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CONCIERGE CLOSE UP: HONG KONG, CHINA

Hong Kong Island and Kowloon are divided both physically and psychologically by Victoria Harbour. On Hong Kong Island, the central city stretches only a few kilometers south into the island before mountains rise up, but the city goes several more kilometers north into Kowloon. In the main districts and neighborhoods, luxury boutiques are a stone's throw away from old hawker stalls, and a modern, high-tech horse-racing track is just around the corner from a temple housing more than 10,000 buddhas.

SIGHTS

Kowloon. The Kowloon Peninsula is the extension of mainland China just across the harbor from the Central District, bounded in the north by the string of mountains that give Kowloon its poetic name: *gau lung* (nine dragons). The southernmost part of Kowloon, called Tsim Sha Tsui, is where landmarks such as the Star Ferry Pier and the elegant Peninsula Hotel stand proudly. It's where Nathan Road, Kowloon's dense and busy shopping street, begins; the famous Kansu Street Jade Market is on this side of the harbor as well.

The **Kowloon Star Ferry Pier** makes a convenient starting point for any tour of the peninsula, and the ferry itself (\$) is the most scenic ride in town. To the right of the ferry pier is the Victoria Clock Tower, which dates from 1915 and is all that remains of the old Kowloon–Canton Railway Station. ☒ *At the foot of Canton Rd.*

Not a single nail was used to build the **Chi Lin Nunnery**, which dates from 1934. Instead, traditional Tang Dynasty architectural techniques involving wooden dowels and bracket work hold its 228,000 pieces of timber together. The Main Hall honors the first Buddha, known as Sakyamuni. ☒ *5 Chi Lin Dr., Diamond Hill, Kowloon.*

The exterior is unimaginative, but inside the **Hong Kong Museum of Art** (\$) are five floors of innovatively designed galleries highlighting Chinese antiquities and fine art, as well as visiting exhibitions. ☒ *10 Salisbury Rd.*

You can stroll along the harbour-front **promenade**, which has been turned into an Avenue of Stars of Hong Kong cinema. ☒ *Along the harbour.*

Not to be missed is high tea (\$) at the famously luxurious **Peninsula Hong Kong Hotel**. The grande dame of Hong Kong hotels is a local institution. ☒ *Salisbury Rd.*

You can have your fortune told at **Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple** (\$), a large, vivid compound whose Buddhist shrine is dedicated to a shepherd boy who was said to have magic healing powers. The temple also has two lovely Chinese gardens and a Confucian Hall. ☒ *Wong Tai Sin Rd., Wong Tai Sin.*

The air fills with warbling and tweeting about a block from the narrow **Yuen Po Street Bird Garden**. Around 70 stalls stretch down one side of it, selling all the birds, cages, and accessories a bird owner could need. Old men tending the stalls lift insect larvae (also for sale) with chopsticks and pop

them into the open beaks of baby birds. Birds are a favorite pet in Hong Kong, especially among the elderly, who often take them out for a “walk” in bamboo cages. ☒ *Yuen Po St., Prince Edward.*

Hong Kong Island. Just 78 square km (30 square mi), Hong Kong Island is where the action is, from high finance to nightlife to luxury shopping. The office towers and opulent shopping centers of Hong Kong's core business district occupy one of the most expensive stretches of land on Earth. The Central District also houses nearly every major investment and commercial bank, fashion designer, and luxury-goods boutique the world has yet produced. Further removed, the Western District is gradually becoming more like Central, but it still retains a traditional feel. Wanchai is the city's fabled nightlife district, now home to popular clubs and restaurants.

Bonham Strand, a major thoroughfare in one of Hong Kong's most charmingly traditional areas, is lined with shops selling goods that evoke the old China Coast trade merchants. Bonham Strand West, in particular, is known for its Chinese medicines and herbal remedies.

Since 1898 the **Central District Star Ferry Pier** has been the gateway to the island for commuters and travelers coming from Kowloon. First-time visitors are all but required to cross the harbor on the Star Ferry (\$) at least once and ride around Hong Kong Island on a double-deck tram. ☒ *Enter pier through tunnel next to Mandarin Hotel, Connaught Rd. and Connaught Pl.*

Built in 1847 and dedicated to the gods of literature and of war, **Man Mo Temple** is Hong Kong Island's oldest. It's dedicated to the Taoist gods of literature and of war: Man, who wears green, and Mo, dressed in red. It now serves primarily as a smoke-filled haven for elderly women paying respects; ashes flutter down onto your clothes from the enormous spirals of incense hanging from the beams. ☒ *Hollywood Rd. at Ladder St.*

From the Central District, the **Peak Tram** (\$) is the world's steepest funicular railway. It passes five intermediate stations on its way to the upper terminal, 1,805 feet above sea level. The tram was opened in 1880 to transport people to the top of Victoria Peak, the highest hill overlooking Hong Kong Harbour. ☒ *Between Garden Rd. and Cotton Tree Dr.*

A practical people-mover, the **Midlevels Escalator** is actually a 1-km-long (½-mi-long) combination of escalators and walkways that provides free, glass-covered transport up or down the steep incline between Central and Midlevels, one of the city's most fashionable residential districts. You can get off at any time to explore the shops or sit at one of the many cafés. ☒ *Enter across from Central Market, at Queen's Rd. Central and Jubilee St.*

Known in Chinese as Tai Ping Shan, or Mountain of Great Peace, **Victoria Peak** is Hong Kong's one truly essential sight. On a clear day, nothing rivals the view of the dense, glittering string of skyscrapers that line Hong Kong's north coast and the carpet of buildings that extend to the eight mountains of Kowloon.

Lantau. The island's most famous resident is **Tian Tan Buddha**, the world's largest seated outdoor bronze Buddha. He sits on the Ngong Ping plateau, beside the Po Lin Monastery, a onetime haven of peace. You can still find stillness at the nearby Wisdom Path, a short hillside walk lined by massive wooden tablets inscribed with parts of a Buddhist *sutra* (prayer). Ngong Ping is also home to a religious theme park, Ngong Ping Village, with interactive exhibits on the Buddha, as well as gift shops and restaurants.

Macau. This Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China is on the western bank of the Pearl River Delta, less than an hour from Hong Kong by hydrofoil. Most people visit Macau to gamble, eat cheap seafood, and shop without crowds. But don't overlook its timeless charms and unique culture, born from centuries of both Portuguese and Chinese influence.

Only the magnificent, towering facade, with its intricate carvings and bronze statues, remains from the original church at **Ruínas de São Paulo**. This widely adopted symbol of Macau was built between 1602 and 1640 by Jesuit priests and Japanese Christians. The church, an adjacent college, and Mount Fortress once formed East Asia's first western-style university and was collectively regarded as the Acropolis of Asia. ☒ *Downtown.*

The **Macau Tower & Convention & Entertainment Centre** rises above everything else in the city, and is the world's 10th largest free-standing tower (1,100 feet). There are a variety

of thrilling activities available here, for those inclined for the adventurous. ☒ *Largo da Torre de Macau, Downtown.*

SHOPPING

After horse-racing and rugby, the favorite sport in Hong Kong is probably shopping. You'll find more of the exclusive designer stores on Hong Kong Island, particularly in Central, while more of the interesting street markets are in Kowloon.

Street bazaars and markets embody some of the best things about Hong Kong shopping—bargains, local color, and an almost audible buzz of excitement. Famous **Cat Street** (☒ *Upper Lascar Row, between Central and Western*) is now full of small, high-quality Chinese antiques shops, but in the street outside you'll still see plenty of hawkers selling inexpensive jewelry, opium pipes, Mao buttons, and assorted paraphernalia.

Chinese Arts & Crafts (☒ *China Resources Bldg., 26 Harbour Rd., Wanchai*; ☒ *Star House, 3 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui*; ☒ *Pacific Place, Admiralty*) is a particularly good bet for a wide variety of Chinese crafts and gifts.

Hollywood Road and **Wyndham Street**, which are actually one long lane running from Central to Western, are undeniably the best places for poking about in shops and stalls selling antiques from many Asian countries. Treasures are hidden away among a jumble of old family curio shops, sidewalk junk stalls, slick new display windows, and dilapidated warehouses. You will also find great furniture here.

Kowloon-side, one of the most fun places to shop is the **Kansu Street Jade Market** (☒ *Kansu St. off Nathan Rd., Yau Ma Tei*), where you'll find jade in every form, color, shape, and size for sale, as well as jewelry and trinkets made from other kinds of minerals and semiprecious gems, including pearls. Some items are reasonably priced, but some jade isn't authentic.

If you wish to dress yourself in high style but with an Asian accent, stop by **Shanghai Tang** (☒ *12 Pedder St., Central*; ☒ *The Peninsula Hong Kong, Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui*). In addition to the brilliantly hued—and expensive—silk and cashmere clothing for both men and women, you'll find Chinese souvenirs.

