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**Report Highlights:**

Bite size local news, Post reports and activity summaries wrapped by ATO Hong Kong. In this issue: ATO Hong Kong Launches Branding Video Campaign on Social Media; Hong Kong Workforce Sees Biggest Decline in Decades; Passenger Numbers at Macau Airport Exceeded 750,000 in First Quarter; Hong Kong Bars and Restaurants Boosted by Rugby Sevens; Hong Kong Businesses Suffered as Nearly 860,000 Residents Left Over Easter Holidays; Macau Restaurants Win Accolades; Labor Shortages Forcing Macau Hotels to Slash Services; Hong Retail Sales Surged as Tourism Returns; Macau Tourism Programs Attract Visitors Around the World; Hong Kong Customs Seized Smuggled Goods Worth \$1.4 million.

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

wrapped by ATO Hong Kong

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## ATO Hong Kong Launches Branding Video Campaign on Social Media

Looking to continue building the Delicious USA brand and increase Hong Kong consumer awareness of U.S. food ingredients, ATO partnered with local TV Chef and influencer Debbie Wong to create a digital campaign. The video features a day in the life Chef Debbie accompanied by Delicious USA products. Through the video, ATO looked the include as many U.S. food ingredients available in the Hong Kong market, emphasizing the sustainability and variety of U.S. offerings. The campaign also aimed to bring more viewers to our Delicious USA website and encourage consumers to head to the grocery stores for U.S. ingredients. Check out the video on [YouTube](#).

## ECONOMY



### Hong Kong Workforce Sees Biggest Decline in Decades [[The Standard](#), April 4]

Hong Kong's labor market has seen its sharpest drop on record, underscoring the city's challenges with an aging population and outflow of talent. The Asian hub's working population fell by 94,100, down 2.4 percent in 2022, according to data released on April 3 by the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. This is the largest labor plummet since the government began keeping records in 1985. Hong Kong is running an uphill battle as the government seeks to kick-start an economy

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

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that recorded its third annual contraction in four years. Last October, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee started a global talent program that includes a two-year visa plan for high-income workers and top university graduates. One of Hong Kong's biggest hurdles is staffing up its tourism sector dented by COVID-19. The industry, along with exports, could help the economy grow by an estimated 7.6 percent, according to a Goldman Sachs Group Inc. forecast. **ATO Notes:** The acute labor shortage is impacting Hong Kong's economic recovery, particularly in the retail and food service sectors. It is expected that Hong Kong's labor supply situation will improve when overseas workers, high school and college graduates will join the labor force in the latter half of the year.

## **Passenger Numbers at Macau Airport Exceeded 750,000 in First Quarter [[The Macao News](#), April 10]**

With pandemic travel restrictions lifted, passenger numbers at Macau's airport exceeded 750,000 in the first quarter of this year, according to an official statement cited in local media. The figure is a year-on-year increase of 170 percent. Visitors in the quarter arrived on a total of 6,900 flights, representing a year-on-year increase of 57 percent, the surge is mostly attributed to traffic between Macau and mainland China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. Although recovery is steady, passenger numbers and flight volumes only stand at 32 percent and 37.4 percent of what they were during the same period before the pandemic. During the three years of COVID-19 restrictions, air passenger arrivals in Macau almost halved, from 1.17 million in 2020 to 600,000 in 2022. **ATO Notes:** With the gradual increase in the number of visitors, Macau is showing steady recovery of economic activities. Macau's airport is modest in size and that renders it easier to resume operations to welcome visitors. It is expected that more visitors will visit Macau in the next few months.

## **Macau Recorded Over 480,000 Visitor Arrivals During Ching Ming-Easter Holidays [[The Macau Post Daily](#), April 12]**

Macau recorded a total of 481,765 visitor arrivals during the six-day holiday period that started with the Chinese Ching Ming Festival on April 5 and ended on Easter Monday (April 10), or a daily average of 80,294, according to immigration statistics released by the Macau Public Security Police (PSP) on April 11. In December 2019, Macau's last full pre-COVID-19 pandemic month, the daily average number of visitor arrivals stood at 99,465, according to data from the Statistics and Census Bureau (DSEC). Macau recorded 39.4 million visitor arrivals in during all of 2019, representing an average of 107,962 daily visitor arrivals. The 93,253 visitor arrivals recorded on Easter Eve reached 93.8 percent of the daily average level of December 2019, while representing 86.4 percent of the daily average level for all 2019. As of April 11, Macau's highest daily post-pandemic number of visitor arrivals stood at 96,011, recorded on March 18 this year. **ATO Notes:** Macau is boosting its air, land, and sea connections to bring more visitors to the city.

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

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## HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, AND INSTITUTIONS

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### **Hong Kong Bars and Restaurants Boosted by Rugby Sevens [[The Standard](#), April 3]**

Hong Kong bar and restaurants owners have gotten a boost in their businesses from the weekend Rugby Sevens extravaganza, said Anthea Cheung, director of the Lan Kwai Fong Association. The three-day tournament took place from March 31 to April 2 at the Hong Kong Stadium, with the organizer recording a total of 75,000 people attending the games. Speaking to a radio program, Cheung said bars and restaurants in Central near Lan Kwai Fong had seen their revenue almost double when compared to last year's Sevens - when certain COVID-19 restrictions were still in force. Whereas businesses for the past weekend had increased by 20 percent when compared to regular weekends, she added. Cheung noted that over 80 percent of patrons at Lan Kwai Fong lately were foreigners, who were traveling to Hong Kong after the city dropped all COVID-19 restrictions. She expected businesses in Lan Kwai Fong will continue to grow as more overseas and mainland travelers come into Hong Kong for the upcoming major events to be held in the city. **ATO Notes:** Overseas visitors to Hong Kong generally spend more lavishly on premium food and drinks, hence Rugby Seven's overseas spectators have boosted the food service businesses. Hong Kong is planning to host more international events in the next few months to attract more international visitors.

### **Hong Kong's Catering and Retail Sectors Need 100,000 workers [[South China Morning Post](#), April 5]**

Hong Kong's catering and retail sectors are facing a combined shortfall of as much as 100,000 workers, according to industry leaders who have backed a government plan to import labor despite objections from unions. Retail sector legislator Peter Shiu said the industry needed 40,000 more workers on top of its current 210,000, as shops faced a 15 percent staff shortage. Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades president Simon Wong said the catering sector needed up to 60,000 workers on top of its current 200,000, as many had emigrated, retired or switched jobs during the pandemic. **ATO Notes:** Hong Kong's acute labor shortage is due to the pandemic and migration, and the catering and retail sectors are particularly hard-hit areas. It is expected that Hong Kong's labor supply to the two sectors will improve when overseas workers, high school and college graduates will join the labor market in the latter half of the year.

### **Hong Kong Businesses Suffered as Nearly 860,000 Residents Left Over Easter Holidays [[South China Morning Post](#), April 10]**

Hong Kong's catering sector and many retailers reported sluggish business over the Easter holiday, as official figures showed nearly 860,000 residents left the city and only 245,000 visitors arrived during the first three days of the long weekend. Industry leaders on April 10 said the outflow of people, equal to nearly 12 percent of the city's 7.3 million population, had left operators struggling with as much as a 20 percent drop in business, while only certain types of shops benefited from the return of tourists. Simon

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

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Wong, president of the Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades, estimated that daily revenue in the sector over the Easter weekend fell to between \$29.3 - \$32 million, down from \$51 million during the peak season and up to \$38 million on normal days in the past. **ATO Notes:** Hong Kong residents love travelling which had been restricted under the pandemic. Therefore, Hongkongers' overseas travels over Easter holidays are considered as "revenge" travel outnumbering the return of overseas and Chinese visitors to Hong Kong. It is expected more Hongkongers will stay in Hong Kong during holidays in future and the number of international visitors will gradually increase towards the second half of the year.

## **Macau Wynn Ranks in Asia's 50 Best Restaurants List** [[The Macau Post Daily, March 31](#)]

Wynn Resorts said in a statement earlier this week that it continues to be the only integrated resort operator in Macau to rank on Asia's 50 Best Restaurants 2023 list, with Sichuan Moon and Wing Lei Palace, which are both at Wynn Palace in Cotai, earning recognition. The list of rankings was revealed at an awards ceremony in Singapore on March 28. The statement noted that Wing Lei Palace earned a spot on the list for the fifth consecutive year and was awarded the "Best Restaurant in Macau" for the first time this year. It is ranked at 39. Sichuan Moon ranked 43 this year, the statement said. It was also awarded "Highest New Entry" award from the rankings in 2020. Moreover, the statement said that before Asia's 50 Best were announced Golden Flower at Wynn Macau made the 51-100 extended list for a second consecutive year.

## **Five Macau SJM Restaurants Listed in '100 Top Tables 2023'** [[The Macau Post Daily, April 11](#)]

Five eateries under Macau hotel group SJM Resorts have been listed in the "100 Top Tables 2023" restaurant guide by the *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), according to a recent SJM statement. The statement said that three restaurants at Grand Lisboa in the peninsula – "Robuchon au Dôme," "The 8," and "The Kitchen" – made the list, adding that "Robuchon au Dôme" and "The 8" have been on the list for 11 consecutive years. The statement pointed out that it was the first time for two of its restaurants – "Mesa" and "Palace Garden" at Grand Lisboa Palace in Cotai – to earn the title, "capturing love from the judges with their chic and sophisticated dining offers."

## **Two Macau MGM Signature Restaurants Earned Recognition in '100 Top Tables'** [[The Macau Post Daily, April 11](#)]

Macau gaming resort operator MGM said in a recent statement that two of its signature restaurants, Imperial Court at MGM MACAU and Five Foot Road at MGM COTAI, have been recognized for their culinary excellence in the *South China Morning Post's* (SCMP) 100 Top Tables 2023. Currently in its 11th edition, the guide names the best restaurants in Hong Kong and Macau, honoring the food and beverage industry of both special administrative regions (SARs), the statement noted. According to the statement, Imperial Court, is again listed in the guide and serves classic Lingnan culinary fare "with a modern, reinvented twist." **ATO Notes:** The aggressive promotion of fine dining at Macau restaurants is part of the city's strategy to develop Macau's international reputation as a "Creative City of Gastronomy." This poses opportunities for premium U.S. food and beverage products.

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

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## **Macau Gaming Revenue Surged 247 Percent in March [[The Standard](#), April 3]**

Macau's casinos had their best month since the earliest days of the pandemic, with gaming revenue surging 247 percent in March after Chinese tourists flocked to the city as the end of zero-COVID-19 restrictions sparked a travel boom. Gross gaming revenue reached \$1.6 billion, data released by the Macau Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau showed. The result topped the median analyst estimate of a 205 percent year-on-year increase and is the highest monthly takings since January 2020. While March revenue rose 23 percent from the previous month, it was still 51 percent down from the 2019 level. Macau reported 1.6 million tourist visits in February, or a daily average of 57,000, which was about 45 percent of the 2019 levels. **ATO Notes:** According to a hotelier, casinos are still the biggest draw for visitors to Macau. While gaming revenue is gradually improving, Macau's casino operators are planning diversifications such as fine dining, entertainments, conventions, and performances to broaden Macau's attractiveness.

## **Labor Shortage Forcing Macau Hotels to Slash Services [[The Macao News](#), April 6]**

A crippling labor shortage is forcing Macau's hotels to operate on partial capacity and cut back on some guest services, according to a Bloomberg report that cited unnamed sources. The sources said that less than half the rooms were available at several five-star resorts. In a survey of room availability for the Easter break, gaming industry news outlet GGR Asia found no accommodation available at 10 of the 19 five-star hotels at Macau's resorts. Billy Song, president of the Macau Responsible Gaming Association, told Bloomberg that some hotels were even cutting back on maid services, servicing rooms only after customers had left. He said the slow-hiring process for non-resident workers was creating a bottleneck in labor supply. "We didn't expect the reopening would come so fast, so everybody's struck unprepared," he told Bloomberg. Tens of thousands of such workers left Macau during the pandemic. However, less than 700 were hired in February, a month after pandemic restrictions were lifted. In the meantime, tourist numbers have surged, leaving hotels on the back foot. **ATO Notes:** The return of visitors to Macau outpaced staff recruitment, hence some hotels had to reduce operation or services. Macau has a small population of slightly over 600,000 and therefore the city is working on bringing overseas workers to join the labor market. It is expected Macau's labor shortage situation will improve in the second half of the year.

## **Macau Tourism Programs to Attract Visitors Around The World [Various Sources]**

As Macau lifted its pandemic restrictions in January, Macau Tourism Office continues its aggressive programs to promote Macau to visitors from around the world. **Macau Tourism Office Launches Incentive Programs to Attract Hong Kong Visitors [[The Macau Post Daily](#), April 11]** The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said in a statement on Saturday that it launched the second phase of its "Macao Treat" special offer on April 10, which is now extended to Taiwanese and international visitors in Hong Kong, in addition to Hong Kong residents who were already covered by Phase 1. MGTO launched the "Macao Treat", the buy-one-get-one-free special offer in the first quarter of this year, which ended on March 31, and was aimed at Hong Kong residents. **Macau Tourism Office's Roadshows in Greater Bay Area [[The Macau Post Daily](#), April 11]** The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) had restarted its "Experience Macao, Unlimited" caravan roadshow across the Greater Bay Area (GBA), attracting more than 2.5 million visitors from cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau GBA to participate, so as to expand Macau's source of tourists and boost the recovery of the local tourism industry. According to the statement, Macau's six gaming concessionaires also set up their

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

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own booths at the roadshow. **Macau to Host ‘Experience Macao Unlimited’ in Lisbon** [[The Macau Post Daily, April 11](#)] The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) is slated to hold its weeklong “Experience Macao Unlimited – Macao Promotion in Lisbon” from this coming Saturday (April 15), being Macau’s first in-person tourism promotion event in Europe after the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the statement. The statement noted that the promotional event is being done in conjunction with Chief Executive Ho Iat Seng’s working visit to Europe. The Macau Trade and Investment Promotion Institute (IPIM) and the Cultural Affairs Bureau (IC) will set up their own booths, along with Macau’s six gaming concessionaires running a raft of integrated resorts. **ATO Notes:** Macau received more than 4.96 million visitors in the first quarter of this year. Macau Tourism Office’s multi-targeted promotions are expected to accelerate the return of international visitors to Macau to boost the city’s tourism and hospitality sectors.



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## RETAIL

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### **Hong Kong Retail Sales Surged as Tourists Return** [[The Standard, March 31](#)]

In February, Hong Kong’s retail sales grew at the fastest pace in more than a decade as spending surged during the Lunar New Year break and tourists from mainland China and elsewhere returned to the city. Retail sales by value rose 31.3 percent from a year ago, the Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department said on March 31, more than double the median estimate of 15 percent in a Bloomberg survey of economists and the highest since February 2010. Sales by volume grew 29.6 percent from a year prior. Retail sales surged “alongside the continued improvement in consumer sentiment and the sharp rebound in visitor arrivals,” a government spokesman said in a statement accompanying the data. The timing of the Lunar New Year usually affects the retail sales figures in the first two months of the year, the statistics bureau said, while last month’s data was also impacted by the low base of comparison from last year. **ATO Notes:** Under the pandemic, Hong Kong food retail sales have held steady around \$12 billion. For the first two months of 2023, food retail sales were \$2.1 billion, a drop of 6.7 percent over the same period in 2022. The drop was mainly due to more Hongkongers dining out and traveling overseas as all pandemic restrictions were lifted in January. It is expected that food retail sales will gradually pick up in the next few months.

# THE HONG KONG WONTON

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TRADE



## **Hong Kong Customs Seized Smuggled Goods Worth \$1.4 Million [[The Standard](#), April 8]**

Custom authorities busted a smuggling case in the western waters of Hong Kong and seized goods, including beef jerky and frozen sea cucumbers worth about \$1.4 million. During an anti-smuggling operation on April 4 afternoon, officers intercepted a river trade boat heading towards Macau. Upon investigations, officers found those two containers belonged to a newly established logistic company and suspected the river trade boat was used for smuggling. As officers removed the red wine and sneakers placed by the door of two containers, they found a large batch of smuggled goods, such as notebook computers, electronic parts, chilled pork stomach, beef jerky, and frozen sea cucumbers. Customs seized over 5.5 tons of pig offal, 2.5 tons of beef jerky, 2.5 tons of sea cucumber, and a large batch of notebook computers and relevant components valued at about \$1.4 million.

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## **Attachments:**

No Attachments.