

# Island life

Hong Kong is a city that offers an eclectic mix of sights and sounds—a perfect getaway

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Aerial view of the Financial District of Hong Kong

A path in old town Central

For someone like me, a window seat in a flight is a must as I always love to look out of the window to see how a city looks like from above. My visit to Hong Kong was no different and to my amazement I was rewarded with views of an azure hued ocean, interspersed with boats and ships and framed beautifully by green mountains. As I was gawking at the beautiful postcard imagery, I realised that this was the perfect precursor to my trip to this developed island nation.

### Cityscapes calling

When I was at the airport, a book on Central Hong Kong caught my attention at the tourism kiosk and I instantly knew that this is where I had to start my exploration of the city. Central is the business district of the city and is home to skyscrapers and glitzy malls. However, my interest was in old town Central that can be accessed via foot through its steep windy roads that have several gems waiting to be discovered. My first stop was at the city's oldest temple—Man Mo Temple, built between 1847 and 1862 by wealthy Chinese merchants. The temple has been set up as a centre for worshipping Mo Tai, the god of martial arts and Man Cheong, the god of literature. The temple is quaint and what is unmissable is the circular incense sticks that hang from the ceilings. The temple is designed using traditional Chinese vernacular architecture. It is exquisitely decorated





Man Mo Temple

with ceramic figurines, granite and wood carvings, plaster mouldings and murals, all examples of fine traditional craftsmanship. When you are here, stop at Tai Kwun, the former Central police station compound that is home to some of the oldest buildings in Central like the Barrack Block which was built between 1862 and 1864. After an extensive revitalisation project, the site reopened with 16 heritage buildings. While the exteriors have been restored to much of their original splendor, the interiors are adapted into galleries, exhibition spaces, shops, bars and restaurants. Also check out Pottinger Street, named after Sir Henry Pottinger, the first governor of Hong Kong. It is one of the oldest streets in Central and has irregular stone slabs and a series of granite steps designed for pedestrians and merchants to walk. The area is dotted with street art, murals and graffiti that make the entire area a riot of colour.

### Sights and sounds

The trams of Hong Kong are legendary and a must see is the 125-year-old Peak Tram. The Peak Tram Historical Gallery here has more than 200 memorabilia exhibited in 15 theme sections and gives you a peek into Hong Kong in the 19th and 21st century. The 373m-long tram takes you to the Victoria Peak which has a stunning bird's eye view of the island. This old funicular railway with antique tracks, colonial arches and lush forests will take you to the Sky Terrace—the highest viewing platform in Hong Kong which is 428m above sea level. The Madame Tussauds wax museum is also located in the same building. Another recommended activity here is a visit to the Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter which is an old traditional fishing village where you can take a ride on a sampan, a local boat. There are only a few fishermen who currently do this and the Aberdeen harbour was the place where the British first arrived in Hong Kong. If you are hard pressed for time, take a ride on the rickshaw open

Traditional fishing boats at Aberdeen floating village



Ocean Park



top bus, that stops at some major hot-spots of the city like Hollywood Road, Peel Street, Lan Kwai Fong, Wyndham, Ladder Street, Queen Street, Duddell Street gas lamps and the Monument In Commemoration Of The Return of Hong Kong To China.

### Retail therapy

If you love shopping, Hong Kong has a whole lot of options from high street fashion to malls to local shops. Causeway Bay is the heart of all the retail glitz and glamour with addresses like Japanese department store Sogo, Times Square, Hysan Place, World Trade Centre, Windsor House and Lee Gardens. If you are looking for authentic souvenirs, Stanley market in the quaint village of Stanley on the south coast is the place to be. This is where

you can buy good jewellery, home furnishings, souvenirs, ornaments, oriental knick-knacks, chop sticks and paintings. If you are looking for souvenirs, head to the Ladies Market that has a long row of small makeshift shops on both sides of the road where you can shop for clothes, bags, jewellery and accessories. There is a lot of scope for bargaining here so make sure you have those skills ready. Also, make sure you visit the 80-year-old Kee Wah Bakery where you can find some amazing moon cakes and egg tarts.

### Entertainment unlimited

Hong Kong is a fun destination for the family and has a number of amusement parks and entertainment zones that are a must see. One among them is the Ocean Park where you can experience

### FACT FILE

- ❖ Travelling within Hong Kong is very easy as there are a number of options. However, it is best to commute via the suburban metro which has an extensive network that connects all parts of the city. Download the MTR app on your phone when you are there.
- ❖ Carry HKD or Hong Kong Dollars (1 HKD is just under ₹10) as some of the local markets prefer cash payments.
- ❖ Hong Kong has several hotels and you can also stay at the very plush Hong Kong Ocean Park Marriott Hotel at Ocean Park which is great if you are travelling with family.

A sculpture of Bruce Lee at the Madame Tussauds wax museum



a whole lot of adventure activities. The park has two major areas—the waterfront and the summit. It has eight attraction zones like the whiskers harbour, marine world, polar adventure, adventure land, amazing Asian animals, aqua city, thrill mountain and the rainforest. While there are several rides that you can enjoy like the mine train, raging river, hair raiser, bumper blaster, bungee trampoline and the flash. You can see animals like penguins, Pacific walrus, spotted seals, Arctic fox den, Northern sea lions, Steller sea lions and snowy owls. The park also has several restaurants with a lot of tasty food. To recapitulate, Hong Kong is a potpourri of experiences that will ensure that you return with memories of a lifetime. □