connectivity

By PRIME SARMIENTO, CHAI HUA and ZHOU MO in Macao

With major infrastructure projects in the Pearl River Delta region now in place, the next step is to strengthen software integration in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to take it to even greater heights.

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy (CTA), made the call at a panel discussion organized by *China Daily* in conjunction with the Global Tourism Economy Forum in Macao. The two-day event, which ran from Oct 23 to 24, was hosted by the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture of the Macao Special Administrative Region Government.

There is a need to design the inter-connection of law, regulation and policies, such as granting permission for vehicles to use the newly launched Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB), mutual cross-border identification recognition and greater convenience in visa application, Dai urged. He stressed that if people feel inconvenient to

travel, the benefits of transportation connection would fail to materialize.

The HZMB, which reduces travel time from Hong Kong to Zhuhai and Macao, is expected to bring in more goods and people and develop the Bay Area, according to the top industry executives on the panel.

Ding Zuohong, chairman of the board of directors of Shanghai-based conglomerate Yuexing Group, called the launch of the HZMB a "historic moment".

He said the bridge will grow the tourism industry in the Bay Area and urged the governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao to "seize the opportunities" generated by the inflow of more people and goods.

Su Zhanhang, vice-president of hospitality and leisure company Chimelong Group, has seen how reduced travel time can boost a tourism-related business.

For example, the opening of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link in September has made it easier for people to visit Chimelong Group's theme parks in Guangzhou and Zhuhai.



From left to right: Zhou Li, editorial board member of China Daily Group and publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily Asia Pacific; Zhang Haitao, vice-chairman and president of CITIC Capital Holdings; Tracy Wong, president of Ronghui (Fujian) Group; Sam Wang, cofounder and president of Beijing Sky Limit Entertainment Group; Pansy Ho Chiu-king, vice-chairman and secretary-general of the Global Tourism Economy Forum; Ding Zuohong, chairman of the board of directors of Yuexing Group; Wang Wenyin, chairman of Amer International Group; Su Zhanhang, vice-president of Chimelong Group; and Zheng Hongxia, general manager of the Tourism Business Management Center of OCT Group. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY

With the opening of the HZMB, the commute time from Macao and Hong Kong to the two Chimelong theme parks has now been reduced to less than one hour, Su said.

Wang Wenyin, chairman of Shenzhen-based industrial firm Amer International Group, believes the Bay Area will become "the world's growth engine in the 21st century".

Wang pinned high hopes on Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong and Macao — the four key cities in the Bay Area. He said these cities will help the region grow into a world-class economic powerhouse.

Such optimism is not unfounded. As Zhou Li, China Daily Group editorial board member and China Daily Asia Pacific's publisher and editor-in-chief, noted during the discussion, the Bay Area's GDP surpassed 10 trillion yuan (\$1.44 trillion) in 2017. This accounts for roughly 12 percent of the country's total economy, worth

over 80 trillion yuan.

Zhou, who moderated the panel discussion, cited tourism as a key industry in the Bay Area. He said the city cluster's tourism revenues in 2017 hit more than 1.1 trillion yuan, while air passenger traffic reached 200 million.

Zheng Hongxia, general manager at the Tourism Business Management Center of Shenzhen-listed OCT Group Co, said the Bay Area's development will lead to more landmark tourism projects.

She said growth in the tourism sector will also boost the growth of related industries, including creative and services-related businesses. This, in turn, will draw more skilled workers and entrepreneurs.

Wang Lei, cofounder and president of Beijing Sky Limit Entertainment Group, said the Bay Area is distinct due to "its own unique geographical position and historical

background. It's located where eastern and Western cultures converge."

"For the region, there's no lack of cultural elements, which is highly important for the development of the tourism economy," he said.

Zhang Haitao, vice-chairman and president of investment firm CITIC Capital Holdings, said the Bay Area's development requires not just connection but also integration.

Zhang said fresh opportunities will arise if the Bay Area differentiates itself from the world's other bay economies.

Huang Danqing, president of Ronghui (Fujian) Group Co, said the real estate company plans to invest in the Bay Area's green construction and culture industries. The technological advantage of the Bay Area is also a welcome boost, Huang added.

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China-EU tourism flies higher

By PRIME SARMIENTO

Shanghai-based businesswoman Jane Jie Sun and her husband decided to take their children to Italy during this year's summer holiday season.

For the CEO of online travel services provider Ctrip.com International, visiting museums, galleries and historic sites will "give our children a greater learning experience".

Sun is just one of a growing number of Chinese travelers who head to Europe, attracted by the continent's diverse attractions such as historic sites, beach resorts and upscale fashion boutiques.

"Chinese travelers have a special (attraction) for Europe. If we look outside of Asia, Europe is the No 1

destination for Chinese tourists," Sun said in her keynote address at the Global Tourism Economy Forum (GTEF) in Macao.

The Oct 23-24 event was hosted by the Secretariat for Social Affairs and Culture of the Macao Special Administrative Region Government.

The theme for this year's GTEF was Strategic Partnership in a New Era, Rising Momentum for a Shared Future, and it featured the European Union (EU) as its partner region.

Sun said most of the Chinese tourists to Europe opt for customized tours. These are also affluent tourists, with each traveler spending an average of 2,500 yuan (\$360) a day. Sun said most Chinese travelers stay in Europe for about 12 days.

Apart from Europe's attractions,

the easing of visa restrictions and the increase in direct flights to Europe from Chinese cities has contributed to Europe's appeal to Chinese tourists, Sun said. She cited several European countries that have "proactively lifted visa restrictions" — such as Russia, Ukraine and Albania — in order to encourage more Chinese tourists. She hopes more European countries will follow suit.

According to the *Asia Tourism Trends 2018* report issued by the UN World Tourism Organization and the Global Tourism Economy Research Centre, tourism has become a "major element" of China and the EU's diplomatic relations ever since China became the world's top outbound market in 2012.

The report said some 5.7 million

Chinese tourists visited the EU, accounting for 5 percent of China's outbound travel in 2016. Most of these tourists went to France, Italy, Russia, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Greater air connectivity encouraged more Chinese tourists to visit Europe. There are now 76 direct air routes between China and Europe, with the number of monthly average flights hitting 2,600. This is double the figure quoted in 2007.

Qian Jiannong, chairman and president of Fosun Tourism & Cultural Group, expects an "explosive growth" in Chinese leisure tourists to Europe thanks to favorable factors like easing of visa restrictions and increased direct flights.

Fosun Tourism & Cultural Group

is a subsidiary of the Shanghai-based conglomerate Fosun International.

Qian said the ongoing EU-China Tourism Year, a bilateral initiative which seeks to increase visitor flows and investments in both China and the EU, has helped to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties.

Alexis Tam Chon-weng, Macao's secretary for social affairs and culture and GTEF's executive chairman, said GTEF will help in "building extensive connectivity for tourism and economic cooperation between China and EU member states".

In his closing remarks, Tam said GTEF will continue "to build new avenues and bridges among countries and regions, and facilitate collaborative partnerships between the public and private sectors".