

香港

HONGKONG

The Stuff of Savory Memories in the Realm of Superlatives

by Thomas Wilmer



photo courtesy of *The Brandman Agency*

The direct Cathay Pacific flight from San Francisco winged over Hong Kong and sailed to a seamless halt on the tarmac at the new international airport. From the terminal on Lantau Island, the drive to the city led us across a dramatic new bridge (reminiscent of the Golden Gate) and revealed a harbor peppered with freighters steaming in and out of port. From water's edge to the top of steep hillsides, flocks of construction cranes methodically



photo by Thomas Wilmer

“...a colorful culture that melds the finest of Occidental urbanity with ancient Asian mythology...”

assembled high-rise apartments to house an ever-burgeoning population (presently 6.8 million).

The construction boom in Hong Kong is pervasive, and real estate speculation is frenetic. Tales abound of speculators bidding on apartments — pre-construction — and flipping them for astounding profits before the buildings are even finished. While in the Hong Kong banking district, architects are on an unrestrained quest to outdo each other in crafting glistening, skyscraping corporate towers.

Business as usual

When the British returned Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 some feared the erosion of its free-market economy, but China has maintained a relatively hands-off “one country, two systems” principle of governance and by all outward appearances it’s business as usual. And the city is vibrantly abloom.

From flower markets to discos

Hong Kong is a realm of superlatives — from cosmopolitan shopping to a colorful culture that melds the finest of Occidental urbanity with ancient Asian mythology, rituals and beliefs. This is a city that hums and throbs with activity 24/7. A stroll through the night markets or nightclub districts such as Wan Chai (made famous by the 1957 movie *The World of Suzie Wong*) reveals sidewalks just as packed with people at midnight as the middle of the afternoon. Open-air markets sprawl for blocks throughout the city – wet markets (fresh fruits and vegetables), flower markets, night markets. The street stalls offer everything imaginable from palm and face readers (Temple Street Market) to squiggling eels, goldfish, songbirds and frogs, not to mention the faux Fendi, Gucci and Calvin Klein leather goods and \$10 Armani and Rolex knock-offs.

photo by Thomas Wilmer



Dazzling neighborhoods

A few Hong Kong neighborhoods such as Mong Kok are among the planet's most populous. The compression of humanity on the streets of Mong Kok is staggering — a veritable sea of people peacefully streams up and down the sidewalks. Surprisingly the city also touts the world's largest ratio of land conserved as parks.

Romantic Star Ferries

Hong Kong's harbor is an integral ingredient of the city's visual enchantment — classic Chinese junks putter past tramp freighters, container ships and mega-cruise vessels. But most engaging is the venerable fleet of green and white Star Ferries (operating since 1898) perpetually shuttling denizens and tourists between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon on the mainland. At



photo by Thomas Wilmer

night the high-rise buildings along the waterfront are ablaze with brilliantly colored laser lights that arc and flash across the sky as the Star Ferries and junks continue inexorably up and down the bay.



photo by Thomas Wilmer

**“...classic Chinese junks
putter past tramp
freighters, container
ships and mega-cruise
vessels.”**

photo by Thomas Wilmer

Shoppers' Mecca

A world-class destination for shopping, the city is legendary for its tax-free selection of designer clothing, leather goods, electronics, custom tailored suits, gold jewelry, jade, tableware, tea and handicrafts. Hong Kong, dubbed the “Culinary Capital of Asia,” is also renowned for its world-class cuisine — from dim sum to Classical French with an Asian twist.

The Hong Kong InterContinental

One would expect the InterContinental to be a great place to stay, but I was totally astounded to discover a splendid, world-class hotel. The hotel's incredible lobby, its three-story-tall glass window walls framing a picture-post-card view of Hong Kong Harbor, the cutting-edge spa, the horizon pool overhanging a cliff edge above the bay and the extraordinary cuisine definitely



