

Bright lights, FIT CITY

THE OTHER SIDE OF HONG KONG

Hong Kong is known the world over for its futuristic city centre but get away from the skyscrapers and neon lights, and you'll discover a bounty of natural delights that cater to everyone, whether they're seeking musical healing or rigorous exercise.



— 1
Hong Kong Island
With five country parks and 50km of hiking trails, nowhere combines the city and nature like Hong Kong.

— 2
Kowloon & NT
This picturesque peninsula is a gateway to marine parks and beautiful beaches that match this area's cultural and hospitality offerings.

— 3
Outlying islands
There is something for everyone from windsurfers to mountain bikers on these 200 outcrops.

— 4
Stepping out
How to walk your workouts in this pedestrian-friendly city – and where to recover when it's time to put your feet up.

Hong Kong Island

I OF 4

DATE IN THE DIARY: Iris, Hong Kong's largest outdoor yoga and fitness festival, offers an extensive programme of activities. Panel discussions take place alongside gong baths and there is a marketplace for budding wellness brands. It takes place at the Central harbour front so festival-goers can roll out their yoga mats in full view of Victoria Harbour. irisbkg.com



A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

Most of Hong Kong is countryside; Hong Kong Island alone has five country parks and 50km of hiking trails. Hilltop hikes and forest walks can be found next to soaring skyscrapers and world-class hotel spas. It's a rare blend for travellers who want to combine a cosmopolitan city with stunning nature in the same trip.

— MY VIEW FROM THE GROUND

Janet Ng
President, Trailrunners Association of Hong Kong

I go running almost every day. I don't see it as training, though, because this is just part of my life. Living in Happy Valley allows me to access some of the trails with the

most spectacular views in the world, day and night. My running mates and I never get bored of the view from Jardine's Lookout, looking down onto the city on both sides of the Victoria Harbour. My husband and I organised the first edition of the HK100 [ultra marathon] in 2011 and 175 runners joined. Now we have more than 8,000 registrations. The race starts from Sai Kung because of the breathtaking views: bays, oceans, mountains and rock columns that are millions of years old.



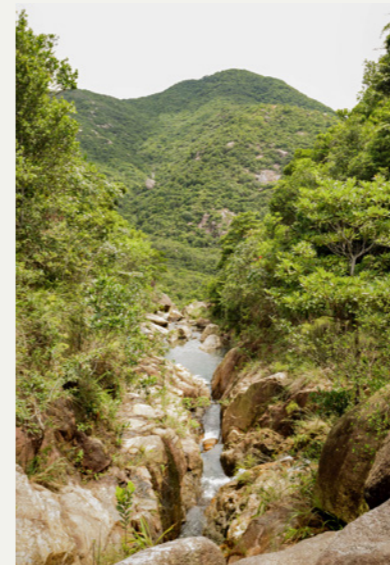
— FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Helping the medicine go down

Traditional Chinese medicine can be complicated at times – who should eat what and when? Cinci Leung, a registered Chinese medicine practitioner, started Check Check Cin to simplify the practice and make Chinese medicine easier to digest, both mentally and literally. Starting out in 2016 with a modern herbal tea shop in Sheung Wan, Leung now runs six shops and supplies a colourful line-up of healthy food products and rice water drinks to convenience shops citywide. Check Check



Cin also has an app to suggest appropriate dishes for every kind of health condition. "Traditional Chinese medicine is all about taking a preventive approach by making small adjustments in lifestyle and dietary habits," says Leung. "I am dedicated to spreading my knowledge to more people."



— OUT OF OFFICE
The great outdoors

Hong Kong is crisscrossed with well signposted hiking trails but it can be even more rewarding (and just as easy) to go off the beaten track – cutting through woodland, scrambling over rocks and wading under waterfalls. Tai Tam Country Park makes up about a fifth of Hong Kong Island and it's a perfect playground for getting close to nature, especially with the help of a knowledgeable guide. Jasmine Nunns has been

running walks and camps in the forests around Hong Kong since she set up her company Kembali more than three years ago. Girls learn to use a knife and trailrunners manage to slow down, while company executives on a team-building day make ropes and construct a shelter. A keen conservationist, Nunns grew up in a rural area of Hong Kong, climbing trees and exploring outdoors. "I want people to build relationships with the natural environment," she says.

HOTEL TIP: Hong Kong's five-star hotel gyms have some of the best facilities on offer and the Grand Hyatt is certainly no slouch. Its Plateau Spa fitness studio provides space for stretching and personal training alongside state of the art running machines. But it's the rooftop running track that gives the Wan Chai harbourside hotel a huge head start on the competition. Leave the treadmills (and the jet lag) behind while doing laps of the 400-metre outdoor jogging path, which winds around the hotel's leafy 11th floor garden and 50-metre swimming pool.



— Q&A
Jeremy McCarthy
Group director of Spa and Wellness, Mandarin Oriental

Wellness has been an integral part of the Mandarin Oriental for more than a decade. It was one of the first international hospitality brands to introduce destination spas in its city-centre hotels. It continues to push the industry forward under New Yorker Jeremy McCarthy, who moved to Hong Kong in 2014.

What's the latest wellness trend in hotels?
We are redesigning gyms to have a lot more open space; more movement, fewer machines. Most fitness equipment is designed to restrict movement – get on a machine which locks you into a pattern and you repeat it over and over again. But we should be mixing it up. That's how people train these days – they want diversity. The best way to train under that philosophy is by using your own body.

Any tips for staying zen during this challenging time?
There's a branch of psychology known as "Acceptance and commitment therapy" – or ACT. It's a mindfulness-based approach and I find this idea of accepting the reality of a situation while taking positive action that will move us forward to be a good antidote to the feelings of helplessness that can occur during the pandemic.

What's your favourite place to go in Hong Kong when you want to get away from it all?
My wife and I both surf and our kids are also surfers, so we like to go to Big Wave Bay. During the winter, if the waves are good, we go out almost every weekend.

Kowloon & NT

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CULTURAL QUARTER

Kowloon's hospitality and cultural offerings have become the talk of the town. Staying on the north side of Victoria Harbour comes with the added benefit of being closer to Sai Kung. This picturesque peninsula acts as a gateway to marine parks, ancient rock formations and beautiful beaches.



DATE IN THE DIARY:

There are few more exciting ways of crossing Victoria Harbour than the annual 1km swim from Wan Chai to Tsim Sha Tsui in Kowloon. The cross-harbour race was revived in 2011 and moved back to its original route in 2017 following improvements to water quality. While Hong Kong has plenty of scenic swimming pools, few experiences can compete with this.

bkhharbourrace.com

HOTEL TIP:

Eaton HK went through a redesign in 2018, refreshing its social spaces and guests rooms with a focus on sustainability and creativity. Also a club, it has a wellness centre, including a rooftop pool, and a packed cultural calendar. Highlights include morning tai chi lessons with Master Cheung, which are open to guests and the public. 380 Nathan Road, Jordan, Kowloon, Hong Kong eatonworkshop.com

— URBAN RETREAT

Art Park

Looking for an easy escape from the crowds? Head to the Art Park, the latest leafy addition to the city. Lawns, open-air performance areas and a waterfront promenade form part of the West Kowloon Cultural District, an ongoing project to build an impressive cultural quarter. While the museums and art galleries are still under construction, Art Park is a perfect spot to idle away the day.



— Q&A

Tsang Man-tung

Scenographer and singing bowl artist

When Tsang Man-tung is not designing theatrical sets he's taking centre stage as a skilled performer of Himalayan singing bowls, an ancient Buddhist instrument used in sound healing.

How does Hong Kong inspire your art?
Nature is the constant inspiration for me. I live in the countryside in Hong Kong and I am blessed to hear all of these natural sounds, day and night.

How do natural sounds help meditation?
Listening to the sound of nature, whether it be birds, water or rainfall, our minds become more focused. Being concentrated is key in meditation and it's believed to be one of the best ways to de-stress, as well as boosting creativity and wellbeing.

What sounds do singing bowls produce?
Bowls are made of an alloy of copper, tin and up to five kinds of metals. All sounds of the bowl hence come from nature but also involve human elements, such as a practitioner's intention, state of mind and technique. When we strike a singing bowl, it produces layers of rich overtones.

— FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Pigging out without the pork

Healthier options are beginning to appear on meat-heavy Cantonese menus. OmniPork is a plant-based meat substitute that's made from peas, soy and shiitake mushrooms. It was launched in 2018 by Hong Kong-based Green Monday and has been an instant success. Chefs are using the vegan ingredient inside classic dishes such as *cha siu bao* (barbecued pork buns). "Many restaurants are now open and eager to experiment with plant-based menus," says David Yeung, Green Monday's founder. An expanding range of Omni-branded products is now available in supermarkets in more than 10 countries.



— URBAN ESCAPE

Cycle track

Tai Wai is a popular starting point from which to rent bicycles and head towards Tai Po on a leisurely ride along the scenic waterfront. A seamless 60km cycle path stretches around the New Territories, from Tuen Mun to Ma On Shan, with views that are worth squeezing the brakes for. If you only have time for a half-day ride, hire a bike at the centre of Yuen Long and pedal to Butterfly Beach at Tuen Mun. It should take about three hours and the scenic route will bring you past

a number of cultural highlights, old temples and trailside cafés for chilled drinks and some noodles along the way. Stretch out on the sand then hop on the Light Rail for a quick return journey.



— DOMESTIC BLISS

Spa heritage

"Everybody thinks that they need to go to Bali to fix their lives but they often forget what they've learned once they get home," says Vlada de Sousa, a Ukrainian yoga instructor. De Sousa swapped the Indonesian island for Hong Kong earlier this year and established a yoga and meditation retreat with her husband, Pedro. To suit the city clientele, Bliss Body Retreat's four-day Hong Kong programme is shorter than the Bali version, yet its tropical surroundings in a remote jackfruit farm in the New Territories are strikingly similar – right down to a nearby Buddhist temple.



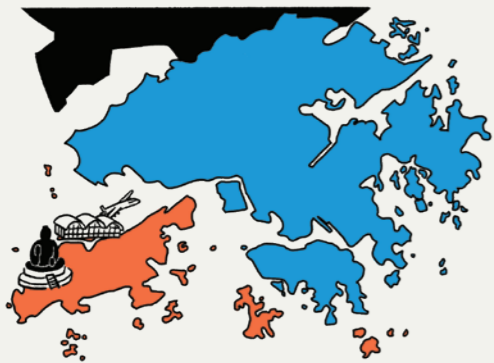
— MY VIEW FROM UNDERWATER

Cathy Chu

Expeditions officer, South China Diving Club

Hong Kong has a rich variety of marine life, from tiny pineapple fish to the blue-ring octopus, which is as beautiful as it is poisonous. Recently we've been spotting more rays – there was even a giant stingray, at least 2 metres wide, on the seafloor. We always charter boats to reach the dive sites and I've many secret spots in my pocket but I can't tell you where they are until you join the club. What I can reveal is that there are many special dive sites outside Tolo Harbour on the northeast side of the New Territories. That's where we find the biggest variety of creatures and coral.

Outlying islands 3 OF 4



ARCHIPELAGO-GO

Anyone who flies into Hong Kong touches down on the largest island, Lantau, but there are more than 200 outcrops to explore, from dumbbell-shaped Peng Chau to the aptly named Crooked Island. Some outlying islands are inhabited year round, others serve as a weekend getaway for walkers, windsurfers, trail runners and mountain bikers.

HOTEL TIP: Hong Kong is reaping the cultural rewards of preserving its heritage buildings. This policy can be traced to the 2012 transformation of a former police station into the nine-room Tai O boutique hotel. Its hilltop setting near the village of Tai O provides a rare chance to escape the modern city and glimpse its colourful past. *Shek Tsai Po Street, Tai O, Lantau Island* taioheritagehotel.com

DATE IN THE DIARY: Lantau's tallest mountain is almost double the height of Hong Kong's famous Victoria Peak and the island has many hills and beaches. One way to get acquainted with the city's "green lungs" is through the 100km TransLantau. The annual endurance race begins at Mui Wo village and takes runners on a scenic route up, down and across Lantau, traversing the hardest hiking trails and scaling its two highest peaks.

— IN FOR THE THRILL *Treasure Island*

Treasure Island Beach Club in Pui O is an adventurous place for all ages. On weekends it is one of several lunch spots along Lantau's southern coast that gets crowded with hikers and paddleboarders. Meanwhile, on weekdays, the water here is filled with children learning to surf or kayak. The Treasure Island Group runs day camps at its beachfront base, where founder Adrienne Ng and her instructors offer activities such as coasteering and canyoning. Participants are picked up by boat from the central pier on Hong Kong Island and camp overnight. Their parents, meanwhile, can hike the 9km to Pui O from Mui O along the Lantau Trail.



— MY VIEW FROM THE AIR

Jonie Cheung

Member, Hong Kong Paragliding Association

"The bird's-eye view of Hong Kong is spectacular. The best view is in the south of Lantau where we land on a long sandy beach. I also enjoy paragliding in Ma On

Shan because it's vast and good for training, both up in the air and on the ground. This sport depends on the weather conditions but, thankfully, my job allows me to be flexible so I go training as soon as the weather is good. The best time of the year is from October to December when it doesn't feel too hot up in the air."



— FOOD FOR THOUGHT *Kernel of an idea*

Yi O Agricultural Co-operation is a remote rice farm in western Lantau, accessed by boat or a one-hour walk along section seven of the Lantau Trail. The centuries' old village of the same name was abandoned in the 1970s as villagers left for jobs in the city. Town planner Andrew Lam and his friend Alan Wong arrived in 2012 to convince the absent landowners to form a co-operative. Yi O rice is now sold at shops across the city, including Muji and Marketplace, and the team of 12 farmers is branching out into beetroot, ginger



and turmeric. Although the villagers have yet to return, there is a stream of visitors who want to try their hand at organic farming or camp in the fields. "We call them the new villagers," says Wang. "People used to ask us when we were going to build houses but now they just want to know when the radishes are ready."



— WATER WAY TO GO *Closer to nature*

Island hopping is a popular pastime in Hong Kong, whether it means jumping on one of the fast ferries to Cheng Chau (*chau* means island in Cantonese) or hiring a kayak in Sai Kung and paddling out to Sharp Island, part of the Unesco Global Geopark. Even Hong Kong's public golf course is on an island: Kau Sai Chau. It's a 15-minute sail from Sai Kung and the course's fleet of catamarans are a common sight on the water, alongside luxury yachts, small sampans and the odd container ship gliding across the horizon. Hong Kong might have grown from a tiny fishing village into a sprawling international city but it hasn't lost any of its seafaring spirit.



— Q&A **Bobsy Gaia** *Founder, Mana!*

Beirut-born Bobsy Gaia has been at the forefront of Hong Kong's plant-based restaurant scene since he moved to the city in the 1990s. The founder of Mana! is a long-time resident of the island of Lamma, where he is well known for planting about 30,000 trees over the course of 20 years. Here he tells us why he does so.

How did you land on Lamma?

The first time I went to the island I heard someone strumming a guitar through an open window and saw all these people hanging out, laughing and drinking beer in the streets with live music going on. It seemed like it had a real sense of community and another side to Hong Kong that I wanted to be a part of.

Why did you decide to start planting the Lamma forest?

It started out of a sheer necessity. I simply wanted to see more trees around the neighbourhood in which I belonged. We planted 2,000 trees on Earth Day in 1997 with the hope that a forest will emerge year by year.

How health-conscious are Hong Kongers?

In 1997 only 1 to 2 per cent of the population were vegetarian. It's now estimated that 30 per cent of them follow what you might call a flexitarian or a semi-vegetarian diet. And the younger generations are aligning themselves with that sustainability.

Stepping out

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HITTING YOUR STRIDE

by James Chambers

Hong Kong offers a full sensory workout of sights, sounds and so many smells. But after six years in this city my feet probably have the best stories to tell. They have taken me to all corners of Hong Kong, albeit via the city's extensive (and sometimes idiosyncratic) public-transport system. But where else in the world can you jump off a subway train and stroll through a high-end mall in the central business district while wearing shorts and flip-flops – and still trailing sand from a day at the beach?

Few Hong Kong homes have stairs but the city compensates for that outdoors via stepped “roads” such as Ladder Street in Sheung Wan, or the hiking trails in the hills. Not even the fanciest gym can go toe to toe with The Twins: a 1,000-step, hilly ascent that takes some training – or plenty of breaks – to complete.

For a post-hike foot massage I head to Ten Feet Tall in Happy Valley for reflexology and some light reading; it stocks a great selection of magazines. Toes that haven't seen the light of day for a while should add a Shanghai pedicure to their itinerary.

Playing football in Hong Kong has been a revelation. This densely packed city offers far better and more accessible all-weather pitches than London, my previous home. Matches take place next to the sea or surrounded by high-rise apartments or mountains.

And if you pick up an injury (as I increasingly do), the recovery process is another experience. SYT Wellness in Wan Chai is a good place to dip a toe into traditional Chinese medicine. A few needle sessions under the heat lamp soon nursed my sprained ankle back to health. As my feet can attest, the Hong Kong workout and wellness package is one step ahead.

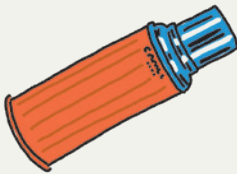
— GET IN GEAR

Kit bag

Touched down in Hong Kong with only a business suit and no board shorts or beach towel? Head to the nearest subway station and stop off to pick up these essential items.



MAZU: These trunks, made from recycled plastic bottles, feature a nostalgic image of a junk boat snapped by Keith Macgregor. *Shop: Escapade Sports; mazuresortwear.com*



CAMEL VACUUM FLASKS: Reusable bottles have been seen in Hong Kong since the 1940s. An 80-year-old brand, Camel's vintage 112 flask is a classic. *Shop: Camlux Hotel; madebycamel.hk*



KHROMIS: Bespoke sunglasses can be made to order at this Sheng Wan boutique or, for those in a hurry, bought off the shelf. *Shop: Khromis flagship; khromis.com*



COCONUT MATTER: It's easy to get sticky in humid Hong Kong so pick up a natural coconut deodorant stick from this eco-conscious brand. *Shop: Edgar; coconutmatter.com*



SORA: These colourful lightweight towels, made from recycled plastic fibres, are as good for the sand as the yoga studio. *Shop: Slowood; thesorallife.com*



PURE APPAREL: One of Asia's top gyms and yoga studios, the Pure Group sidelines in health foods and workout gear. *Shop: Pure, citywide; be-pure.com*



LANE-EIGHT: Hong Kong footwear brand Lane Eight has designed a one-shoe-fits-all style that comes in a variety of colours. *Shop: Lane Eight; laneeight.hk*



MONOCLE: Monocle's new weather-proof Cordura tote bag suits all seasons and fits neatly atop your suitcase for the journey home. *Shop: Monocle; monocle.com*