

# HONG KONG



Nicknamed the 'Pearl of the Orient', Hong Kong earns its title with its stunning mountain vistas beset by blue seas that is sharply contrasted by the city's dominating skyscrapers and high-rise buildings. A colourful cultural hotspot and home to over seven million people, the 'Fragrant Harbour' is where you'll discover the inspiration for back home's classic Chinese take-out dishes, such as sweet and sour pork, chicken chow mein, and many more Cantonese eats both new and familiar. Hong Kong reflects a true fusion of the West and East, influenced by its 156-year history as a British colony and is to date the world's most visited city. It's a place you don't want to miss out on from their mouth-watering food to their neck-breaking architecture; and for me feels like a home away from home.

## Attractions

**Lantau Island:** Lantau Island is where you'll find the Big Buddha aka the Tian Tan Buddha that sits atop the mountainous greenery looking over the Chinese people. Before reaching the Big Buddha, there's a large open piazza with a pathway guarded by the twelve Chinese zodiacs that sits beneath the wide-open sky lined by the greenest vegetation. The biggest surprise you'll find are the cows that happen to accompany the zodiacs, where they quietly graze on the nearby grass. Don't worry the cows are gentle and unassuming, and don't appear bothered by visiting tourists. The cows used to belong to a close by farming village, which in recent years has now dissolved leaving the cows to mosey over.



The landscape at Lantau Island is gorgeous and fresh, especially once you've climbed the 268 steps to witness the enormity of the 34-metre-high Buddha and to enjoy the panoramic views offered. Adjacent to the Buddha is the surprisingly colourful Po Lin Monastery that offers beautiful and intricate art of the Buddhist religion in the form of its architecture, as embodied by The Grand Hall of Ten Thousand Buddhas; be sure to look up and you'll be able to admire the vibrant detail of the carved ceiling.



If you're left feeling hungry from all the climbing and exploring, the monastery offers a fantastic canteen of authentic vegetarian food, called the Deli Vegetarian Café. You'll have to purchase a ticket that will allow you to pick up to three dishes, which can be bought at the entrance of the Big Buddha just before you ascend the stairs. You'll find



that they serve noodles, rice, mixed vegetables, savoury tofu dishes amongst many others. My favourite were the dessert snacks they had; there's a popular HK sweet bean curd dessert using bean curd made daily by the monastery, that is silky-soft and refreshing especially when served cold. Or a soft sticky glutinous rice ball covered in a crunchy outer peanut dressing that had a delicious peanuty centre that left you wishing you could have one more.



To reach the top of Lantau Island, you can travel by bus, cable car or taxi. Conventionally the most common route is to travel via MTR to reach the Tung Chung station that is at the base of the cable car service and bus services to Lantau Island. Though pricier, the Ngong Ping 360 Cable Car is a pretty novel and cool way to reach the Buddha. They have two versions, one which is the Diamond Car that includes a glass floor, truly giving you a 360-degree view. Either way you're able to get an all-round view of everything around you; to take in the

leafy lush tops of the dense forest beneath you, or to appreciate how miniscule the hustle and bustle of the city becomes as you climb upwards. For more information on how to get to Lantau Island visit: <https://www.plm.org.hk/eng/visitors.php>

***The Peak:*** Also known as Victoria Peak, it is the highest vantage point to take in the entirety of Hong Kong's glittering skyline; one of the few places where you can breathe in the fresh air and awe over the view, to be faraway enough in the quiet to listen to the humming buzz of restless energy Hong Kong emanates. Be warned though, The Peak can get very busy as with any popular tourist attraction which may sometimes take away its charm. However, if you're here to visit Hong Kong, Victoria Peak is a must-go, if anywhere captures Hong Kong in a moment – it's The Peak. Personally, I've only seen The Peak at night when Hong Kong is aglow and in some ways, it's livelier and more colourful because of it.



However, I'm sure The Peak during the day is just as spectacular as you'll be able to appreciate Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour in shining clarity. The main way to get to The Peak is to ride the tram up. The tram journey itself is an experience as you're unexpectedly thrown back against your seat due to the steepness of the climb as the tram slowly trudges upwards. Simply hold on and enjoy the changing view at a vertical level! The tram service itself is easy to get to, you just have to make your way to the Peak Tram Lower Terminus on Garden Road which from the closest MTR station is Central Station.



***Victoria Harbour and the Avenue of Stars:*** Hong Kong's famous Victoria Harbour is like the older sister of The Bund to Shanghai – being the first to boast its dazzling superstructures against a backdrop of

natural ridges and endless azure. There is nothing like Victoria Harbour ablaze at night with the bright lights of the giant towers illuminating the darkness. One that always catches my eye that I've self-named is the "bamboo building" aka the Bank of China Tower with its sharp asymmetrical design crisscrossed with beaming white lights to resemble growing bamboo shoots, accordingly it's to represent growth and vitality.

If basking in the glow of the Harbour lights still isn't enough for you, there's also the free Symphony of Lights show that truly makes Hong Kong's skyline more of a bejewelled spectacle. It's a combination of interactive laser lights and music to further enliven the vibrancy and glamour of the metropolis at night. The show is on daily starting around 8pm and lasts for roughly 13 minutes, and there is also an English narration that occurs on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays if you'd like to hear more about Hong Kong as you enjoy the show.



Now the question is where to go to catch the best view of the "bamboo building" and light show? Aside from The Peak, my pick would be the famed Avenue of Stars at Tsim Sha Tsui which is a 400-metre waterside promenade. The Avenue of Stars is a celebration of Hong Kong's film industry that has helped to make the city's sights iconic all round the world. What better way to honour the Stars of the East than by pairing it with the most scenic spot in Hong Kong. To get to the Avenue of Stars simply hop on the MTR and head to East Tsim Sha Tsui station, Exit L6 and follow the signs to the Avenue of Stars. Note that the Tsim Sha Tsui and East Tsim Sha Tsui station are linked by pedestrian subways, so you can also easily head towards the Tsim Sha Tsui station instead.

(\*Currently, the Avenue of Stars is closed for renovation but is expected to reopen near the end of 2018)

Alternatively, you could appreciate the scenery on water by enjoying a ride on the Star Ferry. The Star Ferry has long been a staple in the ever-changing landscape of the city, remaining as a reliable and cheap source of transport from Hong Kong Island to the Kowloon Peninsula, and has become an attraction itself. Alongside its use as a mode of public transport, the Star Ferry offers a cruise tour from the Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry pier that last 80 minutes that showcases Victoria Harbour as well as the Tsing Ma Bridge. If you'd like to explore the different tour options available to enjoy Victoria Harbour, including a cruise at night or during sunset visit: <http://www.discoverhongkong.com/uk/see-do/tours-walks/guided-tours/victoria-harbour/index.jsp>

However, if you'd like a super cheap and short sightsee of the Harbour, just hop onto the normal service of the Star Ferry. The ferry takes two routes: between Wanchai Star Ferry pier and Tsim Sha Tsui Star Ferry pier, and Tsim Sha Tsui and Central Star Ferry pier. From the two different locations, the excursions take a varying time of 10 to 20 minutes. Best of all, the cost of such a ticket will cost you roughly two to four Hong Kong dollars depending on whether it's a weekday or weekend.

**Ladies Market:** Dive into the hustle and bustle of the Ladies Market for a flavour of frantic Hong Kong. If you're looking to experience a bit of that crazy energy Hong Kong has to offer, or to practice your haggling skills then head over to Mong Kok, Tung Choi Street, where you'll find the Ladies

Market; a one kilometre stretch filled with a mishmash of vendors and stalls selling an eclectic selection of stuff from women's fashion, souvenirs to knock offs. Alternatively, Ladies Market is great to just have a wander around and soak in the busy atmosphere or "window shop" – if you'd like to purchase something be sure to haggle or bargain the price as most of the prices won't be written.

There isn't a set opening time but Ladies Market is open pretty much every day. Head over to explore whatever time you want, I'd say it's best to go from 10am onwards, as before then the vendors are still setting up for the day and it's not nearly as lively.

The Ladies Market is pretty easy to get to via MTR – the best way is to go to Mong Kok Station (not Mong Kok East Station) and from there take Exit 2 which will take you to Nelson Street. From Nelson Street walk down about two blocks until you reach a crossroads and see Tung Choi Street aka where the Ladies Market is situated.

**Temple Street Night Market:** Want more markets to explore? Then go explore the well-known Temple Street Night Market to see Hong Kong in action at night. Night Markets used to be a popular past time in Hong Kong combining late night snacking and shopping, but as the city evolved over the years the night markets started to recede, and now the Temple Street Night Market is the last one standing reminiscent of Hong Kong at night in its heyday.

The counterpart to Ladies Market, you'd find that Temple Street Night Market sells menswear and all sorts of trinkets and souvenirs. As its name suggests Temple Street Night Market is built near Tin Hau Temple and weaved into that history is a long tradition of fortune telling that has spilt over into the tourism of the night market. You'd find fortune tellers eager to tell you of your future. Note though not all fortune tellers are able to speak in English though some do have a sufficient grasp – double check before you try it out. The fortune tellers are not situated in the official heart of the market, instead they are nearer the temple itself. To find them head northwards of the market and go past the Yu Mai Tai Library until you reach the temple gardens.

Another cultural element you can discover at the night market is the Opera Singing area, where amateurs of all levels come together to represent Cantonese Opera and showcase their own unique singing style and musical structures. The Opera Singing area is active most nights from around 8:30pm to 11:00pm if you want to catch a street performance.

To locate the Temple Street Night Market there are two MTR stations you can head towards. You can either go to Yau Ma Tei Station and take Exit C then turn onto Temple Street at Man Ming Lane or from Jordan Station, take Exit A and turn right onto Jordan Road and then take another right onto Temple Street. There are also posted signs at the MTR for you to follow to help you get to your destination.

**Lan Kwai Fong:** Want to find out where all the expats hang out? Well you'll likely find them at Lan Kwai Fong where the bars are at, as well as a large number of restaurants with a huge variety of international cuisine available from British pubs and Italian restaurants, to Portuguese and so on. Lan Kwai Fong is a lively night spot and well worth a visit for a drink or meal. Nearby there is also the mid level escalators, which are the world's longest outside covered escalator system, stretching for over 800 metres and rising 135 metres through the streets of a steep hillside.

Fun fact there is another Lan Kwai Fong; a copycat if you will, in none other than China, specifically in Chengdu China where they claim to be the bigger and better version of Hong Kong's Lan Kwai Fong; a Lan Kwai Fong 2.0.

To visit Lan Kwai Fong go to MTR Central Station Exit D2, and walk along Theatre Lane, and up D'Aguilar Street.

**Hong Kong Disneyland:** Much like Hong Kong itself, Hong Kong Disneyland is small however it's not any less magical. Similar to other Disneylands, it is bright and colourful and if you're a fan, undoubtedly brings out your inner child.

From my own experience, it was pretty novel to visit though the only good ride I remember was the Buzzlight Year Space Mountain roller coaster that whizzed round in the dark with blurry glow in the dark decorations.



What I did like about Hong Kong Disneyland was that they had their own Disney Resort Line at Sunny Bay Station where you can take a Disneyfied train that took you to the theme park. It was pretty cute with Mickey Mouse shaped windows and various adorable Disney details.

Guests can purchase Disneyland tickets at MTR Hong Kong Station, Tung Chung Line which also takes 30 minutes to get to the resort itself. A standard one-day park ticket is pricey though at around HK\$589.

## Food

### Dim Sum:

You can't visit Hong Kong without trying Dim Sum, that would be like going to Italy and not trying pasta or pizza. What is dim sum? Dim sum is a morning to afternoon meal (essentially brunch) consisting of various snack size dishes, kind of like Spanish tapas just replace the alcohol with copious amount of tea. Traditionally, dim sum was served via a trolley but nowadays it's more common where you will have a form with all the names of the dishes and you tick off the ones you want. There are so many different dishes you can pick from for dim sum, but these are my personal classic hits which I think are universally loved for an authentic experience:

#### 1. Cha Siu Bao

This is a slightly sweet roasted pork encased in a soft white steam bun. There's usually a thin paper film attached to the bottom of the buns that you need to remove before you dig in.

#### 2. Egg Tart

I believe this has drawn influence from the Portuguese's own pastel de nata. It's a slightly crisp layered pastry with a creamy yellow soft egg filling that tastes sweet. The egg part has an almost bouncy consistency or jiggle to it, and in their bite size are a great dessert snack after eating the savoury portion of dim sum. It is said you'll find the best egg tarts in Macau!

#### 3. Cheung Fun with fried dough or roast pork centre

Cheung Fun itself is a plain but delicate rice sheet that is steamed, it almost has a soft noodle texture but I assure you tastes pretty good when wrapped over other stuff. The other stuff being long tails of

crisp fried dough called *yauh ja gwai* or *you tiao* in Mandarin. The fried dough stick is also popular in Shanghainese breakfast, where long tails of these fried dough sticks are dipped into hot soya milk. With the cheng fun it is usually dipped into soy sauce and eaten. You can also get a roast pork filling with your cheung fun which is just as delicious.

#### **4. Fried Turnip Cake or *Lohr Bahk Go***

This is my personal go to whenever I eat dim sum. It's grated turnip with dried shrimp and small chunks of Chinese sausage formed into a fried patty. It's oily but yummy especially when dipped with either soy sauce or for an added kick chilli oil.

#### **5. Pork Siu Mai**

This a classic dish that pops up when you think of dim sum. Siu Mai are these small roundish squares of pork and prawn wrapped up in a yellow-ish pastry, with an open top that is dotted orange.

#### **6. Har Gow**

These have a shell shape to them with prawns wrapped up in a translucent cover. There is a ridiculous amount to choose from. If you want to be more adventurous you could go for the Steamed Chicken Feet, that is much beloved by Hong Kong residents. Apparently, it's all about the sauce that it comes with, and sucking the skin off the bones of feet. It's actually not that bad once you get over the fact you're eating a chicken's foot. Or you can try Steam Beef Tripe which is the stomach lining of a cow; the texture is a little chewy but overall soft.

If you don't mind the queue you could go try out the legendary Tim Ho Wan dim sum restaurant that has earned two Michelin stars for its food but have still kept its prices reasonable, making it extremely popular and the queues long. Currently there are three Tim Ho Wan locations dotted around in Olympic City, Sham Shui Po, and North Point.

#### **Egg Waffle:**

Egg Waffle or *gai dahn jai* is probably my favourite snack from Hong Kong of all time, shaped like bubble wrap in a honeycomb structure; it is a light, crispy taste of subtle sweet egg puff heaven. Honestly, it's awesome. You'd find that egg waffle is also very popular in China, but for the best you have to try it out in Hong Kong. And the best place to go for egg waffle? Hands down it has got to be in Shaun Kei Wan. Not far from the MTR station of the same name, you'll find a small outdoor shop called Master Low-key Food Shop with lines out the door. This guy is a legend for his egg waffle and has won numerous awards for it. Seriously, they did a city-wide competition where all the egg waffle vendors competed to be the best and he came out on top. Previously the owner was an IT manager before he changed vocation, and I am so glad he did because not only are his egg waffle delicious, but you can also combine it with peanut butter, sugar and condensed milk. Hot egg waffle with melting peanut butter? Game changer.

Try it out for yourselves, the address is Shop B3, 76A Shau Kei Wan Main Street East, Shau Kei Wan

#### **Transport**

In my experience, Hong King's public transport is not only convenient but really easy to navigate. The main two ways to get around is using the MTR or Taxis.

#### **MTR**

As a traveller you will probably use the MTR the most because it is so practical. The MTR maps are easy to read and figure out, all you need to travel on the MTR is an Octopus card. Of course, you can purchase single tickets readily at the ticket machines if you rather. However, I do recommend getting an Octopus Card if you're in Hong Kong for a longer holiday. The Octopus cards are really handy as you can use it to pay for the MTR but also for most if not all buses, just look for a small card dashboard with a picture of the Octopus card. Bonus you can also use your Octopus card in convenience stores like 7-Eleven or even Mcdonalds.

The Octopus card cost HK\$50 but is also refundable, so at the end of trip you can return the card at any available ticket office at the stations. Or you could keep your Octopus card for any future visits to Hong Kong, or as a nifty little souvenir of your stay.

## **Taxis**

If you're exploring the main urban area of Hong Kong, especially on the Blue Island line depicted on the MTR map, you'll find yourself seeing a lot of red taxis. The red taxis are the most common and are the ones you'll likely use the most. All taxis are metered; for the red taxi, the meter starts at HK\$20 and will climb up HK\$1.5 for every 200 metres after the initial covered 2km distance.

Blue taxis cover Lantau island, so if you rather travel by taxi to visit the Big Buddha after arriving to Tung Chung station, the blue taxi is the one you want to get. Slightly cheaper than the red taxis, the blue taxi meter starts at HK\$15 for the first 2km, and goes up HK\$1.3 for every added 200m after.

Lastly, the green taxis cover the New Territories, which is essentially the rest of Hong Kong excluding the main Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula. These start at HK\$16.5 and similar to the blue taxis go up HK\$1.3 after 2km.

Whilst getting a taxi, I recommend having a written address of where you want to go as most taxi drivers will only have a basic grasp of English or less. Although, they will probably know of the famous attractions and places should you wish to go there. Still to be safe, have a copy of the address. Another thing, it is a good idea to carry some change with you for the taxis as taxi drivers are not obliged to give change for HK\$500 or HK\$1000 notes.

## **Accommodation**

Having the fortune of being able to stay with family during my visits to Hong Kong, my knowledge of accommodation in Hong Kong is limited. However, as with any place you would stay at read the reviews and check its distance from notable attractions you'd like to visit. What I can say is, I would recommend staying either on Hong Kong Island, or in popular areas of Kowloon such as in Tsim Sha Tsui or Mong Kok to make your stay convenient by being in the thick of it. However, luckily with the convenience of the MTR, I would say it's pretty easy getting around anywhere.

I personally enjoy using hostelworld as I trust the website having used it numerous times before in my trips, but also there are tons of reviews for hostels which offers valuable insight into the hostels you're looking at, and gives an authentic verification of the hostels by travellers.

## General Tips

If you'd like to know some basic Cantonese, an app I like to use is called Cantonese Basic which has three white dots in a grey speech bubble as its logo. It has some random phrases and topics but does also include common greetings and things that are generally helpful.

For example, if you'd like to say thank you there are two versions: *m goi* and *do je*. Typically, you would end up using the first thank you, *m goi*, a lot more than the other as it is to thank someone who has helped you or provided a service. *Do je* is usually used when you have received a gift. Please do check the pronunciation of how the words are said as Cantonese is spoken very differently from Mandarin, and isn't like pin yin at all.