



The many faces of Hong Kong

Joanne Poh discovers a multifaceted city that has plenty of contradictions

THE MTR (Mass Transit Railway) in Hong Kong may look identical to Singapore's MRT, but that is where the similarity between the two cities end.

Hong Kong is fierce. Whether you desire to ferret out the smoky dens of legendary gangsters à la Young and Dangerous or are more inclined towards the moneyed glamour of Hong Kong's glitterati, the city pulses with a daring authenticity that is as gritty as it is glitzy.

Naughty or nice?

Kowloon is a study in contradictions. In terms of accommodation, the Tsim Sha Tsui district in Kowloon has something to offer two disparate groups of travellers — the wealthy and frugal.

Even if you don't fancy spending the night in a cockroach-infested matchbox with no windows, dare yourself to venture into the deliciously infamous Chungking Mansions and Mirador Mansions on Nathan Road. The two dilapidated buildings house a dimly-lit array of hostels, restaurants, shops and other

rather suspicious-looking businesses.

Immortalised in Wong Kar Wai's film Chungking Express, Chungking Mansions in real life makes its dodgy celluloid incarnation look like Disneyland. A dead body would look right at home on the cracked concrete floors.

Under the light buzz of flickering fluorescent lights, wary shopkeepers, foreign workers and miscellaneous riffraff peer cautiously out at you from the shadowy interiors of tiny shops ostensibly hawking suitcases or offering money changing services.

Home to the cheapest hostels in Hong Kong, Chungking Mansions and Mirador Mansions will make even the most hardened budget traveller think twice about spending the night there. The more transient visitor though is advised to sample some of the cheap and excellent Indian cuisine on offer in the two buildings.

Walk a little further down Nathan Road towards the harbour and turn right, however, and one is transported to a different dimension altogether. Enter the Peninsula Hotel, one of Hong Kong's most famed, most iconic, and most expensive hotels. The fountain at its entrance seems to bubble not cheerily as fountains usually do but in a dignified, almost haughty fashion.

With its high ceilings, splendid harbour view and carpets softer than any of the beds at Chungking Mansions, the Peninsula is a beautiful edifice indeed. High tea at the Peninsula is a recommended indulgence, as any self-respecting Hong Kong film starlet would have you know.

On the other side of Salisbury Road lie the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, the Hong Kong Space Museum and Theatre and the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Beyond that, the magnificent Victoria Harbour and the kitschy Avenue of Stars await.

As you stroll past the statue of Bruce Lee and sidestep Jackie Chan's handprints in the ground, you realise that nothing in Hong Kong — good, bad or tacky — is done by halves.



Meet Bruce Lee at the Avenue of Stars. PHOTOS: JOANNE POH

As you tiptoe past hushed rows of designer boutiques with the reverence befitting a worshipper at a shrine, a pair of shoes catches your eye. Eyes lowered, you respectfully enter the shop, credit card clasped with both hands. Here lies Hong Kong's greatest extravagance.

As you leave the warm glow of the makeshift market stalls behind, enter the electric incandescence of Causeway Bay.

Home to department stores and mega malls like Sogo and Times Square, Causeway Bay demonstrates Hong Kong's great love of buying stuff. Everything from international brand names to locally designed and manufactured products can be acquired with a flick of the wrist and a flourish of the pen.

Struggle to find yourself in the maze of shopping malls before wandering over to Pacific Place at Admiralty and the Landmark at Central with their cavernous, swanky interiors.

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Shopping frenzy

At the Temple Street Night Market, a snaking row of fortune tellers in tented stalls is a picture of oriental mystique. Each soothsayer, head bowed, solemnly inspects the palm of her client with a magnifying glass before making her pronouncement on his fate. The market also offers for sale curiosities such as replicas of ancient Chinese texts and Mao Zedong watches.

While Hong Kong is a paradise for fans of designer brands and other hoity-toity retailing, if you hanker for some bargaining, head to the Ladies' Market on Tung Choi Street in Mong Kok, which of-

GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines flies direct to Hong Kong International Airport 6 times daily in about 3 hours, 45 minutes. Economy class return tickets are priced at \$660 onwards. Cathay Pacific also operates direct flights to Hong Kong.

INSIDER'S TIPS

The Marriott Hotel is conveniently located at Pacific Place. Double or twin-share rooms are priced at HK\$2,720 (\$454) onwards.

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VIETNAM All-In/Special Holiday
 Bonus (*selected tours): Scenic Cruise on Halong Bay
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 5* Ho Chi Minh City Windsor/Ormi/Equatorial Hotel (3N)
 Gourmet: 100% Meals, Seafood lunch, Chinese set lunch, Cruise Dinner on Mekong River, Seafood Dinner, Vietnamese Cuisine
 Attractions: Notre Dame Church, Vung Tau, Cu Chi Tunnels, My Tho, Haiong Bay, Water Puppetry Show
 Xmas Dep: Dec 22, 24, 25
 Guarantee Dep: Nov 26, Dec 5, 8, 12, 14, Feb 2, 3, 4
 + Dec 2, 11 + (Jan-Mar Dep)
 5/8D U.P. \$799
 fr\$ **629**

Love/Magical HONG KONG
 Bonus (*selected tours): Ocean Park + FREE Discount Booklet
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 5* Royal Plaza Hotel (4N)
 Gourmet: Tim Sum Breakfast, Hong Kong Local Café Breakfast, Roasted Goose Lunch, seafood dinner
 Attractions: 1881 Heritage, Festival Walk, Tung Chung City Gate Outlet Mall, Aberdeen Fishing Village, Madame Tussauds Wax Museum
 Xmas Dep: Dec 22, 24
 Guarantee Dep: Nov 26, Dec 1, 3, 8, 11, 15, 17 + Dec 29, 31
 5D U.P. \$1198
 fr\$ **898**

Gold Coast + Sydney/ Melbourne
 Bonus (*selected dates): Catch-a-crab tour, Glow Worm night tour
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 4* Gold Coast Courtyard Marriott Hotel, 4* Sydney Ciltgate Sebel Hotel, 4* Melbourne Ciltgate Sebel Hotel
 Gourmet: 80% meals, Fish & Chips lunch with fresh Oysters, Lobster & Whole Abalone Dinner
 Xmas Dep: Nov 23, 29
 Dec 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 20, 24, 27
 + Jan 21, Feb 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Mar 12, 13
 6/7D U.P. \$1988
 fr\$ **1688**

Turkey Special/Mystery
 Bonus (*selected dates): Exotic Performance of Belly and Folk Dance
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 5* Hotel for the Entire Tour
 Gourmet: 100% Meals, 7 Breakfasts, 7 Lunches, 7 Dinner
 Attractions: Museum of Ancient Anatolian Civilization, Cotton Castle, Troy, Trojan Horse, Grand Bazaar, St. Sophia Museum, Blue Mosque
 Xmas Dep: Nov 20
 Dec 14, 18, 21, 29, Feb 3
 + Jan 12, Feb 2, Mar 9, 10
 10D U.P. \$2199
 fr\$ **1699**

Jewels of Egypt & Nile Cruise
 Bonus (*selected dates): Camel rides at Sahara Desert
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 4* Hotel stay for Entire Tour
 Gourmet: 100% Meals, Daily Scandinavian Breakfast, Chinese Cuisine
 Attractions: Kronborg Castle, Floien, Norway Miniature Park, Viking Ship Museum, Drottningholm, Volvo Museum, Bergen Fish Market
 Xmas Dep: Dec 11, 25
 Jan 29, Mar 11
 + Feb 2, 4
 10/11D U.P. \$2399
 fr\$ **2099**

Eastern Europe
 Germany, Prague, Hungary, Austria
 Bonus: Experience a colourful Hungarian Folklore Dinner
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 4* Hotel stay for Entire Tour
 Gourmet: 70% Meals, Daily American Breakfasts, 80% Chinese Meals, Austrian Pork knuckles lunch in Berlin
 Attractions: Auschwitz Concentration Camp, Budapest, Vienna, Salzburg, Swarovski Crystal Worlds, Neuschwanstein Castle
 Dep: Dec 11, 18, 31, Jan 8, 29
 Feb 5, 19, Mar 5, 19
 11/14D U.P. \$2688
 fr\$ **2388**

Romantic Europe/+ Free 1N Rome/London
 Italy, Switzerland, France, England
 Bonus: EuroStar Express Train from Paris to London
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 2 nights in Lucerne, 3 nights in Paris
 Free upgrade to 1N 5* Switzerland Hotel
 Gourmet: 75% Meals, Swiss Fondue, Dim Sum Lunch, French Seafood Dinner
 Highlights: Eiffel Tower (2nd level) + River Seine Cruise
 Xmas Dep: Dec 4, 11, 15
 Jan 14, Feb 2, Mar 11
 + Jan 12, Feb 3, 4, Mar 9, 25, 26
 12/14D U.P. \$3298
 fr\$ **2998**

Scandinavia
 Denmark, Norway, Sweden
 Bonus: Fjord Cruise - view the Majestic Waterfall foam down into the Queen of Fjord
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 4* Hotel stay for Entire Tour
 Gourmet: 100% Meals, Daily Scandinavian Breakfast, Chinese Cuisine
 Attractions: Kronborg Castle, Floien, Norway Miniature Park, Viking Ship Museum, Drottningholm, Volvo Museum, Bergen Fish Market
 Xmas Dep: Feb 4, Mar 6
 + Dec 3, 12, Jan 7
 8/10D U.P. \$4099
 fr\$ **3699**

Jiangnan/Shanghai
 Hengdian, Shaoxing
 Bonus: Buffet Lunch at the Revolving Restaurant of Oriental Pearl Tower (267m)
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 5* Hangzhou Sofitel Xanadu Resort, 5* Shanghai Sky Fortune Hotel (2N Suite Room)
 Gourmet: 95% meals, Wensan Trotter Dish, Banana Leaf Thai Cuisine, Dongpo Meat and Baked Chicken, Hangzhou Duck Casserole, Suzhou Flavours
 Attractions: Shaoding Ancient Street Trishaw Tour, Hengdian Movie Studio, Ou Garden
 Xmas Dep: Nov 27
 Dec 11, 22, 25, Feb 23, 4
 + Dec 4, 10, 17, 18, 31, Jan 1, 12, 15, 21, 28, 29, 30, Feb 2, 5, 11, 12, 13, 16, 25, 26
 8/9D U.P. \$899
 fr\$ **599**

All-In Yunnan + Shangri-la/Kunming/Dali/Lijiang
 Travel in Comfort: Shangri-la + Kunming
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 5* Dali Regent Hotel, 5* Lijiang Guanfang Villa (2N), 5* Shangri-la Paradise Hotel (2N)
 Gourmet: 100% Meals, Organic Mushroom Hotpot, Tsui Royal Family Banquet, Tibetan Steamboat, Yunnan Herbal Cuisine
 Attractions: Shangri-la Budacuo, Yulong Snow Mountain, Lufeng Dinosaur Valley, Dayan Ancient Town, Stone Forest
 Xmas Dep: Nov 24, 28
 Dec 4, 5, 7, 15, 19, 21, 25, 29, Jan 30
 + Dec 8, 9, 28, Jan 1, 4, 15, 16, 23, 29, 30
 (Feb - Mar Dep)
 8/9D U.P. \$1199
 fr\$ **999**

Dongbei Refreshing/Ice & Snow Wonderland
 Winter Fun: SS Jihua Ski Resort + 1 Round of Horse Sleighing
 Guarantee Hotel Stay (*selected dates): 4* Hotel stay for Entire Tour
 Gourmet: 100% Meals, Exclusive Traditional Man Ethnic Cuisine, Herbal Tonic Cuisine
 Attractions: Harbin Ice & Snow Great World, Sika Deer Farm, St. Sophia Orthodox Church
 Xmas Dep: Nov 27
 Dec 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, Jan 1, Feb 2, 4
 + Dec 5, 27, 28, 29, 30
 Jan 3, 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 23, 24, 28, 30 + (Feb Dep)
 8/10D U.P. \$1599
 fr\$ **1099**

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 • Visit the most beautiful village in France - Yvoire • Enjoy the famous cheese fondue dinner + panoramic dinner in Paris
 • Visit the grand Notre Dame and Louvre Museum & Eiffel Tower • Hop on the Eurostar to London
 • Desert safari experience and dune bashing in Dubai • BBQ dinner with Belly dancing show
 Guarantee Dep: Dec 13 Assemble Date: Dec 3, 8, 22
 fr\$ **2,688***

14D Switzerland / Italy + Dubai (E2114)
 Zurich / Lucerne / Interlaken / Zermatt / Milan / Venice / Rome / Dubai
 • Visit the largest waterfall Schaffhausen in Western Europe • Experience making and tasting Europe's finest chocolates
 • Visit the capital of the Swiss Confederation Bern • Shop at the fashion capital of Italy, Milan
 • Leaning Tower of Pisa • Desert safari experience and dune bashing in Dubai
 • BBQ dinner with Belly dancing show • The "Queen of the Adriatic" Venice
 Assemble Date: Dec 2, 9, 16
 fr\$ **2,988***

14/16*D Comprehensive Italy / Switzerland / Paris / London* + Dubai (E23P12E23L16)
 Rome / Venice / Milan / Interlaken / Lucerne / Paris / London* / Dubai
 • View the famous Leaning Tower of Pisa • Fashion capital of Italy, Milan
 • Enjoy the famous cheese fondue dinner • "Queen of the Adriatic" Venice
 • Visit the grand Notre Dame and Louvre Museum & Eiffel Tower
 • Hop on the Eurostar to London • BBQ dinner • Belly dancing show
 • Desert safari experience and dune bashing in Dubai
 Assemble Date: Dec 1, 8 (E12P14) Dec 1, 8, 15 (E12L16*)
 fr\$ **2,988***

6/7/8D Korea Winter Wonderland
 Seoul / Nami Island / Ski Resort*
 • Ski activities + Gondola ride • Namsa Show • Kimchi Making
 • Lotte World (Best 5) • 2N stay at 5-Star Ski Resort*
 • Everland (Passport Ticket) • Mt Sorak (Cableways) • Nami Island
 • Mineral HotSpring Experience • Hanbok Costume Photography
 Guarantee Dep: Nov 26 Dec 13, 16, 27
 Dep: Nov 3, 7, 10, 14, 17, 21, 24, 28, 31
 Feb 2, 4, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21, 25, 28 Mar 7, 14, 21, 28
 fr\$ **888**

8D Beijing / Chengde / Tianjin
 Beijing / Chengde / Tianjin
 • 7N stay in Beijing 5-star Hotel
 • 10 flavoured Local Cuisine
 • Changing & Fruits Picking or Snow Ski (for dep on/after 1 Dec)
 Dep: Nov 25, 30 Dec 1, 14, 18, 25, 31
 Jan 1, 11, 14, 31 Feb 14, 18, 28 Mar 1, 3, 15 and Daily Dep
 fr\$ **1,008**

7D Tokyo Discovery
 Tokyo / Hakone
 • Enjoy Tokyo Disney Resort + 1D Passport Ticket • Onboard Lake Ashi Cruise ride
 • Yakinku BBQ Buffet • Japanese Set Cuisine • Discover the undersea creatures & performances at Epsom Aqua Stadium • No compulsory shopping spots
 Guarantee Dep: Nov 24 Dec 1, 5, 9
 Dep: Jan 9, 16, 23, 29 Feb 2, 5, 12, 19, 26
 fr\$ **1,788***

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