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Get acquainted with Hong Kong's neighbourhoods



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Inner City Charm

Hong Kong is a forward-thinking city brimming with cultural experiences. A walk through three of its neighbourhoods reveals their history, heart and character.

Words Jennifer Johnston Photography Getty Images, 123rf

The iconic towering skyscrapers hugging Victoria Harbour are a permanent reminder that Hong Kong has maintained its status as one of the world's premier business capitals. When it comes to non-business activities, Hong Kong delivers a dizzying assortment of dining, shopping and leisure choices. Finding them is often like being on a treasure hunt, where the journey can be just as exciting as the prize. Stepping into and exploring some of Hong Kong's neighbourhoods unlocks a mixture of new and old experiences, unlikely to be found in any other part of the world.

Mid-Levels - Hong Kong Island

The name gives away its location. Mid-Levels is located half-way up Victoria Peak, which at 552 metres above sea level is the highest mountain on Hong Kong Island. The predominantly residential area in Hong Kong Island's Central

and Western District enjoys an elevated position above the business heart of Hong Kong. Founded before the arrival of the motor vehicle, Mid-Levels meandering streets are narrow. And due to the nature of the location, many have a steep incline.

Where To Eat & Shop

Aberdeen Street, named after the Earl of Aberdeen, who played a critical role in the development of Hong Kong as a British Colony, is one of the steeper streets. At the junction of Aberdeen and Hollywood Road is the PMQ Building, a hub for Hong Kong's creative industries. Built in 1951, this four-storey building was originally used to house local police officers and their wives. It's now home to over 100 small galleries and design stores showcasing local designers selling merchandise (jewellery, clothing, sunglasses, kitchen accessories) vastly different in quality (and price) from the markets.



1. Hong Kong's Central-Mid-Levels escalator and walkway system covers over 800 metres in distance and over 135 metres in elevation
2. Lin Heung Tea House is popular for its dim sum

Aberdeen Street Social is a two-storey colonial house with a terrace within the PMQ building. The restaurant serving modern British cuisine for breakfast, lunch and dinner is the ideal place to stop for a moment, refuel and contemplate where to go next. For a more traditional food experience, the century-old Lin Heung Tea House on the corner of Wellington Street and Aberdeen Street is one of the city's most popular dim sum restaurants. Empty seats are rare.

Steep Inclines

There are two choices to get up or down Mid-Levels on foot. One, use the streets with hundreds of stone steps, requiring effort and a certain level of fitness. Far less strenuous is via the Mid-Levels escalators. This series of 20 escalators and three inclined travelators covers over 800 hilly metres, taking over 85,000 pedestrians daily from Conduit Road in Mid-Levels to Queens Road Central.

Peaceful Pursuits

A 15-minute stroll from Caine Road on Mid-Levels transports you from the Lan Kwai Fong and Soho drinking establishments into hiking trails in the heart of serene woodlands on the western side

of the Peak mountain. These trails provide the perfect sanctuary to escape the bustle of a heavily populated metropolis.

Another serene escape is the Man Mo Temple. One of Hong Kong's oldest temples, built in 1847 during the Qing dynasty, the temple is dedicated to the God of Literature (Man) and the God of War (Mo). If you're unsure where to find the temple, follow the sweet smell of incense. Large incense coils suspended from the ceiling of the inner main hall emit ethereal plumes of smoke, burned by worshippers as offerings to their respective gods.

Sham Shui Po - Kowloon

Northwest of the Kowloon peninsula, Sham Shui Po is where you'll find many authentic experiences. Getting to Sham Shui Po is an easy 20-minute MTR ride from Central station. This predominantly working-class neighbourhood has the second largest number of elderly persons living among the 18 Hong Kong districts, the lowest income per capita and the cheapest prices of goods. Sham Shui Po is where Hong Kong locals come to shop. As the centre for the city's fabric trade, fashion designers and keen sewers head to Yu Chau Street (Bead street). On this street are countless shops selling materials and clothing components (buttons, zippers, ribbons beads and sequins). From fabric to leather, Alri Star Leather Factory is packed with leather goods as well as the tools to create your own special piece.



Quick Facts:

- A Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong means **Fragrant Harbour**.
- It **consists of** Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, the New Territories and several other small islands spread over 1,106 square kilometres.
- It is densely populated, with a current population of **7.4 million people**.
- After 156 years of British rule, Hong Kong was handed back to China on **1 July 1997**.
- Its **economy** is characterised by free trade, low taxation and minimum government intervention.
- With its sub-tropical climate, the best time to visit is during the cooler months, from **September to March**.

Sham Shui Po is also the go-to place for second-hand electronic goods. The Apliu Street flea market is a strip of open-air stalls selling everything from vintage cameras, fishing rods and phone accessories to second-hand power tools. If you're into recycling and are prepared to rummage through piles of used equipment, this could be your shopping haven.

Snake Soup

Walking the streets of Sham Shui Po is where you'll discover local street food packed with Cantonese flavours and Hong Kong history – including a cafe selling snake soup. In traditional Chinese medicine, snake is used for warming the body, especially in colder weather, promoting blood circulation and easing arthritis. Sha Wong Hip has been serving snake soup since 1965, and its proprietor, Chau Ka Ling, known as Hong

Kong's "snake queen", is a second-generation server of the local favourite.

For something sweeter, Kung Woo Bean Curd Factory offers fresh tofu and home-made sugar free soy bean milk drinks. Established in 1893, this is one of the oldest shops in Hong Kong selling traditional soy bean curd. Its deep-fried tofu puffs and fried tofu topped with fish paste are delectable. As with many Hong Kong diners, seating is limited, but the wait is worth it.

Sham Shui Po is a district filled with history. In 1955, an archaeological tomb dating back to the

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Eastern Han Dynasty (AD25-220) was discovered accidentally when workers were levelling land for a construction project. It revealed the area was occupied almost 2,000 years ago. The Lei Cheng Uk Han tomb is classified as a monument but is closed to the public for preservation reasons. The contents of the tomb and its history can be viewed in a museum opened next to the tomb on Tonkin Street, a five-minute walk from the Chung Sha Wan MTR Station.

Kennedy Town - Hong Kong Island

As the westernmost point on Hong Kong Island, Kennedy Town quickly moved from a sleepy little outpost to a popular district when its MTR station opened in 2014. Until the metro opening, the only access to Kennedy Town, named after Arthur Kennedy, a governor of Hong Kong in the 1870s, was by bus or tram. The city's slaughterhouse, the contagious diseases hospital and the public mortuary were located within its perimeter, leaving little enticement to

visit Kennedy Town. The closure of the hospital and slaughterhouse and the easy access via the MTR (a few stops from Central) has transformed Kennedy Town from a predominantly working-class neighbourhood into a trendy quarter where modern and old coexist.

Sunset Views

You can travel on the MTR Blue Line to Kennedy Town, but if time is of no consequence, a half hour on a double-decker tram from Central takes a more scenic route. Kennedy Town is the last stop on the line. As the closest town to Victoria Harbour, the town has a seaside village atmosphere. Praya Street adjacent to Victoria Harbour offers clear views of Kowloon. The Kennedy Town Shipping Dock has become a popular place to view a Hong Kong sunset.

The Tree Wall

The century-old Banyan trees on Forbes Street are part of Chinese culture and popular with tourists. These trees (usually Chinese Banyans)

3. Apliu Street Flea Market in Sham Shui Po is the best place to shop for cheap, second-hand or new electronics
4. The 19th century Man Mo Temple is the oldest and most revered temple in Hong Kong
5. Aberdeen is a pretty spot that mixes tradition and modernity and popular for its seafood
6. Kennedy Town is a foodie's paradise and one of the most photogenic areas for shutterbugs

grow up to 20 metres in height, clinging to masonry walls originally built to help retain the steep slopes of Hong Kong Island. The seeds lodge between the cracks in the walls, take root and grow. The Banyan trees are not protected in Hong Kong and the recent removal for safety reasons of two trees on Bonham Road in Mid-Levels indicates they may not be around forever.

Where To Eat

Kennedy Town has an eclectic combination of dining options. Hau Wo street is filled with a variety of restaurants offering cuisine ranging from Italian and Mediterranean to Japanese and Belgian. Catchick Street is where you'll find trendy cosmopolitan eateries. Purchase gourmet takeaway sandwiches at the hipster Sunday's Grocery.

Happy Coexistence

Hong Kong is like any modern city, constantly evolving to accommodate growing residential populations and change. Reminders of the past are often removed as developers move into the older neighbourhoods, buying up businesses and buildings, replacing them with new apartments. This process of gentrification is changing the face of traditional Hong Kong, making it harder to experience the way of life that once was. But in these three neighbourhoods, the old and the new prosper harmoniously together, effectively encapsulating Hong Kong's enduring spirit.

About the writer

Jennifer Johnston is an Australian freelance writer and blogger based in Brisbane. She has travelled widely and is inspired by the opportunity to learn about new cultures and places. Jennifer dabbles in photography and is always keen for adventure.