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# DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS

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## HONG KONG

COUNTRY FACT SHEET



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## ABOUT HONG KONG

Hong Kong is a spectacular destination that offers a fascinating combination of the urban, rural and the maritime. It is a territory of contrasts with one of the most exciting city centers on earth. The city is packed with cutting edge architecture and a visit to The Peak to overlook the sprawling metropolis reveals a spectacular landscape home to numerous outlying islands. It is a destination where the East meets the West – a unique place where China and Britain have left their mark, strewn with temples, trams and ancient traditions and financial prowess. Home to over eight million people in an area of 1,100 sq-km, this fast-paced metropolis is like a well-oiled machine with advanced infrastructure including one of only three airports in the world with a 5-Star Skytrax rating; a highly efficient underground rail network; broadband and 3G networks that cover almost 100 per cent of the territory; and a modern road network.

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## AIRPORTS

Hong Kong International Airport is the world's 10th busiest airport with over 50 million passengers a year. Over 95 airlines operate flights to more than 160 locations worldwide including 45 destinations in mainland China. Opened in 1998, the airport has two terminals and is situated 32-km from the central business district. The Airport Express Line has a rail service that links directly to the business center. Buses, taxis, ferries and coaches are also readily available. The Regal Airport Hotel is linked to Terminal 1 by a covered walkway. For fast and convenient transfers, Destination Asia has a fleet of modern vehicles with trained drivers and guides.

## ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Travelers seeking entry to Hong Kong must have a passport valid for six-months and a completed arrival card which is distributed by airline cabin crew before landing. These can also be picked up in the immigration hall. Please see the Hong Kong immigration department's website for further details about visa entry regulations: [www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/hkvisas\\_4.htm](http://www.immd.gov.hk/ehhtml/hkvisas_4.htm) for travelers who would like to travel to mainland China by the overland border, an entry visa is required. There are various land checkpoints between Hong Kong and mainland China, of which Lo Wu and Shenzhen Bay are the most used ones.

*"All the above information may change without prior notice. It remains the traveler's responsibility to check visa requirements before traveling."*

## BUSINESS HOURS

Government offices and post offices are open Monday to Friday between 9-am and 5.30-pm and closed on the weekend and public holidays. Most business offices are open Monday through to Friday from 9-am to 5-pm, with lunch hour from 1 to 2pm.

## BANKS

Banks are open between 9-am and 4.30-pm during the week and between 9-am and 12.30-pm on Saturday. They are closed on Sunday and public holidays. As a global financial heavyweight and international business center, banks are in abundance and easy to find in Hong Kong and Kowloon.

## CLOTHING

The dress code, even in five-star hotels, is smart casual, although it is best to check beforehand if planning to attend high-end venues. Tourists from colder climates sometimes assume that wearing shorts in the tropics is a sensible idea, but very casual beach and leisure clothes can look out of place in Hong Kong – a leading business destination. Most air-conditioned office buildings, shopping malls and entertainment venues are also icy cold in the heat of the summer. In winter the temperature drops considerably and appropriate clothing such as jumpers and coats are needed.

## CURRENCY

The local currency is the Hong Kong dollar (HKD\$). Foreign currency can be converted at banks, authorized licensed moneychangers and most hotels. Credit cards are accepted across Hong Kong, Kowloon and most of the outlying islands. As befitting of a major center of commerce, ATMs, currency exchange bureaus and banks are in abundance.

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## CUSTOM ALLOWANCES

A passenger aged 18 or above is allowed to bring into Hong Kong, for their own use the following items:

- One liter of alcoholic liquor with an alcoholic strength above 30 per cent by volume;
- 19 cigarettes; or
- One cigar or 25 grams of cigars; or
- Five grams of other manufactured tobacco.

These rules and allowances change if the traveler holds a Hong Kong Identity Card. To qualify for this duty free allowance they need to have spent 24 hours or longer outside Hong Kong.

## DOS IN HONG KONG

- Shake hands with everyone – men, women and children – upon meeting and leaving.
- Higher-ranking persons are introduced before those of a lower rank as family members are greeted in order of age.
- In a locality that thrives on commerce, exchanging business cards is an important formality. Offer your card with both hands printed side up and facing the receiver for easy reading. Accept someone else's card with both hands and give it due attention before putting it away.
- Buy an Oyster card if you are going to be in Hong Kong for more than a day. These can be bought at any MTR (metro) station and can be used for trips on multiple public transport services and to buy drinks and snacks in convenience stores.
- When dining in company, fill other diners' teacups before your own. Leave your cup more than half full if you do not want it refilled constantly.
- Hong Kong residents are very style-conscious and dress well. Modesty and cleanliness are very important.

## DON'TS IN HONG KONG

- Hong Kong people tend to be reserved and uncomfortable with close body contact. Do not hug or pat people you do not know that well on the back.
- A Fixed Penalty System of fines for acts committed against public cleanliness offences has been introduced. The common public cleanliness offences covered by the FPS include littering and spitting.
- Smoking is prohibited in all indoor public places, including restaurants, karaoke bars, shopping malls and public bars. The smoking ban is also implemented on public transport facilities, public beaches and swimming pools, escalators and attractions such as the Hong Kong Wetland Park.
- Lay your chopsticks on your chopstick rest or neatly on the table when you have finished eating. Never stick them in a bowl of rice. Avoid spearing food with chopsticks or pointing them at other people.
- Hong Kong Chinese are very superstitious; mentioning failure, poverty or death can offend some people.

## ELECTRICITY

The voltage used in Hong Kong is 220 volts AC. The standard size is the British-style three-pin square plugs and sockets. Most hotels have adaptors for a 100 volt conversion.

## ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE

Hong Kong is often referred to as the "Culinary capital of Asia" and with over 11,000 dining outlets across the territory, ranging from gourmet restaurants to street stalls selling simple noodle dishes, this description is apt. Lamma Island has the freshest seafood served at local restaurants, whereas the Soho area offers the world's most popular cuisines served in restaurants spread over multiple-levels. These eateries are accessed by the world's longest elevator which stretches over 800-meters and rises 135-meters on a steep hillside. Bars and nightclubs are in abundance, as well as theaters and world class art galleries.

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## FOOD

Hong Kong people have a passion for food that eclipses their love for politics, shopping, gambling and even big business. Ranging from simple street hawker stalls to gastronomic restaurants in glitzy restaurants atop skyscrapers, the choices are immense. Hong Kong is home to more than 40 restaurants that have earned at least one coveted Michelin star. Hong Kong's estimated 11,000-plus restaurants serve everything from local comfort food such as congee, noodles and dim sum to international specialties like Thai, Vietnamese and Italian cuisines. Prominent dishes include Roasted Goose, a mainstay of Cantonese cuisine which is made by roasting a goose with seasoning and cooking at a very high temperature for a shorter time to achieve a unique flavor. Hong Kong Dim Sum is undoubtedly the best in the world. These are delicately shaped and bite-sized with light seasonings and stuffed with fillings including meat, seafood and vegetables.

## HEALTH

As an international destination, Hong Kong has world-class hospitals providing outstanding care. Visitors using accident and emergency services in Hong Kong public hospitals are charged a set fee of HKD\$570 (information correct in March 2014) per attendance, but will always be treated even if they cannot pay immediately. The majority of hotels have doctors on call 24 hours.

## HOTEL INFORMATION

In Hong Kong you can sleep in modest guesthouses, youth hostels, palatial hotels, chic boutique properties, and mid-range comfort in the heart of the city or away from it all on the outlying islands. One of the joys of visiting Hong Kong is staying in one of the city center hotels which include historic and world-famous venues, major international chains, and local brands. Most hotels are concentrated on Hong Kong Island and on the Kowloon side. Many offer harbor views but expect to pay more for a room with a sea view. In recent years, more hotels have been opening in the New Territories and Outlying Islands, some of which offer a resort-type experience. The standards of accommodation are excellent with categories to fit all budgets. The larger hotels offer a wide variety of restaurants, bars, swimming pools and other recreational facilities. During check-in you will be asked to complete a registration card. The hotel will also ask for an imprint of your credit card as a guarantee for extra services such as meals, drinks, etc. Ask the cashier to return this slip upon checkout. Please check that you receive meal coupons (where applicable) when given the room key. General check-in is from 2-pm and check out time is 12-noon. If you require a late check-out (extra costs may apply) check with reception beforehand.

## INSURANCE

It is advisable to take out a medical insurance policy before traveling as treatment can be expensive and reflects the high standard of medical provision.

## INTERNET

Major hotels throughout the country offer both Wi-Fi access and business centres with timed computer use. Cyber cafes are also plentiful and you can buy pre-paid international phone cards to make international calls at these places.

## LANGUAGE

Cantonese is the Chinese dialect spoken by over 88 per cent of the people in Hong Kong. Before the 1997 handover, Cantonese and English were Hong Kong's two official languages. Now, "Chinese" and English are listed as the two official languages. Mandarin has also become more prominent and is widely taught in many Hong Kong schools. All official signs are bilingual (using traditional characters). Most shops and restaurants also have English signage – though don't expect this at more local or rural establishments.

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## PEOPLE

The population of Hong Kong is predominantly populated by Cantonese; an increasing flow of people from the mainland; long-stay Western expats; and people from Asian countries, especially the Philippines. Cantonese culture predominates therefore, many Chinese concepts such as “family solidarity”, “saving face” and “modesty” carry significant weight in Hong Kong society.

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Closure of tourist sites can occur at short notice on public holidays and our Destination Asia guides will give guests advice about this situation. The dates of national holidays change every year, so please refer to:

<http://news.destination-asia.com/events-calendar>

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Hong Kong is internationally famous for its safe, affordable and reliable public transport system that keeps the city moving at its trademark efficiency. There are plenty of ways to get around including taxi, ferry, rail, bus or tram. The city has one of the world's safest, most efficient and frequent public transport systems. The MTR's high-speed Airport Express takes approximately 24 minutes to reach Hong Kong's central business district and is the fastest way to get between the city and the airport. For travelers with bags and cases, Destination Asia offers fast transfers with a guide and driver. Once in the city centre or Kowloon, the quick and efficient Mass Transit Railway system covers all major districts in the territory, including stops at the boundary with Mainland China (Lo Wu Station and Lok Ma Chau Station). With the exception of some very remote areas, taxis are plentiful throughout Hong Kong. They can usually be hailed on the street or booked by phone. All are metered, relatively cheap, air-conditioned and clean. As a coastal city, Hong Kong has ferry services that connect Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the Outlying Islands. The most iconic ferries are the green and white Star Ferries that have been faithfully carrying passengers from Hong Kong Island to Kowloon and back since 1888. While the two sides of Victoria Harbor are now connected by a world-class infrastructure system of road and rail tunnels, tens of millions of people still climb aboard the humble Star Ferry vessels each year. A legacy of British colonial rule is the tram network. The double-decker streetcars have been travelling through Hong Kong's busiest thoroughfares since 1904 and continue to be an affordable and fun way to get around. Grab a seat next to a window on the upper deck for the best views. The tram route passes through some of Hong Kong's most famous areas such as the Western district, Wan Chai, Happy Valley, Causeway Bay and North Point. Trams run daily from early morning until midnight.

## RELIGION

Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and other religious beliefs are the most prominent in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the wider region. Buddhism and Taoist temples are also very prominent. The Taoist concept of Fung Shui, or “Wind and Water”, is believed by many locals. This is a 3,000 year-old system of geomantic divination teaching humans how to achieve harmony with the forces of nature and change, thereby gaining well-being and prosperity.

## SAFETY

Serious or violent crimes against foreigners in Hong Kong are rare, but travelers should remain vigilant for petty theft, especially in areas off the beaten tourist track. As a global rule, never leave belongings unattended and always maintain a firm grip on cameras and shoulder bags. Leave expensive jewelry at home and always use hotel safety deposits boxes or in-room safes for valuables.

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## SHOPPING

Hong Kong is one of the world's greatest shopping destinations. The island's reputation as an international center of trade has led to the development of super glitzy malls. The local passion for buying and selling infects almost every corner of the island. From retail monoliths stocked with designer goods; to neighborhood markets selling everything from antiques, watches, Chinese tea sets and silk sheets; to the island's famous tailors who can make a suit in less than 24-hours – Hong Kong has something to suit everyone.

## STREET STALLS

In Hong Kong, you can dress a bride, furnish a house and buy toys for a child in one street at a time as the South China practice of grouping similar businesses on one street means you can get all of your needs without much leg work. For example, Upper Lascar Row – known as Cat Street – has a fantastic congregation of antique dealers, curio merchants and art shops. This is also the place to head for jade, silk products, embroideries and wooden handicraft items. Likewise, Hong Kong's wet markets are windows into a vivid and timeless world of food shopping that continues despite the abundance of modern supermarkets. Prominent among these is Chun Yeung Market. This is situated on a narrow street which is lined on either side with bustling stalls selling fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and seafood. Here you can experience the sights and sounds of an old-school market in full operation.

## TELEPHONE

Most hotels have IDD phones but for a more inexpensive option head to the abundance of Internet cafes for cheaper phone rates and the sale of pre-paid international calling cards. Local calls can be made from either coin or card operated phone booths. International calls can be made from phone booths with card phone facilities or at any Telecom offices. SIM cards are available for sale in convenience stores and hotels. Hong Kong is covered by the 3G phone network.

## TIMEZONE

Hong Kong is GMT + 8 and does not operate on a daylight-savings system.

## TIPPING

In restaurants, a 10 per cent service charge is often compulsorily added to your bill and this is usually regarded as the tip. You may wish to tip on top of the service charge for good service, but it is neither compulsory nor expected. To give the tip more chance of reaching the staff, tips should be given in cash and not as an addition to a credit card bill. Tipping is not expected in taxis but passengers will often round up the fare to the nearest dollar. Small tips should be given to hotel staff for carrying bags to the room. Bathroom attendants in luxury restaurants and clubs might also expect patrons to leave them a few coins.

## WATER

The Tap water is "soft" in character and conforms to guidelines for drinking-water quality recommended by the World Health Organization. However, most people prefer to drink bottled water. All Ice is generally okay in hotels and restaurants but it is best to avoid it at street stalls.

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## WEATHER

Hong Kong has a sub-tropical climate with distinct seasons. The only predictable weather events that could have a significant impact on travel plans are typhoons. The typhoon season begins in May and ends in November. When a typhoon is approaching, warnings are broadcast on television and radio. The seasons are as follows: Spring (March to May), rising temperatures and humidity and cool evenings. The average temperature is 17°C (63F) – 26°C (79F); Summer (June to August), hot, humid and sunny, with occasional showers and thunderstorms. The temperature can exceed 31°C (88F) but high humidity levels can make it feel even hotter. The average temperature is 26°C (79F) – 31°C (88F); Autumn (September to November), this season has pleasant breezes, plenty of sunshine and comfortable temperatures. Many people regard these as the best months of the year to visit Hong Kong. The average temperature is 19°C (66F) – 28°C (82F); Winter (December to February), this season has cool, dry and cloudy periods. The temperature can drop below 10°C (50F).

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## EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

For all emergencies – police, fire and ambulance – dial 999.

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