

STREETS

Exploring Hong Kong Island

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Contents

Foreword by Selina Chow	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Users' Guide	xi
Introduction	1
Central	12
Aberdeen Street	16
Battery Path	21
Chater Road	27
Graham Street	34
Hollywood Road	40
Ice House Street	46
Pedder Street	51
Shelley Street	56
Upper Albert Road	61
Wellington Street	67
Peak • Mid-Levels	72
Bowen Road	78
Conduit Road	82
Kotewall Road	87
Lugard Road	91
Old Peak Road	98
Wan Chai	102
Cross Street	106
Johnston Road	112
Kennedy Road	118
Lee Tsing Street	122
Queen's Road East	126
Ship Street	131
Stone Nullah Lane	135
Causeway Bay • Happy Valley	140
Blue Pool Road	146
Causeway Road	150

Leighton Road	154
Shan Kwong Road	159
Tai Hang Road	163
Tung Lo Wan Road	168
Wong Nai Chung Road	173
Yee Wo Street	179
North Point • Shek O	184
Chai Wan Road	190
King's Road	194
Shau Kei Wan Main Street East	199
Shek O Road	204
Tong Chong Street	210
Southside	214
Stanley Main Street	218
Tung Tau Wan Road/Wong Ma Kok Road	223
Repulse Bay Road	228
Deep Water Bay Road	232
Aberdeen • Pok Fu Lam	236
Aberdeen Main Road	242
Pok Fu Lam Road	246
Victoria Road	253
Wong Chuk Hang Road	259
Western	264
Belcher's Street	270
Centre Street	275
Des Voeux Road West	279
High Street	284
Ladder Street	289
Tai Ping Shan Street	294
Western Street	300
Bibliography	307
Photograph Credits	315

Introduction

Even for those who have lived for many years in Hong Kong, the place and its people continue to fascinate, beguile, infuriate and disgust. Behind the hubris of Hong Kong's recent self-designation as 'Asia's World City', a glitzy depiction easy enough to be seduced by in certain areas, numerous images abound; and an abundance of clichés.

Thronged city streets pulsing with energy, thronged with buses, trams, taxis, private cars and people, people ...

Quiet backstreet courtyards shaded by spreading banyans and heavily fragrant *pak laan* trees (*Michelia alba*), with a garrulous foursome playing mah-jong somewhere in the afternoon shade.

The curling rooflines of venerable Chinese temples wreathed in sandalwood-scented incense smoke, their walls blackened and dark with years of accreted dust and soot.

Crowded squalid back alleys, smelling of roasted pork, diesel fumes, market sweepings and washing hung out to dry.

Undeveloped, almost wild countryside, only a short distance away from the heart of one of the world's most overcrowded cities.

Gleaming steel and glass office towers, the modern day's temples to trade, banking and property speculation; sharp-suited office-workers scurrying in and out, clutching their mobile phones all the while.

Money-making machine masquerading as a legitimate society; noisy politicians gesturing pointlessly for the watching television cameras; government officials responsible only, it sometimes seems, to themselves alone.

Bone-thin old people, pushing trolleys stacked high with waste cardboard and discarded aluminium cans slowly up the hillsides into the dusk.

Fantastic, unlikely, glittering Manhattan East skylite, backed by sheer, towering, jungle-covered mountainsides where the solitary hiker can walk for hours and see almost no one, then clamber down the cliffside and swim off magnificent beaches in the open sea.

Dinners simple, extravagant or anything in between, followed by the latest Hollywood film, or a performance of brightly painted opera singers first down from Szechwan (Sichuan); gazing out across Victoria Harbour's myriad lights into the midnight sky.

Few places in Asia can have changed so much over the last few decades; the remarkable thing is just how many links to the past still linger on in Hong Kong, amid all the glitz and modernity. Staggering too just how much has gone forever.

Attractive, integrated civic precincts like the formerly gracious surrounds of Statue Square have been completely transformed — some would say obliterated — over the past half-century, with only a few isolated remnants like the old Supreme Court and the Cenotaph to remind us of what once was a very attractive downtown area. That element of the past has gone. It has vanished, been thrown away. It no longer exists. Central involves many adjectives, but pleasant is seldom one of them.

Some places, remarkably, have changed little or nothing with the passage of time. A St John's Cathedral parishioner or a student from the University of Hong Kong, returning after half a century or so away, would find little changed in either old building or their immediate surroundings. But these, notably, are amongst the few exceptions.

Of the best of Hong Kong's old urban buildings, hardly any still remain. Tsim Sha Tsui's Kowloon-Canton Railway Station, Central's Hong Kong Club and General Post Office, Causeway Bay's Lee Theatre or the marvellous Repulse Bay Hotel — the list of lost heritage-grade buildings that only live on in picture books and fading memories is almost endless; everyone has a favourite example of a place now vanished.

And all of these buildings mentioned above were only demolished after — not before — a dedicated Antiquities and Monuments Office was established in 1976. They were lost because even when Hong Kong's, admittedly toothless, protective legislation was enacted, few local residents cared enough to publicly demand preservation of what still remained.

As a direct result, Hong Kong's ever-present combination of entrenched vested interests, private-greed and public apathy has ensured that very little built heritage now remains in the urban areas to pass on to coming generations. And of course, on the more frequented streets of areas such as Central and Causeway Bay, virtually nothing remains from the past. And what does still precariously hang

ou becomes a locally renowned ‘antiquity’, eagerly pointed out to those, especially newcomers to Hong Kong, who aver that nothing now remains from the past.

A flight of stone steps lit top and bottom by brackets of wrought-iron gas lamps, say, or an incongruously surviving bronze statue, marooned pathetically out of time and context, become local marvels. Featured in guidebooks and tourist pamphlets and eagerly pointed out to sightseers as evidence that Hong Kong still cherishes its links with the past, few, if any, of Hong Kong’s ‘monuments’ would be considered notable anywhere else in the world. But here they are made much of, and that fact in itself provides interesting and unexpected insights into Hong Kong’s psyche.

Perhaps most obviously, the lavish attention devoted to these scraps and fragments is a tell-tale marker of Hong Kong’s remarkably inward-looking nature and, by extension, just how ice-thin the city’s layer of ‘internationalism’ really is. Hong Kong’s heritage sites are seldom openly benchmarked against similar sites in other ‘world cities’ — the comparison would just be too marked.

But in a backhanded sort of way these scattered oddments really *are* monuments to Hong Kong’s past, yet in ways very few care to think about. Their enduring presence are testaments to the city and its people’s prevailing lack of civic awareness, to its wanton disregarded sense of how what went before elementally shapes what Hong Kong is like now, and the quite chilling unconcern for what the place would eventually be like for future generations.

This indifference often parallels a striking, sometimes stunning, ignorance on the part of many Hong Kong people of all races, of the place that they have lived in all their lives. It’s almost too easy to say, as many local residents do, that Hong Kong has no history, and a truism that for so much of its history the future was so uncertain as to be unfathomable. As a direct result, for many Hong Kong people, the city lives only in and for the present.

An interested backstreet wanderer looking to know more about the city’s past is not often served by asking other Hong Kong people for clues. For the most part, Hong Kong people don’t know anything much about it either, and most can’t quite understand why anyone should take much any interest in a heritage not their own. Far better

to sip cappuccinos in the air-conditioning somewhere and talk about life in Sydney, New York or Vancouver, they imply, than poke about in local backstreets among the dirt and the smells where after all, there's really nothing much to see or do anyway.

What often forcefully strikes newcomers to Hong Kong is how extraordinarily little knowledge, or even curiosity, most people born and brought up here seem to have about the place they've lived in all their lives. Cynics frequently sneer that if Hong Kong people can't make money out of something, sing into it, eat it or hang a designer label off it then they feel it's not worth knowing about. While there is unfortunately some truth in this, the underlying reasons why so many have ended up knowing so little about the place they have lived in all their lives are deep-rooted and complex.

Before the late 1960s, very few people of any race, with the partial exception of the local Portuguese and Eurasians, a small section of the Chinese population and a smaller still number of Europeans, and a scattering of Parsees, Jews and others, really *were* local, in the sense of being lifelong residents, born, raised and educated in Hong Kong. The overwhelming majority of the population came here to earn a living, **not** make a home. Almost everyone was from somewhere else, and fully intended to go back there in time.

To speak of *Heung Kong Yan* (Hong Kong People) before that time, in the sense that the term would be understood by many today, has virtually no meaning, and is a little like referring to sixteenth-century Italians, or nineteenth-century Singaporeans; there just weren't any. Tuscans, Genoese and Neapolitans in Italy, or Hokkiens, Tamils and Bugis Malays in Singapore, yes, but the distinctive, shared inter-communal identity which we recognize today in those places came much later, as it did to Hong Kong as well.

With little shared heritage and so much discontinuity after the Pacific War, what was here before 1949 was largely irrelevant to those who came afterwards. In the 1950s almost no sense of a shared Hong Kong community existed. Instead, there was a collection of different communities who lived side by side but seldom if ever mingled. Cultivating a common Hong Kong-based heritage through the study of local history and encouraging the sense of patrimony that develops

as a result was a non-starter when, for most residents, there was simply no common legacy to begin with.

Hong Kong wasn't a place that those who eventually became 'Hong Kong People' had grown up with, and they didn't really expect — much less hope — that their children or grandchildren would ever come to feel deeply for the place. Hong Kong's only value was as a haven of refuge from disorder elsewhere, a temporary way station for people who never lost the feeling that ultimately they were just stopping off on the way to somewhere else.

Given this transient situation, why should anyone bother to care for the place, or want to know more about it than they needed for day-to-day living? If graceful old buildings were heedlessly destroyed, beautiful scenic vistas irretrievably ruined, the harbour and beaches fouled almost beyond redemption and the New Territories countryside squandered and lost, well, ultimately it didn't matter — or so the flawed reasoning went.

For after all, Hong Kong wasn't really home; it was just a place to make enough money to buy an emigrant's visa to Canada, Australia or the United States, just as three generations earlier Hong Kong represented little more than the opportunity to save up for a comfortable retirement elsewhere in one of the scattered Pearl River Delta towns, or in one of the more picturesque English villages, depending on where one had originally hailed from.

The conscious development of a distinct Hong Kong identity was never encouraged; it still isn't largely because it would be interpreted by the mainland government (a fact they themselves have admitted) as the colonial authorities trying to create a separate, ultimately self-governing entity out of Hong Kong, similar to Singapore's political development at this time, which they would never tolerate. And today, as we are constantly reminded, the concept of 'One Country' is paramount, whatever the rider about 'Two Systems' might once have been taken to mean. But the end result of both policies has been the same — a Hong Kong identity has evolved by default and somehow managed, in spite of so many obvious faults and flaws, to survive and flourish against the odds.

In the future we may come to see that the distinct, widespread,

Hong Kong identity, no less real for being flawed, belonged only to a thin slice in time, falling somewhere between the turmoil of the late 1960s and the turn of the twenty-first century, a few years after the handover. Shanghai ceased to be a meaningful exchange between China and the rest of the world by the mid-1950s as China turned inward and in many ways Shanghai ceased to exist as an identity distinctly separate from the rest of the mainland. A similar convergence appears to be happening in Hong Kong, always a very inward-looking place anyway. And as China continues to modernize and look outward, the formerly stark disparities in lifestyle and expectations between Hong Kong people and their mainland contemporaries can only further narrow with each passing year.

The not-so-slow diaspora of Hong Kong people in the 1980s and 1990s, the steady hemorrhaging of Hong Kong's best and brightest to Canada, Australia and elsewhere in the post-Joint Declaration, and especially post-Tiananmen years, is perhaps one of the clearest markers of this. The genuinely middle class — as distinct from the merely affluent — have not, sadly, returned to Hong Kong in any great numbers. They have left permanently, and local society shows their loss in many less obvious ways.

Those who have come back, regrettably, are for the most part as opportunistic as those who never left in the first place, perhaps even more so. Their sense of commitment to Hong Kong, if it even exists at all, is even more tenuous than it was before; now they and their children no longer *have* to stay here, come what may, if doing so doesn't really suit them in any way. And so there is little incentive to work for a better Hong Kong for tomorrow's generation — their day can dawn elsewhere. For these people it really *doesn't* matter now, if it ever did anyway, whether Hong Kong gets further trashed, polluted, built over, and despoiled. They've got their bolt hole; here is only for now. Why bother about anything else?

The disregarded past, nevertheless, is still lurking about, but increasingly it takes some looking for in most places. Wandering about Hong Kong Island's backstreets, in places like Kennedy Town, Shau Kei Wan or Wan Chai, one can sometimes feel like an archaeologist of the modern-day working without a shovel, piercing

together isolated fragments from what was here until almost yesterday to build up a picture of a very different place.

Glimpses of earlier times remain here and there, and in some corners audible echoes as well, but for many, what went before is at best partially buried, even somewhat obscure. But learn what to look and listen for, and an otherwise everyday scene can completely change.

Market streets are still raucous places of vendor's cries, and not so long ago the clip-clop of wooden slippers (*muoh kek*) was a common and distinctive sound heard all over Hong Kong. Over the last forty years *muoh kek* have steadily given way to rubber-soled shoes, and their once common available presence has vanished into the past. But they are still sold in a few shops here and there, and very occasionally one will hear someone wearing them, probably an old person, clattering along the pavement in the late afternoon in search of a fresh fish and some green vegetables to prepare for the family's evening meal.

At moments like that, one can think that the city's distinctiveness hasn't completely vanished, not just yet anyway, and that there are still echoes — audible at quite a distance in this case — of what Hong Kong used to be like. Or it can seem like that, for those who care to listen. And so, wandering around Hong Kong's backstreets, one needs to look for other elements from the past, more cultural and lasting, and identify links between them and the present. One's historical imagination takes over, and this is perhaps the best part of a wander around Hong Kong.

A foundation stone here, a statue there or from time to time that rarest of local sights — a well-preserved old building — give subtle hints to Hong Kong's past. Names on streets give a few such intimations of the past and lead on to other lingering signposts that point the way towards vanished people, long lost places and almost completely altered ways of life. But not too many clues lead to ready answers and their presence poses as many questions about contemporary Hong Kong's attitude to its past as they lay to rest.

In recent years heritage trails in both the urban and rural areas have attempted to write something of their area's past back into

public consciousness, but like many such initiatives, sadly, they all too often seem like a case of too little and far too late for any meaningful impact on public awareness to be possible.

Let's take an example of one such walking trail, well researched and seemingly well thought out, with considerable sums of public money spent on implementation. What does Dr Sun Yat-sen, revolutionary 'founder' of modern China, and the *gai see* (wet market) on Central's Bridges Street, smelling of dried vegetables, wet feathers and fresh chicken blood, possibly have in common? On the surface of it, nothing. Nevertheless, this unremarkable, rather grubby spot forms an integral part of the Central and Western District Board's Sun Yat-sen Heritage Trail — a series of marker plaques at various locations connected with Dr Sun's student years in Hong Kong and subsequent revolutionary activities, when he used the British colony as a base and relatively safe haven.

For marker plaques are all that remain; almost everything else that was in any way connected with Sun Yat-sen's time in Hong Kong has long since been demolished. As with other heritage trails created in the urban areas in recent years, the inscriptions here record, in effect, that 'on this site, three or four buildings ago, there used to be something interesting or significant.' But beyond that, nothing from the past remains for the ambler to encounter. There is virtually nothing at all to see as you walk along, beyond a usually unremarkable modern building and a small marker plaque.

The Central and Western Heritage Trail, laid out by the Antiquities and Monuments Office, follows a similar pattern to the Sun Yat-sen Trail. Out of thirty-five 'sites of interest' depicted on official brochures publicizing the Sheung Wan Route, nineteen of them are only marker plaques. While some of the sites covered, such as the Man Mo Temple, are of considerable historical and cultural interest, others are of, at best, tenuous importance. While well-meaning, the historical significance of these sites is often so unconvincing that all but the most hardened history fanatic, whose sole aim and purpose is to gaze at the site of the long-vanished stall where Dr Sun habitually took his breakfast congee, can be enthused by any of them.

One such tenuous 'heritage site' is the public park on Caine Road, the claim to prominence of which is that it is where a row of Police Married Quarters once stood. Built in 1920 of red brick and stucco and less than sixty years old when torn down, they were of no great architectural merit; in Sydney, Calcutta, Manchester or Singapore, buildings such as these would literally not have warranted a second glance. The pamphlet might just as well read, 'On this site, more than twenty years ago, there once stood a row of fairly unremarkable buildings, since demolished.' The tower block on Seymour Road, immediately behind and overlooking the park, stands on the site of *Idlewild*, the rather more impressive town residence of early compradore Sir Robert Hotung. By the logic employed concerning the park's inclusion there should perhaps be an entry for that as well, but there isn't.

All of this, though, sadly demonstrates just how bare the bottom of the local heritage barrel has been scraped. When 'sites' like the park on Caine Road have been deemed worthy of inclusion in literature promoting 'heritage', it is impossible not to suspect that it was only for sheer want of anything better.

Heritage is generally a rather subjective concept: what has meaning and significance for one group can be — and all too often is — completely irrelevant to others. Hopefully here on these pages, various kinds of Hong Kong people, from the recently arrived to those whose families have lived here for generations, can recognize elements of the place that are significant to themselves.

Perhaps the most famous sight in Hong Kong, an image well-known to generations the world over, is the sight of the city itself, layered upon the lower slopes of Victoria Peak, with the green-clad mountainside itself providing a majestic silhouette and unchanging backdrop to the constantly evolving scene below it. Of all aspects of Hong Kong's heritage, this view is one that everyone across the full racial, socio-economic spectrum, from Shanghainese tycoon to Cantonese taxi-driver, Pakistani watchman to Peakite *tai tai*, has at some point gazed at and admired, even if only unconsciously.

In a few short years that view will be gone. Super-high office-buildings, that most pernicious present-day example of greedy-vested

interests prevailing over the wider, less immediately tangible public benefit, are steadily obliterating the very view of the Peak itself with an impenetrable wall of glass and steel. And now it is too late to stop.

Like most of Hong Kong's built heritage in the past, this view is being lost without pathos, without protest, and almost without comment. No one in authority, it seems, has ever thought of the uninterrupted Hong Kong skyline as an invaluable part of Hong Kong's collective heritage, of equal value to Chinese, Europeans, Eurasians, Parsees, Portuguese, Indians and every other nationality who ever settled here, which must be preserved at all costs. As a result, possibly the only element of Hong Kong's heritage that is common to all groups is shortly to disappear forever.

Part of the reason for this lies in the blindly commercial nature of Hong Kong and many of its people who, as the cliché appropriately runs, know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Another cause perhaps is the weary acceptance by both concerned parties and one suspects, the general public, that the unsubtly expressed wishes of powerful vested interests would inevitably prevail, over this as every other issue, whatever protest may have been made. This is what has always happened in the past, and so, perhaps, there seemed little or no point in even trying.

Future generations of residents and visitors may gasp in delight at many things in Hong Kong, but the majestic sight of Victoria Peak, rearing massively unimpeded above the heights of the city will, alas, not be one of them.

In this book I have tried to show Hong Kong as it really *is*, or at least as it is to me, rather than present an idealized version of how it was, or could be. Featured within these pages you will find the beautiful, the modern, the stylish and the graceful, placed immediately next to scenes of squalor, poverty, decay and stupidity. For this is how Hong Kong is: the magnificent and the tawdry, the distressing, the agreeable and the mindless, all somehow managing to coexist side by side, and overlapping most of the time as well.

Some corners of Hong Kong depicted here are prosaic and everyday, and reflect elements of Hong Kong life that are repeated all over the territory; others are more obscure, and many are

completely area-specific. Many locations are sharply focused while others contain more diffuse images, impressions and evocations. Aspects of Hong Kong life and Hong Kong people that I've selected, as well as my comments about them, will be controversial; maybe even embarrassing or offensive at times.

Some places are a hidden embarrassment of little-known riches while others contain not much more than the street names themselves and a few stories to point the way towards what once was found there. In these localities I have tried to show things that aren't there anymore, and try to give a flavour, a smell, and a sound of what it once was like, or might have been like.

Like Hong Kong itself, it is a deliberate but at times seemingly random selection, an often contradictory blend of sights, sounds, smells, and images, Hong Kong is like that too. It is not the same place for everyone, and neither should it be.

Above all *Streets: Exploring Hong Kong Island* is an intensely personal book. This is *my* Hong Kong, written as *I* see it. It is a view of Hong Kong seen through the eyes of a long-term resident — myself — whose image of the place and its varied peoples constantly oscillates between fascination, disgust, amusement, irritation, pride and delight, all emotions experienced in the course of an average day and often within an hour or two. But nevertheless I still go to bed every evening loving the place as much as ever. And I still don't quite know why I feel that way.

Mine will not be everyone's version of Hong Kong. It will certainly seem obscure for some, and for others locations that should seem the most familiar will be almost unrecognizable. But within these boundaries I hope readers will identify elements of Hong Kong that are familiar to them as well, stimulate a wish to explore others that are more unknown, or simply cause them to nod with recognition and then say quietly to themselves, 'Yes, that's how I see it too.'

Graham Street

嘉咸街

Situated directly across from the mirror-walls and constantly changing disco-light colours of The Center is Graham Street and its daily fresh food *gai see* or street-market. This narrow lane remains — for now anyway — an earthy and vital slice of the 'real' Hong Kong, rapidly vanishing in other places. Some of the buildings along this steep little backstreet have stood here for a century or more, but all of this is soon to change as the area is slated for eventual demolition and redevelopment.

Many of Central's office-workers stop off here on their way home to pick up some really fresh bean curd, fish and vegetables for dinner, instead of settling for the frequently stale produce on offer in the supermarkets.



 Bus stop

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| ① Tin jo stall | ④ Kowloon Sauer Shop |
| ② Four Sea Medicine Company | ⑤ Wing Wo Provision Shop |
| ③ Frozen meat shop | |

Graham Street is almost continually damp and slippery and it's very easy to come a cropper ambling along here. Most of the wetness comes from the stalls along the edges of the street, as the vegetables are frequently splashed down to keep them fresh in the summer heat. To this slurry is added, throughout the day, an unappealing mixture of café slops, market leavings and rubbish dropped by passers-by. By early evening, whatever the season, Graham Street is almost completely deserted, as with much of Central, as the last weary office-workers head for home and the stallholders that cater to them pack up and go.

1 *Tau foo stall*

Almost permanently clad whatever the weather in white T-shirt, grey shorts and black cloth slippers, the cheery old proprietor of this long-running stall on the corner of Graham Street and Queen's Road Central has been plying the bean curd trade here for decades; when pressed for details he says he just can't remember how many it is any more.

Ah Sook (uncle) and his cheery wife sell excellent *tau foo fa* (sometimes described as 'silken bean curd') soft bean curd, sliced in thin pieces and served with sticky home-made ginger syrup and a generous spoonful of *wong tong* (ochre-yellow, crumbled-up Chinese cane-sugar) sprinkled over the top.

Served hot or cold, the price is the same, a bargain at \$5. For regular customers, the empty bowl will be filled up with sweet *tau cheung* (soya bean milk) after you've finished eating at no extra cost. They also stock various grades of fresh, pressed, dried or deep-fried bean curd, as well as bean sprouts. Quality is some of the best in the street.



2 Four Sea Medicine Company

This little medicine shop has a remarkable array of patent medicines on display. Some are made in Hong Kong, while others are imported from Singapore, Malaysia or elsewhere. One popular remedy is Sea Coconut Cough Mixture, a bargain at \$16 a bottle. The potion is manufactured in Hong Kong but has contents and instructions printed in Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English — obviously with the Singapore and Malaysian market in mind. The perennially popular Madam Pearl's Cough Mixture comes in two sizes (\$12 and \$16) and will both relieve that nagging cough and put you to sleep at the same time.

Menthol-based embrocation oils such as Axe Universal Oil range from a couple of dollars a bottle to under \$20 for a large one that will last the average family for years. Rub it on your body to relieve aches and pains, on the head and under the nose for headaches, and on the stomach to dispel wind. It works — really! Penang-made Nutmeg Oil with a few strands of mace in the bottom of the bottle serves the same purpose, and while a little bit more expensive than the others, it certainly smells a great deal nicer.

Four Sea also stocks the usual array of pre-packaged Chinese herb mixtures and some everyday household items such as soap powder, dishwashing liquid and powdered bleach — all very competitively priced. Green nylon scouring pads for example are a bargain at \$5 for a bundle.



3 Frozen meat shop

You can buy anything in the frozen meat line here from a few slices of luncheon ham or a chicken leg to half a bullock's worth of steaks. Much of the beef on offer comes from Brazil and is much cheaper, says one of the workers, than that obtained from Australia, New Zealand or the United States. You can just taste that disappearing Amazonian rainforest with every bite you take.

For those without environmental hang-ups, or the simply budget-conscious, a 2 kg roll of admittedly very tender Scotch fillet goes for \$60, while frozen ox tongues, just the thing for making your own cold meat, are about \$30 each.

If you require, the staff will happily cut a steak off the frozen slab with a broad-axe sized meat-cleaver while you wait, weigh it and take your money as you go out. Frozen fish and seafood are a major item as well, with large fillets of flounder or sole going for \$12–15 each. There is a fair amount of passing retail trade, they say, but most business goes wholesale to restaurants in Central and elsewhere.



4 Kimchion Sauce Shop

This little shop sells their own brand of really tasty *ho yau* (oyster sauce), a snap at between \$15 and \$30 a bottle depending on the size, ideal for serving with some fresh greens from one of the stalls outside. In spite of repeated enquiries no one seemed to know just where the oysters came from — let's hope they were *not* plucked from the turgid waters of Deep Bay in the northwest New Territories ...



Bottles of *tau baan cheung* (yellowish fermented soya bean sauce) and *lant chiu yau* (chilli oil) stand packed in cartons in front of the shop, and none are over \$10 each. Staff are friendly and also supply wholesale to the restaurant trade. They also stock a range of mainland-made *jeet cho* (black or red vinegars), the tastiest of which are made with glutinous rice, and some cooking-grade Chinese rice wines like the cheap and ever-popular Kwangtung Miju.

5 Wing Wo Provisions Shop

One of the few remaining *jaap for poh* (sundry goods shops) in the area, Wing Wo Provisions Shop still manages to do a brisk business — even when the very building is in danger of falling down around the proprietor's ears. This decrepit-looking two-storey building, now more than a century old, is shored up with iron girders on the corner of Graham and Stanley Streets. Stand under the awnings of this one at your own risk!

Various sizes and varieties of eggs are in the front of the shop, with fresh hen's eggs imported from the mainland going for \$9 a dozen. Duck's eggs are slightly more. Black paste-covered *haam daan* (salted eggs), great in summer soups, and the incomparable *pei daan* (so-called 'hundred-year-old' eggs with the yolk inside

rendered a gooey yellow-green) coated in dried mud and rice-husks are a dollar or so each.

Sharp-tasting, *jee geung* (pink-coloured pickled ginger, just the thing to eat with a slice of *pei daan*) is \$5 a jar. Both sweet and salty varieties of *mui choy* (preserved vegetable), delicious steamed with minced pork, water chestnuts and black mushrooms, are in piles out in front, and you can buy a few pieces for dinner or an entire case of the stuff if you want.



How To Get There

- **By Bus:** No. 91 or No. 94 from Central Ferry Piers, alight on Queen's Road Central at the bus stop immediately after the Central Escalator. Walk against the direction of the traffic until you come to Graham Street.
- **By MTR:** Central MTR Station Exit D1. Turn right at the exit and walk along Pedder Street towards the junction with Queen's Road Central. Turn right into Queen's Road Central and continue walking until you reach the Central Escalator. Graham Street is on the left about 50 m further on.
- **By Taxi:** 'Wong Hui Dai Doh Chung, Gaa Haam Gaai gaai see' ('Queen's Road Central, Graham Street market').
- **By Tram:** From anywhere in Central, take any west-bound tram marked 'Kennedy Town', 'Western Market' or 'Whitty Street', and alight on Des Voeux Road at the Hang Seng Bank Building. Walk towards Central Market and on its left is Jubilee Street. Walk up Jubilee Street until you reach the junction with Queen's Road Central. Graham Street market is across the road.

This crowded thoroughfare, one of the busiest streets in Central, was named after Lieutenant William Pedder, a Royal Navy officer who arrived in Hong Kong in 1842 while serving on the gunboat HMS *Nemesis*. Pedder stayed on and was appointed Hong Kong's first harbour-master and marine magistrate. In the nineteenth century the street ended where the harbour began, at the present Des Voeux Road, and photographs dating from this time show both sides of Pedder Street lined with trees, all long since cut down.

At the junction of Queen's Road and Pedder Street there once stood a clock tower, its timepiece allegedly rather unreliable, that was donated to the colony by one-time watchmaker turned shipping magnate Douglas Lapraik; the tower remained a local landmark for decades until it was finally demolished as a traffic nuisance during the First World War. Douglas Castle, Lapraik's country house in Pok Fu Lam, still stands. A student hall of residence, it is better known today as University Hall.

In the 1920s it was possible to park one's car in the middle of Pedder Street — without charge — and cross to the now demolished Gloucester Hotel for lunch or a drink; a very different world from today's impossibly thronged pavements.



 Bus stop

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| ① Clock Building | ⑤ Landmark Clocktower Hotel |
| ② Pedder Building | ⑥ Site of old Gloucester Hotel |
| ③ Capita Top Club | ⑦ Site of Docking of <i>Nemesis</i> 's stern |
| ④ Shearhall Lane | |

1 China Building

Back in the 1930s there used to be a cafe on this spot called the *Blue Bird*, a favourite rendezvous point among Hong Kong's then tiny middle class. The *Blue Bird Cafe* was locally famous for — believe it or not — ice-cream sundaes. Now an everyday item, there once was a time when eating an ice-cream was a real treat, to be indulged from time to time in comfortable surroundings with a few close friends. Until the 1940s few except the wealthy had refrigerators and instead relied on ice-chests with daily deliveries of ice to the door in large blocks. In those years there was a well-known Chinese restaurant known as *Tai Tong* found on the top floor, a popular lunch-time rendezvous for Chinese businessmen to meet and cut deals.

In place of the long-since-vanished *Blue Bird Cafe*, there is a Hongkong and Shanghai Bank branch on the corner of Queen's Road Central, housing what must be some of Hong Kong's busiest ETC machines.

2 Pedder Building

This is the very last survivor of the old pre-war office buildings that once lined either side of Pedder Street. Built in 1923, Pedder Building has somehow managed to survive when many far newer buildings in the immediate area have been levelled. The original walls were finished with Shanghai plaster, a now obsolete mixture of cement and sand. When the building was given a face-lift in 1993, it proved impossible to find artisans who could work in this medium.

Unlike many newer buildings, Pedder Building has a covered sidewalk, enabling pedestrians to keep on the move in spite of occasional cloudbursts. Anyone watching how people are forced to cower in doorways elsewhere in Central during a rainstorm will surely realize just how sensible these arcades were. Perhaps future architects will reintroduce them?



3 China Tee Club

In spite of its name, the China Tee Club high in Pedder Building is accessible to the general public. A very pleasant venue for nostalgia seekers of a sort, it is a delightful respite from the relentlessly 'international' and 'upmarket' places a few blocks away in the grubby backstreets of 'SoHo' or 'The Fong'. Gently circling ceiling fans don't significantly affect the powerful air-conditioning, and the tables and chairs are more akin to a backstreet *kedai kopi* (Straits Chinese coffee shop) in Penang or Singapore than anything that ever existed in Hong Kong. China Tee Club has a Straits-inspired menu to match, with *laksa*, satay, nasi goreng and other similar fare, all consistently good and reasonably priced.



4 Shanghai Tang

Want to fantasize for a while that it's circa 1932, you're dancing cheek-to-cheek with a slinky White Russian nightclub hostess in a smoky nightclub just off Bubbling Well Road in old Shanghai, but just don't have the gear to recreate the part? Then head straight for this place.

A commercial extension of its flamboyant cigar-smoking owner, David Tang, Shanghai Tang has certainly made an impact since its opening in the early 1990s. A brightly coloured pastiche of 1930s' Shanghai-style stereotypes, right down to the red-turbaned Sikh manning the front door, it is impossible to miss this place — even if you wanted to. Quality is high at Shanghai Tang, but then so are the prices.



Few passers-by realize that some serious old Hong Kong money is behind the venture, artfully concealed behind the nouveau-riche aura that seems to cling to the place. The owner's great-grandfather endowed the Tang Chi Ngong School of Chinese at the University of Hong Kong in the early 1930s (which is still there today and bears his name) while his grandfather Sir Tang Shui-kin was one of Hong Kong's greatest public benefactors, donating schools, clinics and hospitals, many of which bear his name as well.

5 *Landmark/Gloucester Hotel*

Back in the 1920s, at the Des Voeux Road end of Pedder Street stood the old Hong Kong Hotel, home to the bar known as the 'Gripps'. Pre-war this was Hong Kong's best-known drinking place, where sooner or later just about everyone went. The name of this long vanished local institution is perpetuated in another bar at the Omni Hong Kong Hotel on the Kowloon side, but unlike the original bar which was famous throughout the Far East, even in Hong Kong most people have never even heard of the latter one.

The Hong Kong Hotel was partially gutted in a fire in 1926 and replaced by the Gloucester Arcade and Hotel. It in turn was demolished in the mid-1970s and the Landmark complex built in its place. Gloucester Tower, one of the office blocks that make up the new complex, recalls the memory of the earlier building on the site.



6 *Site of old General Post Office*

The old red-brick and granite General Post Office, first built in 1911, was demolished in 1976. Massive Doric-topped columns that stood astride the main doors on the Pedder Street/Des Voeux Road corner ended up at Kadoorie Farm in the New Territories, where they are still to be seen today, stranded halfway up the hillside. Heavy stone fireplaces, timber panelling and flooring were ripped

out and went to private houses elsewhere in Hong Kong — sad but at least better than just filling up a landfill somewhere.

Central's long-gone old General Post Office, like the old Kowloon-Canton Railway Station on the Tsim Sha Tsui waterfront, often features on tourist images depicting 'old Hong Kong', another worthwhile building lost to 'progress'. In its place we now have the black mirror-walled World Wide House, packed with small shops selling Philippine produce and remittance and freight agents.

7 Site of Duke of Connaught's statue

A statue of the Duke of Connaught, one of Queen Victoria's younger sons, once stood gazing across the water at the harbour end of Pedder Street. Like so many other statues around the Central area, this one was taken down and hauled away by the Japanese during their occupation of Hong Kong and presumably melted down for scrap. Very few local residents now remember that the long dead Duke's statue ever existed, and one has to search old photographs carefully to even find a glimpse of it. Connaught Road was named after him to commemorate his visit in 1890 to invigorate the Central reclamation, and not, as the urban myth has it, the place in Ireland. Until the late 1960s' reclamation, it remained the harbourfront thoroughfare popularly known as the Praya.

How To Get There

- By Bus** Buses that stop on Pedder Street – 6, 6A, 6X, 11, 12, 12A, 13, 15, 15C, 25, 61, 64, 66, 75, 90, 90C, 97, 309, 681, A11, M21 and N11.
- By MTR** Central MTR Esir D1.
- By Taxi** 'But Dah Gaa! Wah Yan Hong' ('Pedder Street, China Building').
- By Train** Take any east-bound or west-bound train (except those shuttling between Kennedy Town and Western Market) and alight on Des Voeux Road Central in front of The Landmark. Walk on The Landmark side of the road in the direction of the traffic until you reach the junction with Pedder Street.

Yee Wo Street 怡和街

This busy thoroughfare recalls the Chinese name of Hong Kong's oldest conglomerate, Jardine Matheson and Co. Hong Kong Island was ceded to Great Britain in 1842 after the First Opium War ended which, to their lasting notoriety, Jardine's had helped to incite. Shortly thereafter the company established



themselves at Causeway Bay, then known as East Point, which remained their Hong Kong nerve-centre for well over a century. As well as wharves and godowns, Jardine's also established a cotton mill and a sugar refinery, both early and not terribly successful forerunners of Hong Kong's later industrialization.



 Bus stop

- ① Sogo
- ② People-watching in Causeway Bay
- ③ Jun Mei yue dimm stall
- ④ Hui Lan Shan (herbal dessert shop)

Jardine, Matheson and Co. are more widely known as *Yee Wo* (also sometimes transliterated as Ewo) which means, 'Harmony'; the firm's Chinese name was first used at Canton in the 1820s. The name 'Yee Wo' was much more commonly used in Shanghai, where the firm also had very extensive business interests. In Hong Kong it was better known until the early twentieth century by the Anglicized term 'Jar Deen'. Numerous other street names in the area recall Jardine Matheson and Co. connections, but none perhaps is more prominent than Yee Wo Street.

Permanently thronged with people, buses and trams, Yee Wo Street is right at the very heart of Causeway Bay. Pollution is always extremely bad along here, made worse by the endlessly idling engines of minibuses lined up along nearby Jardine's Bazaar. Wear a gas mask if at all possible! Probably at it's most bearable in the early afternoon mid-week, Yee Wo Street is definitely **not** the place to go on a Sunday afternoon if you can't stand crowds.

1 Sogo

Opened in the mid-1980s, this Japanese department store has been a name to reckon with ever since. Although there are members of the wartime generation who still won't willingly buy anything Japanese, manufactured goods from Japan started becoming popular in Hong Kong in the 1960s. Prior to that time Japanese goods, while cheap, were not renowned for either durability or status.

For cheap-and-cheerful these days, people go to the China Products Department Stores, but for high-end items discerning shoppers head for Japanese stores like Sogo and Mitsukoshi which stock everything from shoes and handbags to dinner services and stationery.

The building itself on the corner of Hennessy Road and East Point Road, just before Yee Wo Street, is a well-known landmark in Causeway Bay, and the store's entrance is usually surrounded by people who've made arrangements to meet up in front. Recently, all the other Sogo Department Stores elsewhere in Asia have been closed down but for now, the Causeway Bay branch still hangs on.



2 *People-watching in Causeway Bay*

One of the most interesting things to do in this corner of Hong Kong is just to stand back and watch what comes past. Sooner or later everything that passes for the cool and interesting around town — and whoever fancies themselves as such — comes parading down Yee Wo Street and the nearby thoroughfares. People-watching aficionados aver that the constantly moving scenery is better along here than almost anywhere else in Hong Kong — only parts of Mong Kok can compare for the sheer volume and variety.

Bored-looking wannabe *tai tai* types wander in and out of the little boutiques, giggly teenage couples out for a good time sit and share a plate of dessert at Hui Lau Shan, the occasional muscle-boy couple wander along hand-in-hand, bewildered-looking Japanese tourists poke about on street-stalls looking for bargains, tiny withered old women decades past retirement age sift through rubbish bins looking for empty soft drink cans to recycle, baggy-trousered, in-your-face expat teenagers burn up their father's credit cards, and the traffic noise never abates. But don't stand and watch the world go by here for too long at any one stretch — your lungs will never forgive you for it!



Causeway Bay •
Happy Valley

3 *Jun Mei yue daan stall*

Ever wondered which shops have the highest rents in all of Hong Kong? High-end boutiques in Prince's Building or the Landmark or tourist-trap electronics shops along Tsim Sha Tsui's Golden Mile would seem the obvious contenders, but no. Instead, this grubby-looking little fast food stall at the corner of Yee Wo Street is one of the prizewinners in that dubious contest, and has a daily turnover that would turn most other businesses quite green with envy.

Perpetually thronged with people at all hours of the day and night, and in just the right location to block pedestrian traffic for metres in every direction, Jun

Mei yue daan (fish ball) stall has been on the same location for over twenty years. Fifteen dollars will get you a satay stick like skewer of fish or squid balls dipped in curry-like sauce, or you could always have a few lumps of battered *heung cheung* (red-skinned sausage). Or perhaps some deep-fried capsicum slices stuffed with fish paste will do to fill the gap till dinner-time? Or maybe some pig's intestines would be more to your liking?



Those who like this sort of thing won't eat anything else, but for others the smell of the fish ball sauce alone is almost enough to make them ill. This type of snack is Hong Kong's quintessential street-food, and love it or hate it, Jun Mei's perennially popular offerings are about as local as it comes! Try it at least once.

4 Hui Lau Shan (herbal dessert shop)

What started out as a humble herbal shop in Yuen Long has become an extremely popular franchised outlet with branches all over Hong Kong. Hui Lau Shan has apparently been around since the 1950s, but only mushroomed in the 1990s. There can be few local residents who haven't tried their *leung cha* (herbal tea) at least once, and the ever-changing, bewildering variety of cold desserts attract a devoted following, especially in the summer months.



Ever-popular *gwai ling go*, black jelly made from stewed tortoise abdominal shells is probably the most popular item. Slightly bitter with a wonderful smooth texture, *gwai ling go* is definitely an acquired taste. Other items are made from *hoi dai yeh* (sea coconut), while *shuet garp goh*, meant to be a good restorative tonic for pregnant women, is made from frogs' fallopian tubes; it really is. Recently Hui Lau Shan has been inventing new and different mango-based desserts, some involving tapioca, ice-cream and grass jelly — all very delicious and just the thing on a hot day.

The Yee Wo Street branch is *always* thronged with people, and late at night the queue outside can be five deep waiting for a seat — but it's worth it! Prices for various items vary from \$15 to \$35 (*gwai ling go* is one of the most expensive items) and are often slightly cheaper for take-away.

How To Get There

- By Bus:** No. 5 from Chater Road Statue Square, No. 2 from Connaught Road Central City Hall bus stop, alight on Yee Wo Street at Sogo Department Store.
- By MTR:** Causeway Bay MTR Station Exits D3 and D4, which open directly into Sogo Department Store.
- By Taxi:** 'Yee Wo Gaa, Sung Kwong' ('Yee Wo Street, Sogo').
- By Tram:** From anywhere in Central, take the east-bound tram marked 'Causeway Bay', 'Shau Kei Wan' or 'North Point'. Alight on Yee Wo Street just after Sogo Department Store.

Chai Wan Road

柴灣道

Until the late 1940s there was very little at Chai Wan beyond a few scattered villages. These were for the most part occupied by Hakka people mostly stonecutters from the nearby quarries. One remaining Hakka village house is Law Uk which has been turned into a popular and well-curated folk museum.

Nearby Shau Kei Wan had been a quietly prosperous local fishing port since pre-British times. It expanded considerably after the British settled on Hong Kong Island as the growing city created a greatly expanded market for their catch. Chai Wan is sometimes also known as Sai Wan — very confusing for some as Kennedy Town is known as Sai Wan as well.

Postwar refugee influx had many families living in precarious squatter settlements on the then marginal hillsides around Shau Kei Wan. The area was a desirable place for the poor to live as it was relatively open country in those days and the tramlines ended nearby, making travel to other parts of Hong Kong Island for work cheap and relatively easy. Gradually these ramshackle areas were cleared, making way for the massive public housing estates and factories that are a feature of the Chai Wan area today.



Bus stop

- 1 Sai Wan
- 2 Sai Wan
- 3 Sai Wan
- 4 Sai Wan

The inauguration of the MTR Island Line with Chai Wan as its eastern terminus has made the area much more accessible, but rentals around here remain some of the lowest on Hong Kong Island.

1 *Salesian Mission*

Built in 1939, for many years this Roman Catholic Mission House was one of the very few substantial buildings in the area apart from the nearby Lyemun Barracks. A massacre of medical personnel by the invading Japanese forces took place here in December 1941 when the nearby gun battery on Sai Wan hill was overwhelmed. Two men survived the atrocity after being grievously wounded on the hillside above the mission and lived to tell the tale. One of them, Dr Osler Thomas, became a well-known medical practitioner in Hong Kong after the war; he now lives in Sydney.



The Salesian Mission is still used by the Roman Catholic Church as a mission house and printing press, and also has a school attached to it; some of the buildings were donated by Aw Boon Haw, the Tiger Balm millionaire.

2 *Lyemun Barracks*

Overlooking the Lyemun Strait, the eastern approach to Victoria Harbour, Lyemun Barracks has had an interesting history stretching back to the early years of the British colony. Barracks were first built on the cliffs overlooking the Lyemun Strait in the



early 1860s, but this early military cantonment was later abandoned due to high malarial fatalities suffered by troops stationed in the area. Some of the remaining old buildings here date from the 1880s when the barracks were re-established, with substantial additions from the late 1930s.

Lyemun Barracks reverted to the Hong Kong government in 1987; the 2/7 Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles were the last regular battalion to be stationed there. Part of the complex has since been renovated and transformed into a government-operated leave centre known as Lei Yue Mun Park, which members of the general public can use.

Two gun batteries and a redoubt were built here in the 1880s, as well as housing for the recently developed Brennan torpedo, an early form of guided torpedo, all of which can be visited on the cliffs below the nearby Museum of Coastal Defence, built into the old Lyemun Redoubt.

3 Sai Wan Battery

This gun battery was built in 1936–37 as part of increased defence preparations in Hong Kong. Manned by the local Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps when the Japanese invaded in 1941, Sai Wan Battery was swiftly overrun and the men caught here were massacred. Two however managed to survive, and subsequently gave evidence at postwar war crimes trials.



Sai Wan Battery is a quiet reflective place with spectacular views of Victoria Harbour, Lyemun Strait and the Tathong Channel on a clear day. Unlike many other easily accessible wartime sites, it is not overrun by war gamers — at least most of the time. The steep winding path up the hill through dense vegetation is very popular with early morning walkers from the nearby housing estates, and a number of them have established flower beds and ad hoc sitting-out areas along the way.

4 Little Sai Wan and Cold War 'listening'

There were a number of advanced 'listening' posts in Hong Kong that provided an ear to mainland China, when more conventional means of observation were not possible. The most substantial of these until the 1940s — and in its time one of the most advanced in the world — was located at Stonecutter's Island; before the Pacific War this was home of the Far East Combined Bureau, Britain's principal intelligence gathering facility in the Far East.

Other high-powered listening posts were built elsewhere in Hong Kong after the Pacific War, at Little Sai Wan (above Chai Wan Road), Chung Hom Kok and at the very top of Tai Mo Shan, Hong Kong's highest mountain. In advance of the handover these were all closed, and the Chung Hom Kok facility moved to Geraldton, Western Australia, in 1995.



How To Get There

- By Bus:** No. 780 from Connaught Road Central City Hall bus stop, alight on Chai Wan Road at the bus stop across from Salesian School.
- By MTR:** Shau Kei Wan MTR Station Exit A2. Walk along Aldrich Street until you reach the junction of Aldrich Street, Shau Kei Wan Road, Shau Kei Wan Main Street East and Chai Wan Road. Walk up Chai Wan Road for about 150 m until you reach Salesian School.
- By Taxi:** 'Chai Wan Doh, Tsz Yau Chung Hok' ('Chai Wan Road, Salesian School').
- By Tram:** From anywhere in Central, take the east-bound tram marked 'Shau Kei Wan' and alight at terminus station on Shau Kei Wan Main Street East. Walk up to the Ming Wa Housing Estate and walk along a shaded path below the apartment blocks until you reach Chai Wan Road.

Tong Chong Street

糖廠街

Back in the days when the local economy actually produced things, the commercial dockyard at Taikoo — along with others at Hung Hom, Aberdeen and Tai Kok Tsui — was one of Hong Kong's major industries. Construction work here started in 1902 and was completed in 1907.

Taikoo (Great and Ancient) was the Chinese name for shipping and trading firm Butterfield and Swire (now subsumed into the massive Swire Group conglomerate which has among other interests a major share in Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong's airline). As well as dockyards and wharves Butterfield and Swire operated a sugar refinery here for many years, processing raw sugar brought from as far afield as Java. Ever wonder why one of Hong Kong's most popular brands of sugar is named Taikoo?

Taikoo Docks had slipways and dry docks, model company housing (including the attractive old Woodside, on the slopes of Mount Butler), a sugar refinery (hence Taikoo Sugar and Tong Chong, meaning Sugar Factory), electric generating plants



and extensive wharves and warehousing. A specially-laid-on Taikoo company launch took European children daily across the harbour to the Central British School on Nathan Road before the war; one of the more vivid memories of a childhood spent at Quarry Bay for ex-Taikoo residents. All this has vanished, and the name is recalled by Taikoo Shing — Taikoo City — the massive residential complex built on the old dockyard site.

With new developments all around, Quarry Bay is now in every way reminiscent of the more modern parts of Central — indeed it is sometimes referred to as 'Central East'. Trend-setting popular restaurants opened along Tong Chong Street, after the completion of Taikoo Place, offering everything from authentic Thai and north Indian curries to what must be some of the best hamburgers in all of Hong Kong.



1 Taikoo Place

Reinforcing the development of Quarry Bay as an alternative business address, some of Hong Kong's more prominent corporate giants such as telecommunications giant Cable and Wireless (since taken over and renamed Pacific Century CyberWorks), and the English-language newspaper *South China Morning Post* maintain their offices here. Business-suited office types are not as out of place along here as one might at first expect in an otherwise rather gritty part of Hong Kong Island. Office buildings along Taikoo Place are named after

some of England's more picturesque counties: Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Cornwall. Spacious and well-designed, office space along here is highly sought after and rents are correspondingly very expensive.



2 Taikoo Docks

Owned and operated by the trading firm Butterfield and Swire, Taikoo Dockyard was one of Hong Kong's principal industries and built numerous ocean-going vessels. In the early twentieth century, Taikoo had a 750-foot-long dry dock fully equipped for all building and ship repair work; the underground car park at Taikoo Shing now utilizes this space.

Along with the sugar refinery, the dockyard was a model employer, with clubs, shops and subsidized company housing on the hillsides above Quarry Bay, all linked to the workplace by cable car. Vestiges of these buildings still survive, including the well-preserved old company house 'Woodside' on nearby Mount Butler Road.

Victoria Road 域多利道

This dramatically scenic, winding road around the western end of Hong Kong Island was originally named Victoria Jubilee Road as it opened in 1897, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year. After a few years the name was shortened to Victoria Road, which it remains today. Most traffic going from Central across to Aberdeen uses Pok Fu Lam Road, which makes Victoria Road relatively quiet, except for the speed-demon minibus drivers who hurtle along here at really frightening speeds.



- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ① Special Branch building | ④ Mount Davis college area |
| ② Gun batteries at Mount Davis | ⑤ The Hong Kong Bazaribian Trust |
| ③ Sulphur Channel swimmers | ⑥ Binky Parking Lot |

The stretch of road around Mount Davis runs above the last remaining length of rocky coastline on Hong Kong Island's northern shore, and even though it is only a few minutes away from Kennedy Town, it still manages to appear somehow remote from the city. The stunning vistas of sea and islands never fail to delight along here — at least on a pollution-free day and down along the seashore, the nearby urban area somehow seems very far away. Further along Victoria Road towards Pok Fu Lam are numerous substantial residences belonging to some of Hong Kong's super-rich: palatial dwellings behind massive gates nesting between the cliffside and the road.

1 Special Branch building

Surrounded by barbed wire and watched over by security cameras, this unremarkable building along Victoria Road was originally used by the British army, and then subsequently for many years as an interrogation centre by the Royal Hong Kong Police Special Branch. Disbanded in 1995 in advance of the



handover, Special Branch had a number of notable successes in rooting out subversive elements, and during the 1950s kept a close watch on both Nationalists and Communists to prevent them from either fighting among themselves in Hong Kong or fomenting trouble in either Taiwan or the mainland, using Hong Kong as a base.

Close surveillance of both parties was especially vital after the *Kashmir Princess* incident in 1955, when Nationalist agents infiltrated themselves aboard a plane at Kai Tak that was supposed to be carrying Premier Chou En-lai to the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung and sabotaged it. The *Kashmir Princess* crashed a few hours later with the loss of all on board, a tragedy that prompted increased police vigilance in Hong Kong.

The Special Branch building still looks very forbidding today, and it was only recently that its former internal security role was publicly acknowledged for the first time — in spite of this little 'secret' having been open for decades!

2 Gun batteries at Mount Davis

Looming above Victoria Road is Mount Davis, steep, forbidding, jungle-clad and almost wild in places, with dramatic views of islands and sea in every direction from the winding road to the summit.

Overlooking Sulphur Channel and commanding both the western harbour and the Lamma Channel, Mount Davis was very heavily fortified in the early twentieth century, with five 9.2-inch gun batteries being completed here in 1912. By the 1930s the strategic importance of Mount Davis had been downgraded, and two of the big guns had been relocated to Stanley.

After the Japanese attacked Hong Kong in December 1941, the fortifications at Mount Davis were badly damaged by continuous aerial attack and were finally abandoned. Before the final British surrender, all remaining armaments and ammunition were destroyed.

In recent years Ma Wu Hall, a Jockey Club funded youth hostel was built near the summit, along with a microwave repeater tower. Otherwise, the gun batteries, bunkers and emplacements remain much as they were at the end of the war, overgrown and frequented by occasional hikers, visitors to the youth hostel and overcamouflaged war-gamers.



Aberdeen •
Pok Fui Lam

3 Sulphur Channel swimmers

Early in the morning and at sundry times during the day, swimmers come down here for a dip in the harbour. These are mostly old men, who are happy — or foolish — enough to brave both the numerous sampans and passenger ferries that pass through Sulphur Channel and the bacteria-rich waters of Victoria Harbour, for their daily exercise. Belonging to ad hoc swimming clubs such as the Golden Bell Swimming Club, these intrepid old fellows dodge all manner of

flotsam and jetsam as well as passing passenger ferries and — one hopes — manage to avoid swallowing too much of Victoria Harbour's unappealing waters as they splash and frolic.



4 Mount Davis cottage area (squatter resettlement)

The hill slopes around Mount Davis became a temporary home to thousands of squatters in the early 1950s, all refugees from the civil war and subsequent communist takeover on the mainland. After living here for almost two decades, the new arrivals were gradually resettled elsewhere on



Hong Kong Island and their huts demolished; however, a nucleus of the original settlement still remains.

Down on the waterline a few village houses have small attractive gardens, along with views of islands and sea that many millionaires elsewhere in Hong Kong don't have and can't afford. While their homes seem somewhat dilapidated, the cottage residents around Mount Davis share with the palaces of nearby tycoons and multimillionaires that rarest of Hong Kong Island commodities — relative space, a patch of garden and a view.

5 *The Hong Kong Bayanihan Trust*

While the local Filipino community seems perhaps more in evidence in Statue Square on a Sunday than anywhere else in Hong Kong, there is a thriving Filipino community centre in Kennedy Town. Established in 1993, the Hong Kong Bayanihan Trust does much to assist the very large, but often marginalized and discriminated against, migrant domestic worker community.



Low-cost or free courses are offered, teaching computer skills, hairdressing, baking, small business management and various other subjects. The centre offers welfare services and sporting facilities (volleyball is especially popular), and even has its own a Tagalog-language radio station. While originally established to offer support to the Filipino migrant worker community, Bayanihan also assists other migrant worker groups living in Hong Kong as well such as Thais, Indonesians, Sri Lankans and Indians. In addition to the Kennedy Town centre, there is another Bayanihan Community Centre at 78 Hak Po Street, Mong Kok.

6 *Bouky Parking Ltd.*

Signpost solecisms are commonplace all over Hong Kong and a constant source of amusement to many; one of the best is located here on Victoria Road not far from the former abattoir. The firm has several branches elsewhere in Hong Kong.

Wanko underwear, need I say more? Appetizing restaurants with names like Manky can't but raise a smile, and further beg the question: does no one *ever* gently point out that — just perhaps — there *might* be a double entendre lurking somewhere underneath?



How To Get There

By Bus: No. 5A from Des Voeux Road Central bus stop outside The Landmark, alight on Victoria Road at the Felix Villas bus terminus. The Special Branch is across the road.

By Taxi: 'Wick Dor Lei Doh, Mor Sing Leng Ging' ('Victoria Road, Mount Davis Path').