

18th August, 2020

**"Questionnaire on Ecotourism in Tung Chung" Found 60% Respondents
Worry about Negative Impacts on Environment by Tourist Influx
Green Power Advocates Comprehensive Green Planning to Seize
Ecotourism Potential under the Pandemic Challenge**

Tung Chung has a long history of settlement that can be traced back to the Sung Dynasty. Apart from ancient villages, there are quite a lot of cultural and religious artefacts from the old days, such as Tung O Ancient Trail, Tung Chung Fort, and Lo Hon Buddhist Monastery. Tung Chung is also an area of rich ecological resources, supported by the large natural Tung Chung River. However, as the Tung Chung New Town Extension work is underway, the present landscape will inevitably experience drastic changes because Tung Chung River valley is included in the western development plan. In addition, a proposal to promote ecotourism in the Tung Chung New Town has also been tabled by the government. In view of this, **Green Power** conducted a questionnaire survey on Ecotourism in Tung Chung previously and found that while most respondents agreed that Tung Chung has the potential to develop ecotourism, as many as 60% of the public fear that the development may threaten local environment. 35% of the respondents have participated in ecotourism in Tung Chung in the past. **Henry Lui, Senior Conservation Manager of Green Power**, welcomed the proposal of developing ecotourism in Tung Chung, adding that conservation measures and education must be put in place at the same time.

Green Power announced the results of Questionnaire Survey of Ecotourism in Tung Chung⁽¹⁾ today. Most of the respondents agreed that Tung Chung has the potential to develop ecotourism, with over 80% found its ecology (e.g. Tung Chung River), natural landscape (e.g. East Phoenix Waterfall) and outdoor facilities (e.g. Tung O Ancient Trail) attractive. On the other hand, over 70% and 50% of respondents found the historical relics (e.g. Tung Chung Fort) and religious culture (e.g. Lo Hon Buddhist Monastery) attractive respectively. The top three most well-known ecotourism sites are Tung Chung Fort, Ngong Ping Trail and Tung Chung River.

Among the respondents, only 35% have participated in ecotourism in Tung Chung. Over 50% thought that information on ecotourism and groups that organize tours were difficult to access. Lui commented that in general the public was aware of the rich ecotourism resources in

Tung Chung but participation was low. He suggested that more ecotourism activities can be organized by the government and different groups in view of the increasing demand on local tourism under the pandemic. Ecotourism may benefit the local environment by minimizing adverse impacts brought by the influx of tourists.

Almost 90% of the respondents agreed that extending the new town near Tung Chung River while promoting ecotourism would alter the environment. More than 60% expressed worries about negative impacts. 70% feared that “the tranquil environment would be damaged” and “human activities would exacerbate interference with the ecology (e.g. clam digging and fish catching)”. Lui pointed out that past lessons have shown us new town development and too much visitors would invite more damage than benefit to the environment. The government must prioritize conservation and regulation as it plans for ecotourism development, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas. Policy is needed to ban irresponsible “ecotour” operators and regain public confidence in genuine eco-tourism.

The survey found that the public was generally agreed with the principles of “stringent regulation of inappropriate behaviors that cause damage to the environment and ecology” and “designing facilities that address local environmental and community needs”, each receiving support from 60% and 45% of the respondents. On the other hand, only slightly more than 10% of respondents agreed with the principle of “bringing economic benefit for the local community”. More than 90% were willing to pay less than \$200 to participate in ecotourism, while 60% were only willing to pay less than \$100. Lui remarked that contrary to public understanding, economic benefit is also an important element that supports the development of ecotourism. Economic benefit provides incentive for the local community to support ecotourism as well as preserving, maintaining and managing the local resources. Therefore, different to the usual consumptive tourism, participants may need to pay a higher cost for the more sustainable ecotourism that integrates conservation with community development.

Lui commended that the survey showed that public support on conservation of Tung Chung River was strong. 80-90% of the respondents agreed that different measures should be adopted to protect Tung Chung River and the estuary while promoting ecotourism in Tung Chung. These included restoration of damaged habitats, setting up of conservation areas (e.g. River Park Reserve), and capping visitor number, etc. Lui concluded that Tung Chung River is the last remaining large natural river in Hong Kong. With proper protection and management, developing ecotourism would certainly help improve the landscape and ecological environment.

Exploring Ecotourism Potential Together

As part of the three-year conservation programme **In-To Tung Chung River**, supported by the **Hong Kong International Airport Environment Fund**, **Green Power** organized an online forum on Tung Chung River Conservation and Development earlier to explore the opportunities and challenges of developing ecotourism in Tung Chung. Ecotourism is the theme of this year's programme.

Guests attending the online forum included: **Dr. CHEUNG Ting On Lewis, Associate Head of Department & Associate Professor of Department of Social Sciences, The Education University of Hong Kong; Mr. Derek TSE, Chief Advisor of Eco Travel Limited / EcoGuide Assessor / Committee Member of Association For Environmental Education, Hong Kong; Mr. LEE Chun Fai, Manager (Camps), Hong Kong Playground Association Tung Chung Camp;** and representatives from **the Civil Engineering and Development Department, the Drainage Services Department and the Water Supplies Department.**

Dr. Cheung valued ecotourism as a low environmental impact tourism model, “In ecotourism, the number of visitors is regulated and the tour guide takes up the role of a watchman to alert and correct any misbehavior of the visitors that may cause damage to the environment. Essentially, ecotourism operators have to sustain the natural environment while generating income from it. Ecotourism also put education at the heart which distinguishes itself from conventional mass tourism.” **Tse** followed by expressing the wish of the industry and the government in promoting local green tourism against the challenge posed by the pandemic, but added that “comprehensive planning is necessary. Special care must be paid to the carrying capacity of the potential sites. Only then can we protect the environment through ecotourism.”

Lee, who has been organizing outdoor activities in Tung Chung, shared the first-hand experience of campers. Passion is always nurtured in the beauty of nature. Lee suggested that appreciation and knowledge are both key directions in developing ecotourism.

Representative from the Civil Engineering and Development Department explained the government's plan in protecting Tung Chung River, which included the delineation of 20-30 metres of the river bank as nature reserve and restoring the artificial channel as River Park. The future River Park will come under the management of the Drainage Services Department.

Representative from the department said that the River Park would allow the public to enjoy “water-friendly culture” and appreciate the ecological value of natural river, which also serves flood-control purpose during heavy rains. Ecological tours would be organized as part of the public education effort. The Water Supplies Department official then shared their experience in holding public activities. Through introducing water services facilities and their operation, the public learn more about the precious water resources and would become a stronger ally in protecting our water resources together.

⁽¹⁾ The questionnaire survey on Ecotourism in Tung Chung was carried out from 3rd January to 31th March, 2020, targeting Hong Kong residents above the age of 18. The survey was delivered both on the street and online with the same set of questions. Street interviews were conducted in Tung Chung, with successful completion of 123 questionnaires. For online questionnaires, 689 effective responses were received. Among all 812 respondents, 138 were Tung Chung residents.

** Special thanks to students major in Geography and Resources Management from the College of International Education, Hong Kong Baptist University who assisted in the conducting of all street questionnaire survey and part of the online questionnaire survey.*

Tung Chung River

Tung Chung River is the last remaining natural river in Hong Kong which retains much of its pristine landscape from the headwater to the estuary and the bay. Numerous precious fish species inhabit in the premium water, including the rare Beijiang Thick-lipped Barb. A large area of natural mangrove and mudflat lies at the estuary which is home to many important creatures. Further out in Tung Chung Bay waters is the breeding and nursing grounds for Horseshoe Crab, seahorses, pipefish and other commercially valuable fishes.

“In-To Tung Chung River” programme

In-To Tung Chung River is a three-year programme fully supported by the Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund with the objective of engaging the public in “saving our own river” with collaboration among green groups, government departments and community groups. The concept of holistic river basin management is advocated to conserve Tung Chung River and its ecosystem services more comprehensively.

One key project is to build a database of Tung Chung River ecology by collective efforts of citizen scientists who participate in ecological survey and regular monitoring. A public platform will be created to facilitate exchange between the public and the government. The public can learn more about river conservation and related measures by the government (such as the River Park proposal in Tung Chung New Town Extension and ecotourism in Tung Chung) and have



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the chance to express their opinion. In addition, a series of guided tours and workshops will be held for the public to explore and protect the ecology and hydrology of Tung Chung River.

Organizer: Green Power

Fully Supported by: The Hong Kong International Airport Environmental Fund

Supporting Organizations: The Civil Engineering and Development Department, the Drainage Services Department, and the Water Supplies Department

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