

# Hong Kong: An “English Town” in China?

> By Dr. Ala Al-Hamarneh

The world knows many Chinatowns in North America and Europe, where Chinese restaurants, stores and cultural institutions are located. The Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York and London are famous tourist landmarks.



Aberdeen

أبردين

The British colony of Hong Kong was handed over to the People's Republic of China in 1999. With the handover of the British Colony and the smaller Portuguese Colony of Macao, the colonial history of Chinese territories occupied by the Europeans came to an end. The political formula of “one country – two systems” suggested and implemented by the central

government in Beijing allows the citizens and the local authorities in the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao to keep their open economic systems and democratic political structures as well as their cultural specifics.

Is it possible to tackle Hong Kong as a unique giant “English Town” in China? While 95% of the territory's population of

approximately 7 million is ethnic Cantonese Chinese, a rich cultural diversity dominates. Colonial history shaped the cultural development of the city. For centuries, Hong Kong was an open port that attracted many people from Britain and southeast and southern Asia (Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, India) with their varying lifestyles and ethnic and religious ▶

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The Clock Tower

برج الساعة

backgrounds. Of course, the colonial English culture and way of life dominated the public sphere and the urban design of the city. We must not lose sight of the fact that the city was first founded as a transit commercial harbor by the British. No wonder then that place names like Victoria Harbor, Aberdeen, Stanley, Causeway Bay and Repulse Bay dominate Hong Kong Island.

Hong Kong Island, where Hong Kong City is located, represents only one part of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Kowloon on the mainland and the so-called New Territories added to the region by the Chinese Central Government after the handover make up the two other major parts. Many smaller islands belong to the region as well. The most famous islands are Lantau Island, Lamma Island and an artificial island where the new international airport and the Asia Expo Complex are located.

The image of today’s Hong Kong is dominated by global businesses, sky scrapers, advanced communications and information technologies, luxurious shopping malls, fascinating night life, international restaurants and modern lifestyles. Indeed, the city is able to satisfy the demands of every tourist. Beyond the above-mentioned state of the art services, Hong Kong offers beautiful beaches, non-motorized islands, virgin green landscapes and rural experiences. The family-oriented entertainment and cultural infrastructures have been developing rapidly in the last years. In addition to theater and concert halls, the Cultural Center in Kowloon which opened in 1989 hosts the new Museum of Modern Arts. The newly-launched first-in-Asia Disney Land aims to attract new tourist segments. ▶



Colonial and Postmodern Hong Kong

هونغ كونغ العهد الاستعماري وما بعد الحداثة

If the tourists are looking for typical Chinese architecture, markets and temples, then Hong Kong is not the right place to visit. Hong Kong presents a mixture of the British colonial heritage and post-modern Chinese global cities. The more than 100 years old Star Ferry has been cruising between Kowloon and Hong Kong City, offering a marvelous panoramic view of Victoria Harbor and the skyline of the city. Another stunning panoramic view is to be found on the Victoria Peak of the highest mountain (552 meter) of the island, which can be reached either by the old Peak Tram or on foot.

Since 1888 the Peak Tram has been taking thousands of residents and tourists up to Shan Teng (the Peak's name in Cantonese Chinese). Until 1945, the mountain was an exclusive residential area for British and other European citizens. The local Chinese population and other Asians were not allowed to live there. Another old popular transport system is the Old Tram line that runs along the waterfront of the island. About two-thirds of the territory of the Island is covered by parks and green landscapes. The Ocean Park, the Country Park, Victoria Park and the Aberdeen Country Park are popular picnic and

trekking areas for residents and tourists. The beaches in Repulse Bay and Stanley, where the Maritime Museum is located, are beloved places for water sports and swimming. The most trendy beaches are to be found on Lamma Island, where numerous small restaurants offer fresh fish dishes and delicious sea food. Lamma and other smaller islands can be reached by ferry from several stations on the main island. The charming harbor of Aberdeen hosts the most frequent ferry service to the small islands. Aberdeen is well-known for its fish market and the famous floating fish restaurants. ▶



Stanley

ستانلي



Repulse Bay

مرفأ ريبلس

“ Hong Kong is a unique phenomenon in Asia. It is not a simple combination and mixture of cultures and styles; it is rather an organic fusion of people and histories that has created its own character and brand. It is definitely not an “English Town” in China that can simply be copied and reconstructed in other countries and areas. ”

Hong Kong City exhibits the international business character of the city; towers of global finance institutions dominate the downtown area. With its trendy night quarters of SOHO (South of Hollywood Street) and Lan Kwai Fong, where the restaurants offer dishes from all over the world and the clubs play all kinds of music, Honk Kong has great spots for gourmets and clubbers. Kowloon, on the mainland, is the right spot for shopping. The stores on Nathan Road and Canton Road offer all

possible electronic devices, watches and computers as well as luxurious clothing brands and factory outlets. The Night Market at Temple Street is a colorful celebration of cheap goods and food courts. The back streets of Kowloon present a mixture of Chinese street flair and international amusements. While Hong Kong City portrays the global and luxurious face of the region, Kowloon seems to represent the traditional Chinese trade spirit and an ambitious third world city.

Hong Kong is a unique phenomenon in Asia. It is not a simple combination and mixture of cultures and styles; it is rather an organic fusion of people and histories that has created its own character and brand. It is definitely not an “English Town” in China that can simply be copied and reconstructed in other countries and areas. It is just Hong Kong; a great architecture, an interesting urban life, a charming international atmosphere, a mysterious history, attractive countryside and smiling people who are happy to host and help visitors. Behind the smiling faces and the astonishing opportunities for cultural experiences, tourists notice little of the problems of the city; irregular migrants, lack of space for housing, increasing poverty and the extreme shortage of drinking water (it must be imported from mainland China). Nevertheless, the authorities are aware of these and other problems and are tackling them and the residents are proud of their city even when a weather warning says: “Stay home, an extremely heavy storm is expected.” This does not mean the English foggy, cloudy, rainy and grey weather. This is a Hong Kong hurricane! ■