

# Hong Kong high & low: something for everyone whether you're staying at the Ritz or the Y



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The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong dominates the skyline.

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Festivities and fireworks are part of Hong Kong's identity, but to me, the city is a perpetual party, popping year-round with lights and commerce and energy. The approximately 400,000 Canadians who visit this year will experience an intriguing mix of East and West, all flourishing in a delicate balance of upper-crust elegance and frenzied neon-lit street life.

Hong Kong always has been my favourite city, even before I ever saw it. The name is loaded with music and mystique. The place brings to my mind images of a glamorous and worldly past of rickshaws and Rolls-Royces, and a pulp history rife with international spies, opium smugglers

and painted women with rare talents.

With eight million people, the Hong Kong of today embraces enough skyscrapers of astounding architecture to dwarf Toronto and even Manhattan, as well as the world's largest container port and one of the busiest airports. It's also an enormously entertaining destination on any budget.

The city has more than 60 Michelin-starred restaurants and is home to some of the world's most luxe hotels, including the revered [Peninsula Hong Kong](#) and the new and astounding [Ritz-Carlton](#). Fashionistas line up outside Chanel and Prada, and Cartier and Rolex boutiques proliferate by the dozen.

But that's just one side of the modern metropolis. Bargain hunters, too, can enjoy this intimate city of distinct neighbourhoods that you can walk, touch and feel. Here is a peek at Hong Kong, two ways.

### **FANCY**

**Stay** Big spenders will feel right at home at the plush Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong, the highest-elevation hotel in the world, capping the shimmering, tapered glass tower of the International Commerce Centre. Rates start at \$900 for a ritzy room for two, which includes the astonishing experience of swimming on the 118th floor, a half-kilometre in the sky. You could easily drop another \$1,000 per day, living the high life at Ritz-Carlton with dinner at a one of the hotel's restaurants, sightseeing via limousine, a restorative massage at ESPA and lychee cocktails at the penthouse lounge Ozone.

**Eat** The new culinary darling is [Above & Beyond](#) in Hotel Icon, which has panoramic views, an airy design by Sir Terence Conran and contemporary riffs on Cantonese cuisine. Delicacies include wagyu beef, abalone with fish maw, lobster with black truffles, barbecued goose, king prawns, foie gras with pineapple and tender smoked Bresse pigeon with oolong tea leaves.

Restaurant manager Hugo Cheng brings expertise from Joël Robuchon's empire and executive chef Joseph Tse from Mandarin Oriental. A gastronomic dinner costs \$85 and up, plus wine pairings. The twist is that Hotel Icon is run by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Hotel Tourism



Management, so you are taken care of by the best and brightest servers, both professional and interns.

**Shop** The city's [Tatler](#) magazine is 400 pages thick with glossy ads for big-brand cars, jewels and watches. (The hottest timepiece is the Swiss-Italian Panerai, which runs \$8,000-\$25,000 for most models.)

The swish [Lane Crawford](#) department store carries high-end French, Italian and American designers. But why not go all-Chinese with good-luck symbols, mandarin collars and calligraphy designs from Hong Kong companies? The chic lifestyle boutique [Shanghai Tang](#) carries luxurious cashmere, leather and silk clothes for men and women (figure on \$700-1,000 for a dress or a man's jacket) and home accessories, all with Chinese detailing. [Goods of Desire](#) on Hollywood Road is a hipster haven of local creations, such as weekend sweaters and down vests at \$100-200 and loft-worthy decor items. [Chinese Arts and Crafts](#) has a three-storey collection of treasures, from a slinky \$200 cheongsam to a \$200,000 museum-quality porcelain vase.

[Wan Chai](#), the former red-light district immortalized in the 1960 movie *The World of Suzie Wong*, is Hong Kong's upscale "it" neighbourhood, with office towers and condos sprouting like bamboo trees and international indulgences such as l'Occitane Spa from France and The Pawn, a gorgeous, historic colonial-style lounge and dining spot with a regal British accent. Wan Chai's Star Street is a cluster of hot indie boutiques and Queen's Road East is a posh decorators' row with fine Asian fabrics.

**Spa** The sublime Chinese Wellness Ritual at the [Four Seasons Hotel Spa](#) begins with an ancient tea ceremony and segues into a soothing rice poultice application, a bracing body exfoliation, a warm rain shower and a revitalizing massage, all done with essences of ginseng, jasmine and green tea. It's a steep \$460, but you'll feel like a million.

**Nature** It's easy to forget that Hong Kong, the Fragrant Lagoon, is surrounded by tranquil islands, picturesque mountains and the warm waters of the South China Sea. No one does a high-flying trip to the seaside like The Peninsula Hotel, the colonial-era doyenne of Hong Kong hotels, where a stunning \$57-million renovation is adding subtle high-tech touches and a warm residential style to spacious rooms.

The Peninsula runs a twin-engine chopper for aerial tours (around \$3,000 for four people) of the [Hong Kong Geopark](#), a UNESCO site of unique rock formations near Sai Kung in the New Territories. Geo-tourism is a new gig for Hong Kong and visitors can explore mangrove forests, sea corals and walled villages, built centuries ago as protection against pirates.

**Tea** East meets West at The Peninsula's legendary afternoon tea served in the splendid neo-Classical lobby. Scones are topped with Devon cream, and Chinese chrysanthemum tea is served

on fine



bespoke porcelain by Tiffany & Co.

## **FRUGAL**

**Stay** Hong Kong has more budget-conscious options than one would think possible. Old China hands know about [The Salisbury YMCA](#), arguably the world's most desirable YMCA hotel. It's across the street from the iconic [Star Ferry](#), which still runs for 40 cents a ride after more than 100 years, and next door to the landmark Peninsula, so the same dazzling harbour view at a fraction of the cost. Rooms start at about \$130 for two and include daily housekeeping and a fitness centre with two large indoor swimming pools and a hot tub.

The young and cool stay at [Hotel de Edge](#) in the trendy, gentrified waterfront district of Sheung Wan, adjacent to Central. It's an amazingly affordable 90-room newbie with a boutique style, molecular cuisine and a slew of design awards. Rates start at \$120 for a compact, well-thought-out space.

**Eat** Cheap eats take on new meaning in the wild world of Cantonese cuisine. Michelin has sprinkled one precious star on 44 "authentic" eateries, where you can feast for as little as \$10 in simple surroundings.

You can pop into a storefront restaurant for egg tarts, roast goose, noodle dishes, dim sum, milk

tea or rice congee and rarely spend more than \$10. Snake soup and hot pot will warm you up in winter. Shing Kee in Central is one of the last dai pai dongs, steamy street cafés where you can fuel up on rice topped with tripe, pork, ox tongue or beef for \$5 a bowl. Tim Ho Wan in Mong Kok, with one Michelin star, has basic laminate tabletops and tissue boxes for napkins, but its dim sum is so celebrated that there are limos and lineups outside. For about \$10 each my table feasted on dumplings stuffed with barbecued pork, chicken, shrimp and beef, plus exotica like chicken talons, all heightened with spicy XO sauce.

**Shop** Even on a budget, shopping is without limits. When you visit street markets such as [Jardine's Bazaar](#) or the [Ladies' Market](#), you can score almost everything for \$5-20, if you negotiate. At the [Jade Market](#), I stocked up on pendants and bracelets for gifts at \$20-30.

Vendors along Cat Street in Soho display bookshelf bibelots at great prices. I love [Li Yuen Street East and West](#) in Central for colourful silk brocade jackets and fringed scarves. And Tai Ping Shan Street is the artsy centre of the “it” district of Sheung Wan.

The [Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium](#) is a traditional department store, ideal for herbal medicines, musical instruments and premium teas.

**Spa** When I arrived in Hong Kong after a 15-hour flight from Toronto, I was jet-lagged, my legs buckled and my back had ached since we flew over Outer Mongolia. I join the free Tai Chi classes in Kowloon harbour and after gentle movements and balance work, I emerge with a sense of calm and boosted energy. I ferry almost dock to dock to [Ten Feet Tall](#), a day spa





specializing in the 5,000-year-old Chinese art of reflexology, or foot massage. It's worth the \$30 splurge. My arches are kneaded like dough while I sink into an oversized white leather chaise and sip chilled cucumber water.

**Nature** I want to feel Hong Kong's origins as a fishing village and see sailing junks and beautiful beaches. While high-budget visitors are fluttering to Sai Kung aboard The Peninsula's helicopter, I swipe my Octopus transit card and board a train and a bus to explore the coastal town's bountiful markets of still-jumping fish and strange crustaceans. Loaf On, at the far end of a cobblestone promenade of bustling restaurants, is another one-Michelin-star eatery where a delectable spread of clams in black bean sauce, scallops with garlic and stir-fried squid will cost about \$25.

**Tea** The elegant, historic [Lok Cha Tea House](#) presents ceremonial tastings of jasmine, rose, black, green and white teas. If you book through the [Hong Kong Tourism Board](#), some of the visits are free. The priceless extra is that Lok Cha is in Hong Kong Park, a serene botanical garden and bird sanctuary gurgling with fish ponds and waterfalls, a rare respite from the city's bustle.

