

Dynamic HONG KONG

By BEN MACK

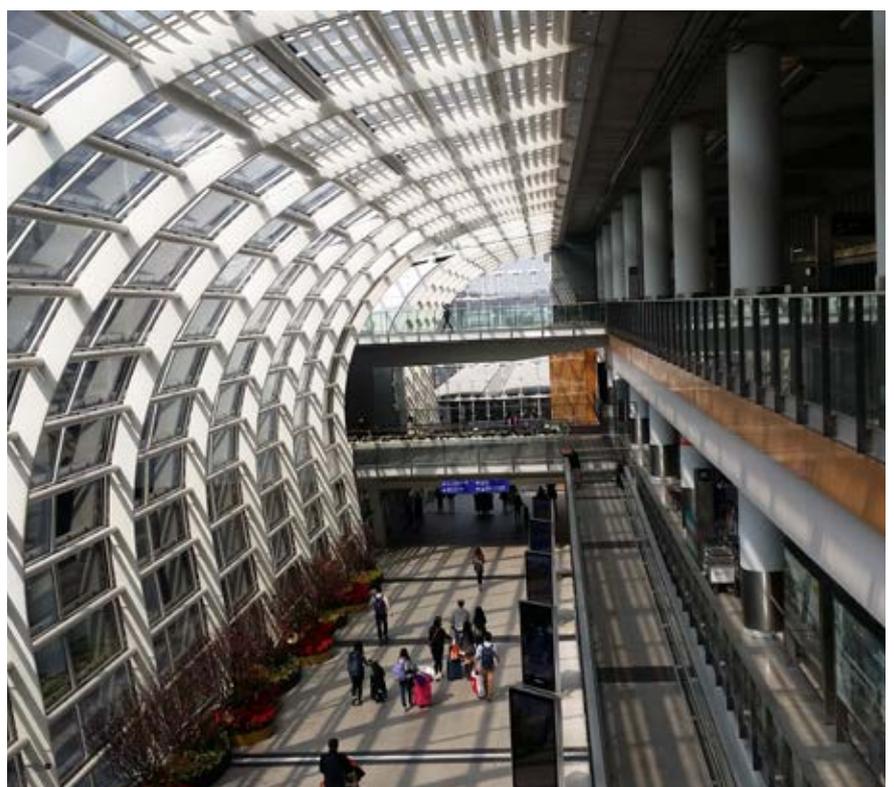
Photos by FERAZ KHALIL & BEN MACK

“Hustle” and “bustle” are two of the words that first come to mind when many people think of Hong Kong. There’s nothing wrong with that, of course – after all, the Asian city has been synonymous with busyness for centuries. But the great thing is, with so much going on, it really is one of those places where there’s something for everyone.

Want to visit theme parks? There’s Disneyland Hong Kong, not to mention Ocean Park (where it’s possible to see pandas). Like shopping? Times Square in Causeway Bay and Mong Kok are some of the most famous shopping districts not just in Asia, but the whole world. Seeking nature? You can find that, too, with Victoria Park and many of the outlying islands. The point being, Hong Kong has it all – which can actually make it somewhat difficult to decide where to begin.

Knowing where to start really depends upon what you want to do in Hong Kong. But no matter what your intentions are, the aptly named Central District is a good beginning. Located at the northern end of Hong Kong Island, it’s where you’ll find the largest number of the towering, neon-lit skyscrapers for which Hong Kong is famous. The shopping mecca of Times Square is here (home to the most highest-end designer brands such as Dior, Gucci and Chanel), as are five-star hotels like the Four Seasons, Mandarin Oriental, and the Ritz-Carlton. While most of the ultra-luxe hotels have enough amenities and restaurants to keep visitors indoors for days, it’s still worth taking a few hours to at least take a tram up to the top of Victoria Peak (known locally as “The Peak”) to check out the breathtaking views of the city below, or to walk along the waterfront. Hong Kong may be famed for its frenetic pace of life, but both spots are some of the best to simply sit down and watch the world go by.

It may be one of the glitziest places on Earth, but Hong Kong Central is also where you can find a real relics from the past. The Lin Heung Tea House isn’t the fanciest place around, but it does have the best dim sum in the city. The lotus paste buns and rice dumplings are also highly recommended. Just be aware that, compared to most places in Hong Kong, you might not hear





Hong Kong Skyline. Photo: FEROUZ KHALIL



Nathan Road. Photo: ECKHARD PECHER

much English being spoken.

For a different culinary experience entirely, a meal or drink at Ozone is not to be missed. Claimed to be the highest bar in the world, it's all the way up on the 118th floor of the Ritz-Carlton; needless to say, the view is extraordinary. The food is pretty good too, if not slightly adventurous. The "New York Wacky Maki", a seafood dish with black truffle scallop, radish, apple and bacon is well worth ordering.

Film buffs know Hong Kong is the home of Bruce Lee and kung fu films. For any martial arts aficionado, a must-do is a visit to the Avenue of the Stars. Located right along the waterfront of Victoria Harbour, the walkway is based on Hollywood's Walk of Fame and pays homage to the city's rich cinematic history. The fierce-looking Bruce Lee statue might just be the most-photographed thing in southern China, but what better way to prove you visited the hometown of the most famous martial artist ever?

Hong Kong may have a reputation as an "expensive" city (after all, all those designer goods and fancy hotels usually aren't cheap), but there's plenty of ways to have a great time while also saving money. One of the best ways to save is to try the numerous local markets and restaurants, which you can find in just about every district. While some of the foods may look (and smell) strange, they're all high on the scale of delicious. Just make sure to ask if it's spicy or not.

Markets such as the legendary Temple Street in Kowloon also offer a chance to check out Hong Kong's famed discount designer merchandise. The experience alone – with thousands of people from all over the world milling about, with all manner of local and international goods for sale (really, name the item and you'll find it in the markets) in shops as tiny as roadside stalls to cavernous warehouses – is not to be passed up. But be careful: if you knowingly buy a counterfeit – like a fake Louis Vuitton

handbag or Rolex watch, or even pirated CDs or DVDs – the penalties can be severe.

Another way to save money is to use public transport as well as numerous apps (such as the "Octopus App," named for the public transit card commuters use called the Octopus Card) for travelling about. Not only is the metro, ferry, bus and funicular system extensive, but like the markets, it's a great opportunity to see what local people do. Although the train network alone has hundreds of stations, there are easy-to-follow maps, many of them interactive, at every station to tell you exactly where you are and to help you plan your journey.

There's nothing wrong with indulging in all the opulence that Hong Kong has to offer. It is considered one of the most romantic cities in Asia for a reason. A relatively inexpensive stay at a hotel doesn't mean you have to sacrifice quality, either – at least not if you stay at the T Hotel. Located about 20 minutes southwest of the city centre in the lush Pokfulam area, the hotel offers the same level of luxury as better-known five-star lodgings, but at a fraction of the price. The main reason prices are so low is because most of the hotel's staff are actually students training for a hospitality career. Add the fact the hotel has breath-taking views of the South China Sea and that the staff will go above and beyond to make sure your stay is a pleasant one so they can get good marks from their instructors, and it's a true hidden gem.

Hong Kong is a place for families. It's a place for lovers. It's a place for solo travellers. Really, though, it truly is a place for everyone – no matter your plans or expectations.

 Fiji Airways flies direct to Hong Kong from Nadi up to five times a week