



Electric Avenue,
Victoria Harbourfront
by night. Opposite,
golden Buddha statue
one of 10,000 at the
famous monastery
in Sha Tin

HIGH LIGHTS

18 GLITTERING MOMENTS

THAT'LL MAKE YOUR STOPOVER
IN HONG KONG LAST A WEEK

BY **LIZ EDWARDS**

Give it a whirl: from top, left to right: t'ai chi in Hong Kong Park; tranquillity beyond the towers, at the foot of Victoria Peak; the Cantonese classic, steaming *dim sum*; aboard an authentic Chinese junk in Hong

Kong harbour at night; lanterns for sale at Stanley Market; the golden sands of Repulse Bay beach; looking down on it all from the Ritz-Carlton's spa pool, 118 floors above the city streets; neon-lit Nathan Road, Kowloon

1 THE DRAMATIC ARRIVAL

Hong Kong isn't like other cities; it doesn't get you all bright-lights excited then let you down with a concrete conveyor-belt journey in from the airport. Hong Kong catapults you straight into your own film set. Mine feels like a post-apocalyptic mash-up of *007*, *Logan's Run*, *Mission Impossible* and *Blade Runner*: the monumental sweep of the suspension bridge, the juggernaut sideloader cranes marshalled portside, the obelisk sentry of the 500m ICC tower. Skyscrapers at the foot of hills, skyscrapers on top of hills, skyscrapers neither halfway up nor down hills. Man-made canyons, elevated walkways, all so emphatically, futuristically urban I'm momentarily surprised to see real people walking on real pavements.

2 GROUNDING YOURSELF WITH RETAIL: THE STREET-LEVEL VIEW

Time to zoom in and get out among it, the best way I know how – shopping bag in hand. Of course real people walk on real pavements; the streets of Hong Kong island's designer-label Central district are thronged. Gradients help me keep my bearings as I weave through the stallholders and daily shoppers of Graham Street's wet markets – nests of fresh noodles, tubs of bean sprouts and wind-dried sausages by the bundle. More suitcase-friendly pickings are to be had further west on Upper Lascar Row: beneath bamboo scaffolding, stalls overflow with antique photos, ornamental Buddhas, retro Mao trinkets, canopies of parasols and lanterns. My fistful of HK dollars goes to the *Likely Lad* Rodney Bewes lookalike owner of Yuan Heng spice shop – I leave with Szechuan peppers and scrolls of cinnamon, all totted up on his abacus.

3 RISING ABOVE IT ALL

To every city its Eiffel Tower. Here, the must-do viewpoint is Victoria Peak, high above Central, where everyone comes

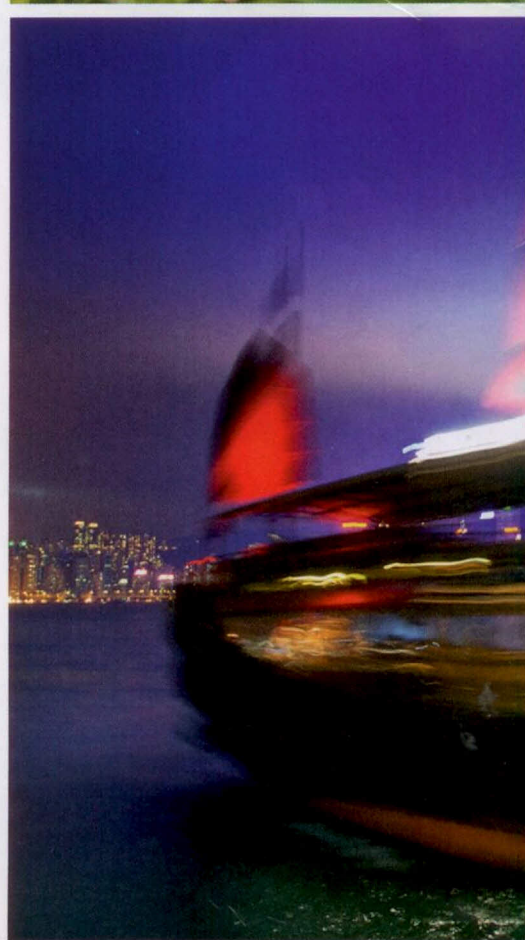
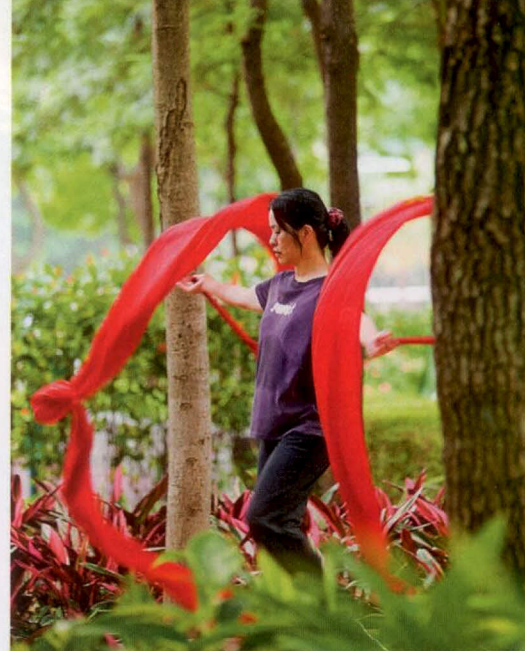
to breathe (and then gasp at the vertiginous real-estate rates). I turn my back on viewing platform and mall, for the birdsong and leaf-shade of the round-peak path. It's not all mine – I pass buggy-pushers, lovers, bow-legged grannies, pampered handbag pooches – but there's peace. Glimpses of harbour between camellia leaves and viburnum berries, the distant city hum. And, as the funicular tram drops back between apartments (so close I can see whose houseplants need watering), a black kite hovers, then lands metres from my head, all feathery knickerbockers and ruthless talons.

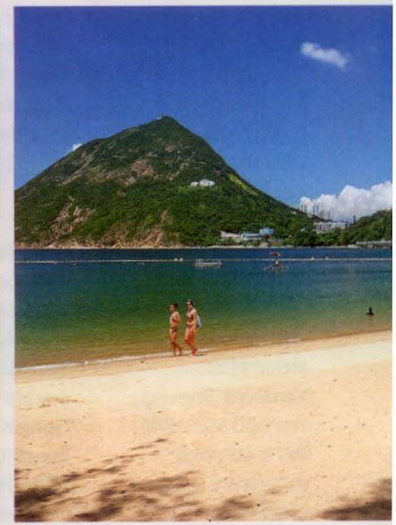
4 FINDING SOMETHING GONE

Keeping up is hard to do. Even short conversations with Hong Kong insiders soon turn to one subject: change, pace of. It's not just blink-and-miss businesses, they say, whole buildings disappear overnight. Outsiders stand little chance, especially given the vertical sprawl. Bars, massage parlours and under-the-radar 'private kitchen' restaurants exist on upper storeys invisible to idle street-browsers. So across Victoria Harbour in Kowloon, I shouldn't be surprised that a friend's tip-off, Tim Ho Wan restaurant ('Michelin-starred *dim sum* for pence!'), is now a mobile-phone shop. Mobile man sighs and hands me a pre-scrawled address. What the shiny new location lacks in atmosphere, it makes up for in delicate prawn dumplings and silken pork *cheung fan* rolls, served at lightning speed to keep the snaking queue moving.

5 COLONIAL IRRIGATION

When in expat territory, do as the expats do: on Friday evenings, say my ex-London pals Anna and Donald, that's G&Ts at the Captain's Bar. Antique maps, chilled silver tankards and tinkling ivories make the clubby, red-leathery lounge feel older than the 50-year-old Mandarin Oriental it sits in. It's a class apart from the *other* expat drinking I spy later in party district Lan Kwai Fong. A suited >





THE NEON'S ON AND
I'M DAZZLED. THIS IS
THE REAL LIGHT SHOW
AND PEOPLE ARE OUT
IN ARTIFICIALLY LIT FORCE

ADDRESS BOOK

STAY

YMCA of Hong Kong

(Kowloon; 00 852 2268 7000, www.ymcahk.org.hk). Doubles from £101, room only.

Hotel Icon (Kowloon; 00 852 3400 1000, hotel-icon.com; pictured). Doubles from £141, B&B.

Kowloon Shangri-La (Kowloon; 0800 028 3337, shangri-la.com). Doubles from £251, B&B.

Mandarin Oriental (Central; 00 852 2522 0111, mandarinoriental.com). Doubles from £375, B&B.

The Peninsula (Kowloon; 00800 2828 3888, peninsula.com). Doubles from £382, B&B.

EAT

Tim Ho Wan (18 Hoi Ting Rd, Mong Kok; 00 852 2332 2896; mains around £1.40).

Bookworm Café (Yung Shue Wan, Lamma; 00 852 2982 4838; mains around £4). Hippyish cafe.

Megan's Kitchen (Wanchai; 00 852 2866 8305, meganskitchen.com; mains around £8).

Yardbird (Sheung Wan; 00 852 2547 9273, yardbirdrestaurant.com; mains around £10).

22 Ships (Wanchai; 00 852 2555 0722, 22ships.hk; mains around £11).

Shang Palace

(Kowloon Shangri-La; 00 852 2733 8754, shangri-la.com; mains around £25). Two-Michelin-starred Cantonese.

Café Gray Deluxe

(Admiralty; 00 852 3968 1106, cafegrayhk.com; mains around £32). Harbour views from the 49th-floor and expat-friendly Euro dishes at the gorgeous boutique Upper House hotel.

Bo Innovation

(Wanchai; 00 852 2850 8371, boinnovation.com; menu £95).

DRINK

Lock Cha Tea House

(Admiralty; 00 852 2801 7177, lockcha.com; tea about £4.50).

Honi Honi

(Central; 00 852 2353 0885, honi-honi-bar.com). Third-floor tiki bar.

Captain's Bar

(Mandarin Oriental; 00 852 2825 4006).

DO

Ritz-Carlton

(Kowloon; 00 852 2263 2100, ritzcarlton.com). Pool access for non-hotel guests from £64.

Hong Kong Foodie

Tours (00 852 2850 5006, hongkongfoodietours.com). From £55.

Aqua Luna (00 852 2116 8821, aqualuna.com.hk). From £16.



city type leans from a first-floor-bar balcony, pouring beer into the mouth of his mate on the pavement. This is where mainland Chinese tourists come to snap Brits in action. Proud moments.

6 WATCHING THE LIGHT

At 8pm every evening, those *Mission Impossible* scrapers come over all Disney. For 15 minutes, lasers flash, searchlights strobe and rainbows flicker from buildings on either side of the harbour, all choreographed to music. You can watch it from Kowloon's waterfront and hotels but I go the whole cheesy hog and get a ticket on red-sailed *Aqua Luna*, the harbour's last traditional wooden junk. It's so much easier to ponder the Post-Modern juxtaposition of ancient and modern with a Luna Breeze clinking in my hand...

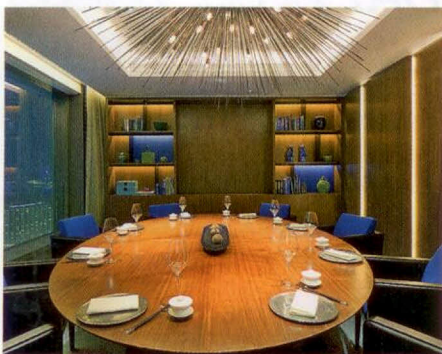
7 FOLLOWING THE FOOD TRENDS

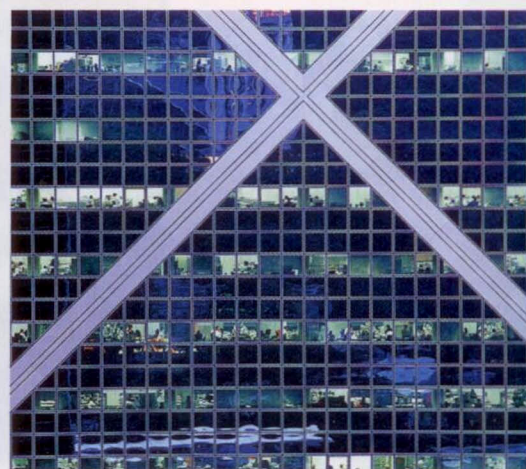
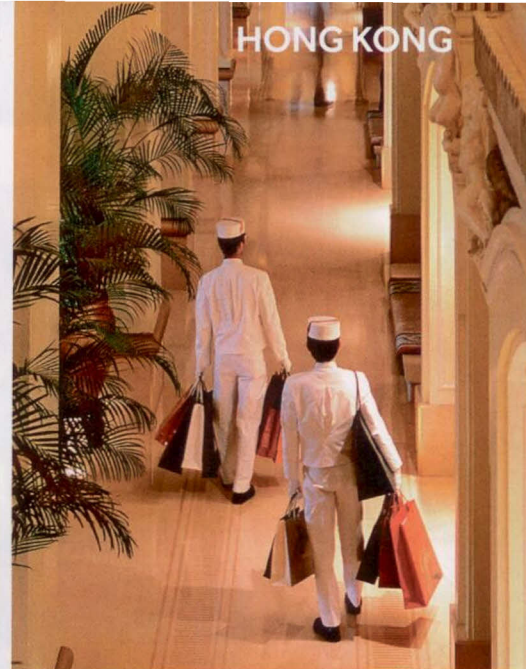
By the time I finish this sentence, another food trend will have stormed Hong Kong, but when I visit, it's all about small plates. At 22 Ships, owned by London wunderchef Jason Atherton, those small plates are Spanish-ish; the menu ticks off *jamón*, *morcilla*, Padrón peppers,

plus *foie gras*, *wagyu* beef and mango. The treat-em-mean no-reservations policy keeps food hipsters keen. And head chefs – next day I spot 22 Ships' guy dining at Yardbird, where the bare-brick decor and scrum for seats are the same, the tapas Japanese. Chicken wing *yakitori* with *shichimi* spice powder is the business.

8 GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL, A BIT

Reading about Hong Kong's beachy, hikey, less inhabited islands has me picturing Manhattan-meets-Maldives-meets-Milford Track. Which isn't *quite* how Lamma looks as the ferry docks at Sok Kwu Wan pier – a narrow concrete path leads past fish-tank restaurants, mudflats and up over a scrubby hill. But a little nature goes a long way: a few elephant ear trees, a giant black-and-white butterfly and paddling in the friendly waves of Hung Shing Yen beach – I'm sold. The cross-island hike is tamed with railings, public loos and pretty pagodas for breath-catching. But the most built up it gets (power station aside) is the line of cafes in Yung Shue Wan and the huddle of stilted fishermen's houses over by the pier. The low-rise calm reminds me of the Scilly





Isles. Imagine if *they* were a breezy half-hour ride from Canary Wharf...

9 HITTING RUSH HOUR

You know you're getting to grips with a city when you can surf its rush hour on public transport. I reach Kowloon's underground MTR station bang on 6pm, just as crowds multiply, determination sets in, commuters throw caution to the wind and actually *walk* up and down escalators. Full-on, but organised, yellow-shirted platform staff direct passengers to emptier carriages, where illuminated route maps show direction, location and connections. I come unstuck when I run out of coins; queue at ticket counter; am given change not ticket; return to ticket machine queue. Moral of the story: invest early on in a prepaid Octopus card and sweep through like a pro.

10 DINING FROM A BIRDCAGE

'Dead garden' – a name unlikely to shift many M&S ready-meals, but responsible in part for jammed reservation lines at Bo Innovation, among the twinkliest of HK's Michelin-starred restaurants. From my ringside seat (six

stools form a kitchen-view table), I watch a chef plant the finishing touch – a freeze-dried spring onion 'twig', tweezered into a wooden sake box of onion and lime foam and morel 'soil'. Looks weird, tastes amazing. There's more playful artistry and precision-kitcheneering for the following dozen or so courses. *Petits fours* arrive in half a birdcage. It's clever, good-looking, great-tasting – dinner as entertainment.

11 LOSING COUNT OF THE BUDDHAS

I'm not sure whether my favourite Buddha is the one holding his robes up over spindly legs to have a paddle, the one on a donkey with floor-length eyebrows, or the one wearing armour and a fierce frown contradicted by his camp 'I'm a little teapot' pose. But it's been a long whittling process; there are 9,997 more to choose from at this hillside monastery in Sha Tin. Its pavilions and pagodas have views of huge bamboo clumps, wooded slopes and (of course) more tower blocks. People puff their way up the Buddha-lined hill to waft bundles of incense, rattle devotional sticks, have their fortune told. I've never visited

Fan(cy) footwork: above, t'ai chi in Victoria Park; bellboys in The Peninsula hotel; the vertiginous Bank of China Tower. Opposite, traditional boat backed by steely skyscrapers; inside the Ten Thousand Buddhas' Monastery; Michelin-starred scallops at Bo Innovation

China, but here in the New Territories just north of Kowloon, I suddenly feel closer.

12 TRAVELLING BY CITY ICON

New York has the yellow cab; London, the double-decker; Hong Kong, the Star Ferry. A 20p ticket gets me a top-deck seat with naturally air-conditioned views of Victoria Harbour, teeny boats and mega tankers navigating the waters between stern skylines. Sailors wear natty blue suits, *and* it's genuinely convenient – 15 minutes from Kowloon to Central. That's HK 1, NyLon 0.

13 EARS POPPING EN ROUTE TO RECEPTION

Did I mention that parts of this town are quite high-rise? I soon learn that arriving at a building's door is *not* arriving at your destination. I'm off to the Ritz-Carlton spa for a swim in the highest pool in the world (118 floors up!), in the ICC, HK's tallest building. But getting to Kowloon MTR >



Simply eggs-ellent:
Scotch egg with
tonkatsu sauce and
cabbage at HK's 'It'
restaurant, the *yakitori*
Yardbird bar

station, directly beneath, is only the half of it. It's nine escalators and miles of polished mall before I even glimpse daylight. More escalators and lifts take me higher, all the way to the 103rd-floor reception. The swim? Like the weather round the outdoor hot-tub: a blast.

14 PIGGING OUT WITH LOCALS

How to tell which hole-in-the-wall joint will give you the best feed of your life, and which will sentence you to days of hotel-bathroom arrest? I wish I knew, so I sign up to a Hong Kong Foodie Tour that'll show me local places for local people. It's fantastic. In four hours, our guide, Silvana, whips us round six cafes in the Sheung Wan district I'd otherwise have missed, weaves local history and culture into her explanation of dishes, feeds us *won ton* soup, pork buns, sugarcane juice and custard tarts (bought from bakers displaying them on metal trays – it means they make their own). In the barbecue pork shop, a place designed more for easy cleaning than diners' comfort, whole pigs line the wall waiting for their moment in the oven. The chef brings his A4-size cleaver down on the chopping board and, quick as you like, we have bowls of rice topped with tender spiced meat. Dreamy.

15 THE 007 HOTEL

Genteel string quartet, politely murmured conversation, clink of fork on

CHEF BRINGS HIS CLEAVER DOWN. QUICK AS YOU LIKE, WE HAVE BOWLS OF TENDER SPICED MEAT

plate, splosh of Darjeeling in porcelain... Afternoon tea at The Peninsula, the 85-year-old Kowloon hotel that's the city's oldest, is a colonial-era institution. But, like Bond with his Q (Roger Moore swooshed in here in *Man with the Golden Gun*), this is one tech-savvy octogenarian. In-room tablet-controls are so advanced I actually find them easy to use and wi-fi in the Rolls-Royce is the icing on the cake.

16 DRINKING IN TOP-DECK VIEWS

Mr Whippy, Pizza Express and dodgy pubs I can get at home. After a quick souvenir-haul from its market, I decide British-seaside Stanley, on Hong Kong island's south coast, is not for me (I much prefer the Chinese-seaside Sai Kung, out east amid country parks and empty space, with its incense-hazed Old Town and bubbling-tank seafood restaurants). My bus journey there, on the other hand, is a corker. Front row, top deck on the No. 6 from Central gives me Sikh temples, double-decker trams and the huge Happy Valley racecourse. Then – ta da! – Repulse Bay, all manicured golden sands, flash boats and jump-on-in waters.

17 SQUINTING AGAINST THE NEON GLARE

By day, there's a certain dinginess to the streets of Kowloon: buildings are too close together to let in much sun, and it's all less polished than Central's swanky sidewalks or Sheung Wan's charming higgie-piggie. By night, the neon's on and I'm dazzled, by ads and shop signs running along and across the street. This is the real light show. And people are out in artificially lit force, eating fish balls on skewers, taking delivery of fruit for tomorrow's market, clacking mah-jong tiles under station walkways. The Temple Street Night Market, still going after midnight, is the place for *Star Wars*-themed USB sticks and crucifixion-themed T-shirts: '1 Saviour + 3 Nails = 4 Given'.

18 NICE CUPPA CHA

Sometimes, the best escapes are right in the thick of things. And so it is with Hong Kong Park, a cool splodge of green among the business district's monoliths. I zen out in the t'ai-chi garden, kick shoes off for the pebbly foot-massage path (good for the sole), pick one of 50 brews in the Lock Cha teahouse. And relax. ■

Get me there

GO INDEPENDENT

Cathay Pacific (020 8834 8888, cathaypacific.com) flies five times daily from Heathrow to Hong Kong, from £629 return and connects to 40 destinations in China through sister airline Dragonair. **Virgin Atlantic** (0844 209 7777, virgin-atlantic.com) has daily Heathrow returns from £676. **BA** (0844 493 0787, ba.com) has Heathrow returns from £674.

GO PACKAGED

Cleveland Collection (020 7843 3597, clevelandcollection.co.uk) has five nights at the Mandarin Oriental from £1,695pp, B&B, including Heathrow flights and transfers. **Virgin Holidays** (0844 557 3859, virginholidays.co.uk) has five nights from £940pp, room only, including four-star Kowloon accommodation, Heathrow flights and transfers. Or try **Thomson Worldwide** (0844 050 2828, thomsonworldwide.com).

GET AROUND

Hotels can arrange airport transfers, but the 24-minute **Airport Express** train costs 90p one-way to Hong Kong and Kowloon stations, where you can also check in for the return leg. Fares, timetables, maps and apps for the easy-to-use MTR public transport system are available at mtr.com.hk. Get a prepaid Octopus card (£12, including refundable £4 deposit). **Taxis** are cheap and abundant and work on meters. If you book ahead, via a hotel or restaurant, say, they cost about 40p extra. If you want them to cross the bay from Hong Kong island to Kowloon, or vice versa, you also have to pay the £4 toll, plus 80p-£1.20 extra for the return journey. **The Peak Tram** costs £2.25 single.

FURTHER INFORMATION

See the tourist board website on discoverhongkong.com.

