



# Dynamic Mosaic *The Irresistible Lure of Hong Kong*

There is no other city quite like it. Hong Kong is a land of ceaseless motion, an eruption of sights and sounds and smells and tastes that tantalizes the senses and captures the imagination forever. **United Airlines**, now with nonstop service from New York's JFK International, joins **United Vacations** as your guide to this intoxicating and eclectic City of Life,

by Dara O'Brien

In Chinese, Hong Kong means "Fragrant Harbor," and it has long been one of the world's most alluring ports of call. The city is as much a passion as it is a place; a heady blend of serene beauty, man-made wonders, and contagious energy that some have found impossible to leave behind. Over the years, many who came for the experience of Hong Kong have stayed to become a part of it.

The city is a dynamic fusion of its wildly eclectic heritage, weaving elements of East and West . . . and all points in between. Its architectural landscape leaves you breathless. A simple walking tour of Hong Kong Island transports the traveller between the centuries, from the city's Chinese heritage, to its years under British rule, to its present-day guise as a high-tech financial center. Skyscrapers surge upward amidst stately colonial structures and centuries-old temples. Antique trams rumble past the vaulting elegance of the **Bank of China Tower**. The mid-nineteenth-century **Man Mo Temple** is a stone's throw from the red

brick **Western Market**, an Edwardian structure that's been transformed into an intimate enclave of shops and restaurants.

Hong Kong's British heritage is ingrained throughout the city. English is widely spoken, and fashions, food, arts, and entertainment all bear witness to Western influences. Residents still pause for a spot of tea each afternoon (although even with this fusion of cultures, the ritual has a distinctive Chinese flavor). Even the popular attachment to the "sport of kings" at race tracks like **Happy Valley** and **Sha Tin** speaks to Hong Kong's rich British past.

A stroll through Hong Kong Island's Central district reveals colonial gems such as the one-hundred-year-old red brick **French Mission Building**, with its simple green shutters and wrought-iron details, and the beautiful Gothic **St. John's Cathedral**. From there it's an easy stroll east to **Causeway Bay** for the shooting of the **Noon Day Gun**, a throwback to the celebrated pursuit of "Mad Dogs and Englishmen."

But first and foremost, Hong Kong is a

Chinese city. Its status as a Crown Colony never diminished its Eastern roots. Cantonese co-exists with English as the official language, and Chinese customs and traditions are widely observed.

Markets like **Tai Po** sell fresh fish and produce in much the same manner of generations past. Stately ancestral halls like **Tang Chung Ling** and **Tai Fu Tai** reflect the lifestyle of the bygone Chinese aristocracy. The city's 260 outlying islands are the embodiment of Hong Kong's living heritage. The largest is **Lantau**, a land of beautiful mountains and great beaches with plenty of open space. Postcard perfect fishing villages, including **Tai O** and **Tung Chung**, dot the island's shoreline. Lantau is also the home of the extraordinary giant **Buddha**, a two-hundred-ton bronze statue perched atop the mountainside monastic retreat of **Po Lin** (and visible all the way from Macau on a clear day).

Po Lin is just one of many of the monuments and temples that reflect Hong Kong's venerable spiritual traditions. The



**Chi Lin Nunnery** is a stunning replica of a Tang Dynasty Buddhist temple. Built from natural materials, all aspects of its seven linked halls and temples are in perfect balance.

Many diverse museums offer deep insights into Hong Kong's spiritual, cultural, and artistic traditions. The newly opened **Hong Kong Heritage Museum**, the largest institution of its kind in Hong Kong, is an excellent point of reference. The museum's permanent galleries are built around a series of courtyards, in the style of a Chinese palace of long ago; themed exhibits such as



Prehistoric Life, Village Life, British Rule, Cantonese Opera, and more are featured.

But it may well be true that the best example of Hong Kong's multifaceted heritage can be gleaned through its people.

Travellers can gather insights through an informal network of citizen ambassadors who are eager to share what they know about their city and its customs. Enlisted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board as part of its "Meet the People" program, these local experts offer an insider's view of the city.

One of the preeminent sources on Hong Kong's lively folklore is **S. J. Chan**, author of "Traditional Chinese Festivals and Local Celebrations" (Wan Li Book Co.). His free weekly lectures (Mondays, 10 A.M.) at the stunning **Tin Hau Temple** on Hong Kong Island's **North Point** shine a light on the city's maritime legacy. Tin Hau, goddess of the sea, is a revered presence and figures prominently in the cultural and spiritual life.

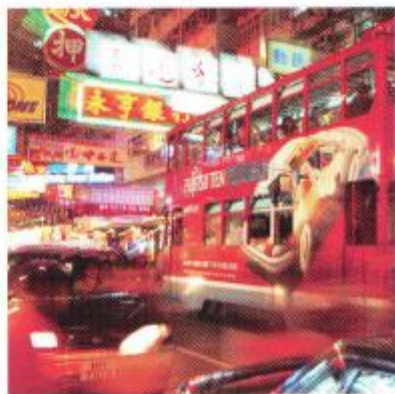
The ultimate celebration of Hong Kong's rich cultural heritage can be found in its many annual festivals—including the delightful **Bun Festival** on tiny **Cheung Chau Island**. One of its greatest boosters is **Lai Kim**, owner of the **Cheung Chau Windsurfing Centre and Outdoor Café**, which overlooks the island's gracious Mediterranean-style port. Every Saturday at 11 A.M., he draws visitors for his discussion of the island and its landmark event, which has been celebrated every summer since 1777.

Compact, compelling, chaotic, and diverse, its ambient heritage makes Hong Kong a city best enjoyed on foot. There is no better way to experience the contrasting

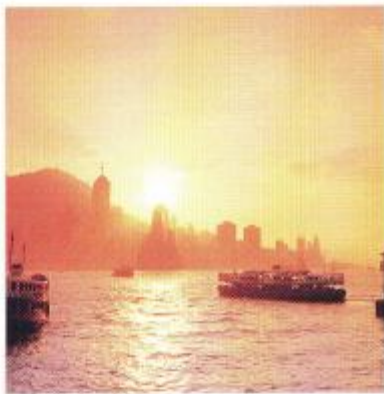
cityscape of Hong Kong Island; the bright, brimming streets of Kowloon; the green hills and simple villages of the New Territories; or the open, unspoiled terrain of its outlying islands. Hong Kong is a city to savor, a place with a diverse heritage that unites travellers in appreciation of its sheer abundance.



For more information about visiting Hong Kong, call the Hong Kong Tourism Board at (800) 282-4582 and mention code NY4, or visit [www.DiscoverHongKong.com](http://www.DiscoverHongKong.com).



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• **The Great Eagle Hotel Opens Hong Kong's First Real New York Deli.** Hong Kong will get an authentic taste of New York in April when the Great Eagle Hotel, the city's finest independent five-star hotel, opens its **Main Street Deli**. Inspired by New York's famous Second Avenue Deli, Main Street Deli features traditional favorites such as pastrami on rye, hot corned beef, bagels, salads, and chicken soup with matzo balls. Executive Chef Alan Yu trained in New York with Second Avenue Deli owner Jack Lebewohl, so he knows a thing or two about the discriminating New York palate. Call the Great Eagle Hotel at (852) 2375-1133 and mention code GEH, or visit [www.gehotel.com](http://www.gehotel.com).

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