

# HONG KONG

*A View of a Remarkable City*

LEE H. VAN DAM

# HONG KONG – A View of a Remarkable City

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## Experiencing Hong Kong

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**Hong Kong is a remarkable city – certainly one of the most interesting places in the world!** I am often asked by friends who are planning to visit Hong Kong for the first time for advice on how best to see and experience this amazing place. Since traveling tastes are very individual things, it is not easy to give advice that suits everyone. Some people are sightseers, some want to spend time in museums, and some want to experience more of the people and the culture. Me? I am a bit of a combination of these. **I want to see all of the interesting sights, but I also want to be able to gain an understanding of the people and their way of life.** So, with that in mind, here are a few of my thoughts about how I would spend my time if I were visiting Hong Kong for the first time.

**When is a good time to go?** Hong Kong's climate is an important consideration in planning your trip. With a cooler winter and a very hot and humid summer, **fall and spring are the better times to travel there.** Ideal months are October, November, March, and April, unless you want to be there for some of the big Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year (in late January or early February) or the Dragon Boat Festival (in May or June).

**Where should we stay?** Being in a hotel that has a wonderful view of the harbor would be my first choice. However, hotels like that will be on the expensive end of the scale since Hong Kong is one of the costliest cities in the world. But Hong Kong has hundreds of hotel and lodging choices offering thousands of hotel rooms ranging from

extremely expensive to very cheap, so finding one to your liking that fits your budget shouldn't be a problem. Here are some possible choices:

- **Very Expensive**

- **Peninsula Hotel** – This would be my first choice in Hong Kong if money were no object. It is a stylish cultural icon that has a prime location at the tip of the Kowloon Peninsula. **The Peninsula oozes old-world charm and ambiance.** If you want to be pampered and get a feel for Hong Kong as it was in colonial times, this is the place. (A similar grand old hotel is the Mandarin Hotel on the island.)
- **Ritz-Carlton** – Located on the 102<sup>nd</sup> through 118<sup>th</sup> floors of the International Commerce Centre in Kowloon, this is **the highest hotel in the world** located in a skyscraper. The views in every direction are terrific and the amenities and restaurants are superb.
- **Four Seasons** – On Hong Kong island, this wonderful hotel is housed in the International Finance Centre in the Central District. It has excellent views of the harbor and Kowloon and its Lung King Heen Restaurant was **the world's first Chinese restaurant to be awarded three Michelin stars.**

- **Expensive**

- **Island Shangri-La** – With a prime island location and excellent views, this is a wonderful hotel. It is famous for two things: (1) **a 16-story painted silk mural called *Great Motherland of China***, which is the largest such piece of artwork in the world; and (2) **a 140-year-old banyan tree in the hotel's atrium.** Some HK\$24 million (US\$3.1 million) was spent to preserve the tree while the hotel was being built.
- **InterContinental Hong Kong** – With a superb waterfront location on the Kowloon side, this hotel is close to Nathan Road, the Avenue of the Stars, the Star Ferry, and many upscale shops and restaurants.
- **Grand Hyatt Hong Kong** – Connected to the Convention and Exhibition Centre on the island, this hotel has a wonderful vista of the harbor and is considered to be an

excellent value for the money. It is close to some of the old markets and quaint shopping streets on the island.



- **Moderate**

- **YMCA on Salisbury Road** – This surprisingly upscale hotel is located directly adjacent to the Peninsula Hotel in Kowloon and has essentially the same view and location as the Peninsula, but at a fraction of the Peninsula's price. **This is where Holly and I stayed on our last visit to Hong Kong and we loved it. Book early and ask for a harbor view room on a high floor.** That type of room is worth the little bit of extra cost. The hotel has a swimming pool, exercise room, and restaurant, and is convenient to everything. It is newly remodeled and very comfortable.
- **Novotel Century Hong Kong** – This has clean, comfortable rooms and is in a good location on the island. It has no views, but it is close to restaurants, shopping, and transportation.

- **Holiday Inn Golden Mile** – Located directly on Nathan Road in Kowloon, this popular hotel is right in the middle of the busy tourist stretch of Tsim Sha Tsui – and it is convenient to many tailors if you’re looking for a suit and some shirts.
- **Inexpensive** (but in Hong Kong even inexpensive things can cost quite a bit)
  - **Metropark Hotel** – Located on Waterloo Road in Kowloon, this hotel provides a clean and comfortable place to stay at a good value. It is located within easy walking distance of the Ladies Street area.
  - **Butterfly on Victoria Hotel** – Located near Victoria Park in Causeway Bay on the island, this boutique hotel provides a pleasant place to stay. Although not near the typical tourist areas, it is close to an MTR stop, so getting around is easy. The smaller rooms in this hotel are relatively quiet (it’s hard in Hong Kong to ever find true quiet) and they are nicely furnished.
  - **Caritas Bianchi Lodge** – In Yau Ma Tei on the Kowloon side, this is a clean and friendly hostel offering rooms with private baths. The Jade Market, Temple Street Night Market, and Mong Kong Computer Centre are within easy walking distance. This place fills up fast, so book early.

**How long should we stay?** It is hard to discover Hong Kong in a meaningful way in just a day or two, so I recommend you spend **at least three full days** experiencing Hong Kong’s sights, sounds, tastes, and people. This can be done on your own at your own pace, which is how I prefer to see things, or you can sign up for any number of commercial tours to do it. A suggested itinerary for each day would be:

- **Day 1 (Suit, Chop, and Hong Kong Island)**
  - **Buy a Suit** – Get fitted for a suit at one of Hong Kong’s many tailor shops. By doing this on the first day, you’ll leave time for an additional fitting or two so that your suit will be just the way you want it. You may want to study up a bit on suits before your trip. At home, look at suits in clothing stores and study men’s fashion magazines so you’ll have a good idea of what kinds of fabrics, colors,



and styles are your favorites. If you'd like a suggestion for a tailor, the one I go to is Ash Samtani Clothing at 92-94 Nathan Road, Burlington Arcade, in Tsim Sha Tsui on the Kowloon side. I bought my first suit there in April of 1966 and have been using them since. And you are welcome to mention to Ash, Luke, and Amar Samtani that I recommended them to you.

- **Order a Chop** – Have a Chinese person who speaks good English give you a Chinese name consisting of three Chinese characters. Then order a Chinese chop from one of the many small shops that make them. A chop is a traditional Chinese signature stamp with your Chinese name etched into it. Going there on your first day will give the shopkeeper time to have the chop carved and ready for you before you leave town.
- **Ride the Star Ferry** – This world-famous ferry has been going back and forth across Hong Kong's harbor since 1888. I love the Star Ferry and try to ride it each time I visit Hong Kong. And I especially enjoy riding it at night.
- **Go to the Peak** – Take the Peak Tram (it is actually a funicular) to the top of Victoria Peak and then go up the escalators in the Peak Tower to the viewing deck. If your time in Hong Kong permits, go to the Peak twice – once in the day and then again at night.
- **Visit Repulse Bay and Stanley Market** – Take the #6 or #260 bus from Central to Stanley Market. Try to sit on the top deck at the very front of the bus so you'll have the best view.
- **Day 2 (Kowloon and the New Territories)**
  - **Mong Kok Shopping Area – Shop in the Mong Kok area on the Kowloon side at Ladies Street, Sneakers Street, Flower Market Street, Bird Street, etc.** And if you like electronics, don't miss the Mong Kok Computer Centre at #8 Nelson Street. It is a congested, jam-packed, shoulder-to-shoulder mall where you'll find every conceivable kind of computer and electronic product. It's a little hard to spot. Enter on the ground floor and then go upstairs.
  - **Jade Market** – The Jade Market is a lot of fun to visit. The many shops in this congested market specialize in

offering an unbelievable variety of jade pieces in many shapes, colors, and price ranges. They also sell pearls and other jewelry.

- **Ten Thousand Buddhas Temple** – Located in Sha Tin in the New Territories, this is an interesting place to experience old Chinese culture and learn about Chinese beliefs.
- **A Symphony of Lights** – Held every evening at 8:00 p.m. at Victoria Harbour, this light and sound show can be seen from either side of the harbor, although I prefer viewing it from the Kowloon side.
- **Tsim Sha Tsui and Kowloon at Night** – Shop the many stores and markets along Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. Ride a double-decker bus headed north on Nathan Road to the area of the Temple Street Night Market. Sit on the top deck of the bus in the front seat!
- **Day 3 (Lantau Island and Farewell Dinner)**
  - **Big Buddha** – Take the MTR to Tung Chung on Lantau Island and then ride the Ngong Ping 360 cable car to the Big Buddha statue. Hike the 268 steps to the Big Buddha, eat a vegetarian lunch at the Po Lin Monastery, and stroll through the shops at Ngong Ping Village.
  - **Suit and Chop** – Pick up your suit and chop.
  - **Peking Duck Dinner** – Finish off your trip to Hong Kong with a Peking duck dinner at a fancy Chinese restaurant such as the Peking Garden Restaurant in Star House on the Kowloon side near the Star Ferry. (Note – You may need to make reservations and place your order in advance if you plan on having Peking duck.)

For those whose travel plans allow them to stay for a longer period of time in Hong Kong, or for those who are lucky enough to live in Hong Kong, please see my list of **101 Things to See and Do in Hong Kong (Appendix D)**.

## *Chinese Term*



## *Double Happiness*

Seen prominently at Chinese weddings and elsewhere, the double happiness symbol is a beautiful Chinese artistic design made up of **two characters for the word joy placed side by side**. Its presence is believed to bring extra happiness and harmony.

The double happiness symbol (usually in bright red or gold) appears frequently at Hong Kong weddings on invitations, decorations, and favors – and often even in the fabric of the bride's dress and the material used to make the groom's clothing. It is also commonly displayed in homes, in businesses, and on many Chinese products. **The double happiness symbol is also an important part of a Chinese New Year celebration.**

