

Hong Kong—A Bridge To The East

by Margaret Zellers

(NAPSA)—This is the “Year of the Monkey.” The Chinese horoscope predicts that people born in the Year of the Monkey are clever, skillful and inventive. With its emphasis on movement, a Monkey year also happens to be a great time for international travel. Wondering where to go? Few places offer the historic and hip *mélange* of East and West that is cosmopolitan Hong Kong.

While the super modern airport, luxury hotels and tech-focused businesses suggest that Hong Kong is firmly planted in the 21st century, the lifestyle of the one-time British colony weaves threads from centuries’ old Chinese and British traditions, coloring it all with a mix of Asian and Western fads and fashions to create a lively scene.

A British colony for 176 years, until it became a Special Administrative Region of China on July 1, 1997, Hong Kong has long been a gateway for China—and an Asian center that guarantees some English-speaking residents and signs that are easy for Americans to read. But the lifestyle is distinctly Hong Kong’s own.



You don’t have to look for cultural events in Hong Kong; you live them. Tai Chi, often defined as “Chinese shadow-boxing,” is a morning ritual in many parks. Just after dawn, the park is planted with carefully spaced folk, reaching around for an elusive something that is just out of their grasp. Bodies move in slow motion,

synchronized with inner spirits, to stretch every muscle in a pattern that includes as many as 200 body movements. They are bringing calm and order into their lives. And you can do the same, between 8:00 and 9:00 most mornings, with the qualified instructors who give free classes on the plaza at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, near the Star Ferry dock on the Kowloon side of the Harbour.

So important is the time-honored knowledge of feng shui—the harmonious arrangement of life’s elements—that buildings in Hong Kong’s business district are placed to take advantage of the most favorable location and traditional buildings acknowledge legends about lions and dragons. I. M. Pei and others created the modern Hong Kong skyline, which is enlivened every evening when the *Symphony of Lights* plays along the borders of Victoria Harbour.

For a greater appreciation of feng shui and its importance for a well-ordered life, find your way to the Hong Kong Visitor Information & Services Centre on Hong Kong island, the starting point for free architectural tours on Saturdays.

Many multi-story air-conditioned buildings are honeycombed with modern shops but the intricacies of pearls or jade—or even Hong Kong designer fashions that appear as art—may need some explaining. Through a “Meet the People” program, gemologists and others share their areas of expertise via free talks and tours.

Glimpses of Hong Kong’s inner life require pausing long enough to look, but the street parades and vibrant festivals wrap you immediately in colors and sounds. Chinese New Year may be the mother of all celebrations, with elaborate costumes and street dances of the first night parade and flower markets selling lucky kumquat plants, but the Dragon Boat Festival and Tin Hau’s Birthday (which honors the patron saint of the sea) are two more of the colorful celebrations where parades and markets fill the streets. Another, the Che-



ung Chau Bun Festival, on one of the region’s smaller islands, is renowned for its procession of child performers, dressed as ancient gods and modern heroes, who parade in the air above the crowd. Getting to Cheung Chau is as easy as boarding an island ferry with the day-long Island Hopping Pass that offers unlimited travel between the islands, including Lantau and Peng Chau.

Of course Hong Kong has its Philharmonic and a full calendar of events, highlighted by Hong Kong Arts Festival, but there’s special appeal in cultural events with eastern emphasis. The Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra performances follow western orchestration with traditional instruments, and a Cantonese Opera Appreciation Tour follows an explanation of the music with a live performance, helpful to the previously uninitiated.

The history of Hong Kong is embedded in its daily life, and the best place to put it in perspective is at the Museum of History, where 6000 years of a vibrant past are shown in dioramas and displays. A Museum Pass, which you can purchase for HK\$30 (about \$4), allows for week-long entry to six top Museums, including history and art, heritage and science.

Museums provide the touchstones, the punctuation marks for Hong Kong’s rich cultural life, but the living experience comes in the streets—from dawn to well past dusk. For more information, check the Tourism Board’s official Web site at www.discoverhongkong.com/usa.