

THE HONG KONG WONTON

wrapped by ATO Hong Kong

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The Southern United States Trade Association Brings Southern Flavors to Hong Kong Retail Consumers

From December 9 – 22, 2022, the Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) launched a retail promotion with local retailer Feast Market. Featuring over 100 U.S. food and beverage products, the promotion ran through Feast Market’s two outlets in the popular districts of Causeway Bay and Tin Hau. The festival, the first collaboration between SUSTA and Feast Market, was promoted through social media, two influencer programs on Instagram, Facebook and local radio. Throughout the pandemic, food retail sales in Hong Kong have held steady at around \$12 billion a year and competition for shelf-space at grocery stores remains fierce. During the first eleven months of 2022, Hong Kong food retail sales increased 0.5 percent compared to the same period in 2021.

ECONOMY



Hong Kong Drops On-Arrival PCR Tests and Vaccine Pass, City Set to Reopen its Border with Mainland China [SCMP, December 28, 2022]

Starting December 29, 2022, Hong Kong will drop almost all COVID-19 measures, including mandatory Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) tests for arrivals, its vaccine pass scheme, and quarantine requirements for close contacts. A mandate requiring mask wearing remains in place. Those arriving in Hong Kong will still need to present negative results from PCR or rapid antigen tests (RAT) conducted within 48 or 24 hours, respectively. An existing requirement to conduct daily RATs until Day 5 of arrival, will optional. Infected individuals in the city will still be required to undergo a five-day isolation period and can only be

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released after showing negative results on a RAT on the fourth and fifth days. **ATO Notes:** There is a lot of anticipation in the city as both mainland and Hong Kong governments are scheduled to reopen the border on January 8. At the beginning, there will be an established daily quota of travelers to ensure smooth operation at the border. This quota is expected to expand before the Lunar New Year (starting January 22). There is a general expectation that the economic rebound will begin in the new year, while the food and catering sector anticipate an uptick in business during the Lunar New Year. While the commercial sectors welcomed the move, there are local concerns that the city's healthcare system could be overburdened after the border reopens. As of this report, unvaccinated visitors from the United States (at least two-shots) are not allowed entry in Hong Kong. U.S. agricultural exporters considering travel to Hong Kong should note that as of December 28, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued [new requirements](#) for travelers returning from China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Prior to travel, please consult the latest U.S. Department of State's [Travel Advisory](#), the U.S. Consulate's [COVID-19 information page](#), or contact ATO Hong Kong.

Surge in Searches for Flights to Hong Kong [[The Standard](#), December 16, 2022]

Following the Hong Kong government's announcement canceling the amber health code scheme, the number of people searching for inbound flights to Hong Kong increased more than 20 times, according to an online travel platform. Trip.com revealed that the top five cities searching for flights to Hong Kong are Bangkok, Tokyo, Taipei, Seoul and Osaka. Its website saw a 2,004-percent increase in searches for flights to Hong Kong on December 13, compared to the corresponding day last year. As for the search growth compared with the same day during the previous week, flights from Seoul to Hong Kong saw a 908-percent surge, the most among the top five destinations, followed by Osaka at 667 percent and Tokyo 641 percent. Singapore recorded a 403 percent rise followed by Beijing (264 percent), Toronto (186 percent) and Vancouver (152 percent). Searches for flights to Hong Kong and onward to the mainland also recorded an 89 percent week-on-week increase. **ATO Notes:** As Hong Kong has eased inbound travel restrictions, it is expected more visitors will return to Hong Kong for leisure and business in 2023, boosting the recovery of the hotel, convention, and food service sectors.

Over 40 Percent of Hong Kong Employers Plan to Increase Staff Size in the First Quarter of 2023 [[The Standard](#), December 28, 2022]

Forty-four percent of employers are planning to hire more workers in the next three months while around one-fifth are expecting a staffing decrease, a survey has found. The human resources agency ManpowerGroup Greater China conducted the survey as they interviewed 508 local employers on the employment outlook for the first quarter of 2023. Meanwhile, about 32 percent of employers have no plan to adjust the size of their workforce. Following seasonal variation, the net employment outlook index in Hong Kong stands at 22 percent, marking a 14 percent decline compared with the figures logged in the fourth quarter of 2022. The survey also revealed the finance and real estate industry recorded the highest and the most optimistic net employment outlook index at 40 percent, followed by the communications and media industry at 32 percent and the information technology industry at 31 percent. With borders between the Hong Kong and mainland China set to reopen, Manpower group forecast surging demands in the catering and tourism sectors and believed employers will have to rely on hiring casual workers and digitization to tackle understaffing issues. **ATO Notes:** The opening of the

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Hong Kong border is expected to attract travelers to visit the city and boost its economy. As many workers have left the beleaguered catering and tourism sectors under COVID-19, it will take at least several months before these industries can hire enough workforce to serve returning visitors.

HSBC's Review of Clients' Spending Patterns [Ming Pao, December 30, 2022]

The Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Hong Kong released a study on its clients' consumption patterns based on their credit card expenses recorded during the first eleven months of 2022. The results indicated that its clients aged between 45 to 54 years had the greatest spending power averaging \$10,670 each month. The second tier belonged to clients aged between 55 to 64 years with monthly spending of \$9,510, and the third tier to clients aged between 35 and 44 with spending of \$9,383. The younger generation (aged 28 and 34) had a monthly spending of \$6,425 doubling the spending for those aged between aged 23 and 27. The study also revealed that men spent 40 percent more than women on festive dining. In contrast, women spent 10 percent more than men on shopping. It is worth noting that the percentage of spending on dining decreased as the age group advanced. The young clients aged 23 to 27 years spent 24 percent of their expenses on dining, while those aged 55 to 64 spent only 14 percent of their expenses on dining. **ATO Notes:** According to Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong's median monthly wage for 2021 was \$2,404, which was far lower than the HSBC's credit card spending. The survey, however, highlighted spending by more affluent groups, who are the promotional targets of premium and luxurious foods. Lower dining expenses by advanced aged group is likely due to consumers' increased caution to dine out following Hong Kong's fifth and deadliest wave of the pandemic.

Cathay Pacific Will Double Flights Between Hong Kong and China [The Standard, January 5, 2023]

Hong Kong-based flight carrier Cathay Pacific Airways will more than double its flights to mainland China to 61 return services a week from January 14 following the resumption of quarantine-free travel between Hong Kong and the mainland. Starting January 8, it will increase flights between Hong Kong and Beijing to 10 pairs per week, and flights between the city and Shanghai to 21 pairs per week. From January 14, the airline will increase flights between Hong Kong and Xiamen to four pairs per week. The airline aims to operate over 100 return flights a week by March, according to a statement on January 5. It currently operates 27 flights a week from Hong Kong to the mainland, as well as 50 from mainland to Hong Kong. Cathay was hit particularly hard by the pandemic, which left Hong Kong largely cut off from the rest of the world and saddled the carrier with record losses as it operated at just a tiny fraction of its usual capacity. The company expects to recover 70 percent of its pre-pandemic capacity by the end of this year and return to pre-crisis levels by the end of 2024. **ATO Notes:** The gradual increase in Cathay Pacific flights marks the opening of the Hong Kong border, and other airlines are expected to follow suit and re-connect Hong Kong to the international community. Currently, airfare costs are unusually high as the demand surged sharply in anticipation of reopening of the borders. Airlines are also actively recruiting staff to support the increase in businesses. Industry observers highlight it will take several months for the flight capacity and airfare prices to stabilize.

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Macau Lifts COVID-19 Curbs for Travelers from Hong Kong, Taiwan and China [[The Standard](#), January 5, 2023]

Starting January 8, travelers from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland will not need to present a negative COVID-19 test result in order to enter Macau, according to local authorities who echoed Hong Kong's announcement to reopen the border with mainland on the same day. However, Hongkongers, Taiwanese and overseas travelers who have stayed in Macau for seven days are required to present a negative PCR COVID-19 test result, valid for 48 hours, before entering mainland China. Meanwhile, travelers from other countries and regions must still present a negative PCR test result before boarding a plane or a ship to Macau. Passengers will be able to transit flights starting on January 8, and special restrictions on inbound travelers holding foreign passports will be lifted. Mandatory health declaration measures at all border points and healthcare management measures upon entry will also be abolished. **ATO Notes:** [China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are major sources of business and leisure visitors to Macau. The lifting of COVID-19 curbs for these travelers marks the official end of the seclusion of the casino city. Transportation linking Macau with these three economies is gradually resuming and strengthening, preparing to welcome the first major return of tourists during Chinese New Year holidays which will start on January 22.](#)

Pandemic Peak Reached: Macau [[Macau Daily Times](#), December 29, 2022]

Macau reportedly has reached the peak of the current wave of the pandemic, as residents have grappled with the rapid spread of COVID-19. While, following Beijing practices, asymptomatic cases are no longer reported, but many businesses have closed for several days due to employee shortages. In the city center, nearly all shops have closed by 8 p.m. and many food and beverage outlets have remained closed, while 24-hour supermarkets have been operating on limited hours. Since the outbreak started, about 40 percent of the medical staff at the private Kiang Wu Hospital have been infected with the virus. Macau has seen a rapid increase in new infections, raising concerns that its health system could be overwhelmed. There have also been complaints over the lack of medicine to reduce fever in local pharmacies. An acting director of the public hospital has said that the city has already reached the peak of the pandemic, echoing the Health Bureau's forecast that the outbreak will peak by the beginning of January following the easing of restrictions. China announced a major easing of its rigid "zero-Covid" restrictions two weeks ago, and Macau followed suit. The Chief Executive said that there would be no backtracking on plans to reopen the city as the easing of restrictions was aimed at allowing normal life to resume. **ATO Notes:** [Macau is closely following China's policy response to the pandemic. A tourism portal in China recorded 10 times more searches year-on-year after the loosening pandemic measures, with Macau topping the list of intended destinations followed by Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, South Korea, the United States, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and the United Kingdom.](#)

Macau Gates Open to First Hong Kong Tour Group [[The Standard](#), December 30, 2022]

Twelve people in a \$128 two-day cuisine tour to Macau have become the first tourist group to travel to the casino hub from Hong Kong in nearly three years. China Travel Service (Hong Kong) organized the tour after Macau scrapped its quarantine rule and reopened its doors to Hong Kong tourists on

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December 23. The travel agency said it could only allow a limited number of participants as transportation between Hong Kong and Macau has not yet been fully resumed. Fanny Yeung, executive director of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, expects a jump in the number of Macau tours after the Lunar New Year. She said it takes time for the tourism industry to recruit workers such as technicians after the pandemic. The tour does not provide any indoor visits nor meals outside the hotel. Some Macau eateries remain closed despite the easing border restrictions. However, travelers can now enter casinos without travel restrictions after the government removed the compulsory showing of health codes when entering most indoor premises on December 12. The Macau Tourism Office's data showed a total of 36,000 Hong Kong travelers entering Macau in December. **ATO Notes:** [Hong Kong is Macau's second largest source of visitors after mainland China. The first Hong Kong tour group signals that Macau is ready to welcome tourists after it eased most of its stringent inbound travel restrictions. Macau's gaming and tourism industries will take some time to recruit enough workforce to serve the gradual return of international visitors.](#)

Macau Welcomed 28,100 Visitors on New Year's Eve [[The Macao News](#), January 3, 2023]

Macau tourism officials are highly optimistic about a healthy uptick in the number of visitors after recording 28,100 arrivals on New Year's Eve. The Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO) said that this was the highest number of visitors in a single day since National Day on October 1, the first day of the Golden Week holiday. On December 30, Macau recorded 18,000 visitor arrivals, up 49.2 percent from the daily average of 12,203 arrivals from December 1-29. The MGTO said this significant increase reflected visitors' increased confidence in Macau and the expectation of a steady rise in arrivals during the international New Year and Lunar New Year holidays. The MGTO also said that with the relaxation of Macau's entry regulation for Hong Kong visitors, it has joined hands with the tourism sector to attract more Hong Kong visitors to increase their length of stay in Macau and boost their willingness to spend, thus helping Macau's tourism and economic recovery. **ATO Notes:** [As Macau has eased most of its travel restrictions, it is expected that more visitors, particularly from China and Hong Kong, followed by international visitors, will help boost the city's tourism and hospitality sectors in the first quarter of 2023.](#)

HOTELS, RESTAURANTS, AND INSTITUTIONS



Hong Kong Residents and Visitors Welcome the Lifting of COVID-19 Curbs [[The Standard](#), December 30, 2022]

Diners were thrilled that they no longer had to use the vaccine pass starting December 29. Among them was an unvaccinated 90-year-old who enjoyed his first meal in a restaurant in months and said he felt "free and happy." Travelers arriving to Hong Kong were also excited about the cancellation of

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mandatory PCR tests at the airport. The government scrapped most of its anti-epidemic measures, including the vaccine pass, social gathering cap, arrival PCR tests and isolation requirements for close contacts of infected persons. Chui Man-wai, chairman of the Institute of Dining Professionals, expects that in the short term, the relaxation will boost the restaurant business by 10 percent. This can go up by another 30 percent once quarantine-free travel between Hong Kong and the mainland resumes. Chui added that the catering sector will have to hire more staff. Travel Industry Council chairwoman Gianna Hsu said the relaxations could attract more tourists. However, the number of visitors may not surge within the short term as the travel and catering sector will need some time to adapt to the new measures, she added. **ATO Notes:** Hong Kong's lifting of its COVID-19 curbs is set to attract international visitors to come to the city for leisure and businesses. In particular, the lifting of restrictions on dining and food tasting will encourage the promotion of U.S. food and beverage products at food trade shows, food tastings, wine tastings, cooking demonstrations, and other culinary events.

Macau's Gaming Revenue Dropped Over 50 Percent in 2022 [The Macao News, January 2, 2023]

Macau's accumulated gross gaming revenue (GGR) in 2022 dropped 51.4 percent to \$5.3 billion compared to 2021. According to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau (DICJ), Macau casinos' GGR in December was \$434 million, down 56.3 percent compared with December 2021, when the casinos' revenues were \$994 million. However, December figures showed a month-on-month increase of 16.1 percent from \$373 million in November. In addition, the figure dropped 84.62 percent from the pre-pandemic figure of \$2.9 billion in December 2019. Compared to the figure prior to the pandemic, last year's accumulated GGR decreased by 85.57 percent from \$26.6 billion in 2019. Macau currently has 30 casinos operated by the city's six gaming concessionaires – SJM (13), Venetian Macau (5), Galaxy (4), Melco Crown (4), Wynn Resorts (2) and MGM (2). **ATO Notes:** As Macau has eased most of its inbound travel restrictions, it is expected more visitors will return to Macau in 2023 and help boost the recovery of the city's hotel, gaming, and food service sectors.



RETAIL

Hong Kong Brands and Products Expo Generated \$128 Million in Sales [South China Morning Post, January 1, 2023]

The 56th annual Hong Kong Brands and Products Expo, organized by the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong, attracted more than a million visitors and generated \$128 million in sales. Many of the 400 exhibitors in 860 booths at Victoria Park, the largest park in Hong Kong, enticed customers with hefty discounts on products such as food, home appliances, toys, and health items. Allen Shi, the association president, said that business was so brisk that some booths had already run out of stock. "This year's expo performed the best in terms of people traffic and sales out of the past

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three years of the pandemic. The resumption of on-site food tasting was a game changer,” Shi said. Eating and drinking were reinstated in outdoor areas at places of entertainment, event venues and sports premises after the government scrapped most pandemic-related curbs on December 22. “More than 100 exhibitors quickly resumed food and drink tasting, which helped them promote their products and drive sales growth,” Shi said. “We also decided to extend the opening hours every day from Christmas to New Year’s Eve to further stimulate the flow of people and business.” **ATO Notes:** [The Brands and Products Expo is the largest outdoor consumer shopping carnival in Hong Kong. Food vendors and consumers welcomed the lifting of restrictions on on-site food tastings. This move will enhance businesses at culinary events such as food trade shows like the next HOFEX \(scheduled for May 2023\), retail food tastings, and cooking demonstrations.](#)

Hong Kong Shopping Malls Enjoyed Sales Growth Over The Holidays [\[The Standard, January 3, 2023\]](#)

Local property developer Sun Hung Kai Properties (SHKP) said its 15 major shopping malls saw a 20 percent rise in sales and foot traffic over the New Year holidays compared to the previous year. SHKP executive director Maureen Fung estimates the malls could post double-digit growth in sales and foot traffic in the fourth quarter, boosted by the Christmas and New Year holidays. For the upcoming Lunar New Year and China's reopening in January, SHKP plans to invest over \$1.3 million to attract consumers and tourists and expects retail sales to perform well. Financial Secretary Paul Chan also forecasts a significant rebound for the first quarter, citing the return of tourists, the gradual return of pre-pandemic life and the low base over the same period in 2022. Hong Kong's total retail sales in January and February last year declined 4.9 percent yearly to \$7.6 billion, mainly due to the rapid surge in local infections and stricter anti-pandemic measures. **ATO Notes:** [Many Hong Kong residents are expected to travel abroad over the Chinese New Year \(January 23-25\). Visitors from mainland China are not expected to come to the city immediately after the reopening in January, given the recent spike in infections and the weak consumption demand. Hence, any robust recovery in the Hong Kong retail market is not expected until the second half of 2023.](#)

Hong Kong Overall Retail Sales Dropped in November [\[The Standard, January 5, 2023\]](#)

Hong Kong's retail sales unexpectedly dropped in November, the sharpest drop in eight months at 4.2 percent from the same month in 2021 and the outlook remains challenging even with the border reopening. The figure was far worse than the forecast rise of 4.8 percent, and lower than the 4 percent increase in October, data from the Census and Statistics Department showed. Looking ahead, the government spokesman said tightened financial conditions will continue to weigh on local consumption demand, but the further relaxation of social distancing measures and continued improvement in labor market conditions will provide support. He also said an expected increase in visitor arrivals should benefit the sector. Annie Tse, chairwoman of the Hong Kong Retail Management Association, said the drop was partly due to the reopening of the international border when Hongkongers rushed out for overseas travel while international visitors were reluctant to come as COVID-19 restrictions were still in place. Tse added that lifting the border restrictions does not mean there will be an immediate surge in business. Mainland visitors may not return to the city in the short run amid soaring COVID-19 cases. **ATO Notes:** [While Hong Kong overall retail sales have fluctuated under the pandemic, annual food retail sales have held steady at \\$12 billion. For the first 11 months of](#)

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2022, Hong Kong food retail sales were \$11 billion, an increase of 0.5 percent over the same period in 2021. It is expected that the return of Hongkongers who rushed out for overseas travel, mainland Chinese visitors and international visitors will boost Hong Kong sales in the food retail and food service sectors in the first quarter of 2023.

Macau Consumption Carnival Generates Spending Worth \$110 Million [[The Macao News](#), January 3, 2023]

Macau's first-ever citywide Consumption Carnival generated \$110 million in spending with more than 23,000 businesses participating since its launch in October 2022. The Economic and Technological Development Bureau announced that by December 28, a total of \$6.4 million in e-coupons had been distributed, of which \$5.7 million worth of e-coupons had already been spent. The consumption promotion scheme, which will last four months and is co-organized by the bureau and the Macau Chamber of Commerce, aims to attract consumers to spend locally, to increase business turnover, maintain consumption momentum and expand domestic demand, thereby strengthening retailers' confidence in boosting their businesses. **ATO Notes:** Macau has been following China's stringent zero-COVID-19 policy and hence restricted international travels to the city. The lack of visitors adversely affected Macau's tourism and gaming industries. Since then, the Macau government has launched multiple programs to alleviate the hardships of Macau residents and businesses, and organized events to stimulate local consumption.



TRADE

WTO Rules in Favor of Hong Kong in its Trade Dispute with the United States [[South China Morning Post](#), December 22, 2022]

A World Trade Organization (WTO) panel found that the United States broke trade rules in forcing Hong Kong goods to be relabeled "Made in China." The United States rejected the ruling. Following Beijing's crackdown on democracy protests in Hong Kong, in August 2020, the United States said that goods from Hong Kong would have to be relabeled to gain entry to its ports. The new labeling requirement for Hong Kong-made products took effect on November 10, 2020. **ATO Notes:** Hong Kong is a member of the World Trade Organization separate from mainland China. This is the first time that Hong Kong has directly filed a complaint against another WTO member since the 1997 British handover of Hong Kong to China. In 2021, the United States imported \$165 million worth of agricultural and related products from Hong Kong. Hong Kong's food production is minimal. Most of the food products exported to the United States are sauces, noodles, and non-alcoholic beverages.

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Hong Kong Reviews Regulations on Ractopamine and other Veterinary Drugs [ATO Hong Kong]

The Hong Kong government (HKG) is reviewing its regulatory controls on ractopamine, along with other veterinary drugs, under the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations. Currently, Hong Kong follows action levels according to Codex's standards. The Hong Kong Center for Food Safety (CSF) will likely release a consultation paper after completing its regulatory review targeted for the first quarter of 2023. According to past practices, the HKG will notify the World Trade Organization (WTO) of its regulatory changes and provide trading partners the opportunity to comment. In the worst-case scenario, adopting a zero tolerance for ractopamine could threaten roughly \$539 million worth of combined U.S. beef and pork exports to Hong Kong. ATO Hong Kong will continue to monitor.

Expediting the Processing of Import License Applications for Frozen Meat and Poultry [[Hong Kong Center for Food Safety Trade Forum](#), December 23, 2022]

In order to facilitate the import and supply of frozen meat and poultry products, the Center for Food Safety (CSF) will put in place arrangements to expedite the processing of import license applications by one calendar day. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, the import of frozen meat, chilled meat, frozen poultry or chilled poultry requires an import license. Each consignment is to be covered by one import license, which is valid for a period of six weeks from the date of issue. Application can be submitted either online or by hard copy paper. Currently, an import license can be collected three working days after application. Effective January 1, 2023, under the new arrangement, the processing time will be reduced by one working day. **ATO Notes:** [Post has not heard of any industry/trader complaints relating to the processing time for the issuance of import licenses in Hong Kong. However, the new arrangement pledging to reduce processing time by one calendar day is a welcome improvement.](#)

Update on U.S. Turkey, Egg, and Poultry Exports to Hong Kong In Response to U.S. Outbreaks of Avian Influenza [ATO Hong Kong, January 4, 2023]

In coordination with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS), the Agricultural Trade Office (ATO) has been working to address Hong Kong's import suspensions on U.S. poultry and egg products in response to ongoing cases of avian influenza (AI) in the United States. Over the past few months, the Hong Kong government has lifted AI-related suspensions on affected counties from several U.S. states including Delaware, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Texas upon receipt of APHIS reports confirming that AI incidents have been resolved and in accordance with international guidelines. However, Iowa recently has five counties identified with AI cases, resulting in Hong Kong's trade suspension of poultry and egg products from these five counties. As of January 4, U.S. poultry and egg products from a total of 99 counties in 23 states are still ineligible to ship to Hong Kong due to AI. While AI incidents have severely impacted turkey and egg supplies in the United States, it has not affected the supply of chicken products. During the first ten months of 2022, U.S. exports of whole turkeys to Hong Kong plummeted 79 percent to \$230,000 compared to the same period last year. Higher U.S. prices discouraged U.S. exports of egg and egg products 56 percent to \$18 million. On the other

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hand, the 22 percent decline in U.S. poultry exports to Hong Kong is more likely attributed to higher direct shipments of U.S. poultry to mainland China which rose 36 percent during the same period.

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