

Story by Rachael Oakes Ash. Photography
courtesy Hong Kong Tourism



Main: Hong Kong comes alive at night
Below: Make sure your credit card is
clear when you head into Prada
Left: Cake, anyone??

princess in prada



Hong Kong has long been regarded as one of the world's great destinations for buying cameras and electronic gear. But now it's just as famous as a treasure trove of designer clothing outlets at bargain-basement prices



Shopping is in my DNA. The words 'sale', 'bargain' and 'discount' are my trigger points and before you can say "buy one, get one free", I am pulling out my wallet.

Hong Kong is a shopper's Mecca and I have been known to make the odd pilgrimage. Buy, buy, buy takes on new meaning in a city where the bigger your consumption, the higher your status.

Shopping is the favoured pastime of the Hong Kong Tai Tai who could have invented the word 'consume'. These modern-day concubines, the wives of Chinese squillionaires, drive German, wear French and spend Swiss. For status-envy viewing, the Clipper Lounge at the Mandarin

Oriental is where they congregate each afternoon for tea.

Not having my own squillionaire to play with, I am forced to spend my bank manager's money, which means dress like a princess on a pauper's budget. In Hong Kong, that's easy. While Chanel, Armani, Prada and Bvlgari fight it out for the Tai Tai dollar, their cheaper counterparts provide much fill for the suitcases of the less well heeled. Jacob, Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik ripoffs line the markets, discount designer stores abound and shopping malls provide more than just air-conditioned relief from the summer humidity.

Boutique after boutique lines the streets. Kilometres of road are

dedicated to computers, electronics and cameras, and markets are found down side streets. Tired feet? Taxis are cheap and the MTR is the most reliable, safe and easy underground train system in the world.

I confess, being a size 14 – 12 on a good day – that petite Asian designers are not my favourites. I learnt my lesson in Bangkok during a rather humiliating wrestle with a fetching pencil skirt in a communal changing room. The tag said 'large' but my butt said 'XXXL'. Thankfully, the St John's Ambulance service was on hand and the skirt and I finally parted company.

No such problem in Hong Kong. The former British colony is used to



Where to shop

Designer discounts Hong Kong Island

Dickson Warehouse for Escada, Lagerfeld and others at reduced prices. Olympia Plaza, 243-255 King's Road, North Point. Joyce is the style brigade's dream. The warehouse has same stuff but better prices. Horizons Plaza, 2 Li Wing Street, Ap Lei Chau.

Kowloon

I.T. Sale Shop – think three floors of Alexander McQueen, Miu Miu and Zucca with the top floor permanently on sale. Silvercord Centre, 30 Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon.

Nike Factory – name says it all. Enterprise Square, 9 Sheung Yuet Road, Kowloon Bay.

Market mayhem

Jade Market – 400 stalls peddling jade of all tones. Haggle hard and be early. Jordan Kansu Street near Nathan Rd, Kowloon; 10am-6pm

Ladies Market – think cosmetics, shoes and underwear. Tung Choi Street, Mongkok; noon-11pm daily.

Temple Street Night Market – doesn't get going till sundown. Fake watches and tourist fodder with Chinese Opera entertainment. Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon; 6pm-midnight daily.

Stanley Market – clothing, artwork, silks, fabric and open air bric-a-brac. Stanley Market Road, Stanley Main Street Hong Kong; 10am-6pm daily.

Mall magic Hong Kong Island

IFC Mall under the IFC Tower – Burberry, Prada, Valentino and Roberto Cavalli for starters. Harbour View Street, Central.

Pacific Place – from Chloe, Dolce & Gabbana and Hermès to Marks & Spencer, Esprit, Mango and French Connection. 88 Queens Way, Admiralty.

The Landmark – Chanel, Cartier, Gucci, Tiffany's and their friends. 12-16 Des Voeux Road Central, Central.

Times Square – 16 floors, enter at own risk! 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay.

Kowloon

Ocean Terminal, Ocean Centre and Harbour City – with 700 stores, if you can't find what you need here to suit your budget, you're not trying. 3 Canton Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon.

The Peninsula Arcade – old money meets nouveau riche and both spend up big at Piaget, Cartier, LV and Shanghai Tang. Salisbury Road, Kowloon.

Battery operated and plug-ins

Nathan Road, Kowloon side – a host of overhanging neon signs in Cantonese, hustle-bustle and old Hong Kong. Head towards Mongkok for electronics, computers and the like.



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the gweilo ('foreigner') butt. Much of what Western designers produce is manufactured on the mainland for export to the US, Australia and Europe. Many of these Anglo-sized clothes find their way to the outlet shops in Wan Chai.

In a city where living space is at a premium, locals eat out most nights and dress accordingly. The vintage clothing revival bypassed HK. If it's not the first on the rack, they don't want to know. The only things worth buying second-hand are Chinese antiques, and for those go direct to Hollywood Road.

Make note, though, if buying antiques in Hong Kong or the New Territories, ensure you purchase from an HKTA member, otherwise your Fujian cabinet will be shipped, but probably not to you.



Left: Giorgio Armani
 Above: This shop specialises in Chinese tea
 Right: Pick up all kinds of bargains in the markets



With the locals' brand obsession comes the demand for luxury apparel. Louis Vuitton believes the city worthy of three global stores. Prada, Gucci and Christian Dior sit alongside Stella McCartney, D&G and Escada in the streets of Central. Unlike the Jade and Temple Street night markets, this is a strictly haggle-free zone.

After two days, I am booking a return trip. There is something so fulfilling about swinging a plethora of shopping bags in each hand. A spring returns to my jetlagged steps the more I buy. Branded bags sit on the outside where my fellow pedestrians can see me for the stylemeister I think I am. Unbranded bags are hidden in my backpack which gives my tourist status away.

Two months later, I return more prepared. My shopping requirements are divided by category (electronics, camera, clothes, shoes, jade) and shopping areas (Wan Chai for discount outlets and street side markets, Mongkok for electronics, computers and Ladies Markets, Tsim Sha Tsui for cameras, Central and Mid Levels for upmarket boutiques and mid-range shopping malls).

I have a list of comparative prices from home to ensure I don't spend more than I need. I have packed light, leaving loads of room in my luggage for my goodies. The upgrade to Virgin Upper Class means more baggage limit and a flat bed for shopaholic exhaustion.

I have also made the calculated decision of arriving at the very end of the January sales. This means a Vivienne Tam boho chic top reduced from thousands of HK dollars to a few hundred, Boccacini retro-inspired knee-high boots for next to nothing, and a Miss Sixty lemon-lined denim pea coat for a sixth of the price in Oz. Somebody stop me! Only 37 more sleeps till the Hong Kong Shopping Festival. •

travelfacts

gettingthere

Virgin Atlantic offers direct flights from Sydney to Hong Kong. You can sit in Upper Class at the pointy end for the price of Business. Phone 1300 727 340 or visit www.virginatlantic.com.au
 Cathay Pacific has direct flights to Hong Kong from Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth with connecting flights from Cairns and Adelaide. Phone (02) 9251-3460 or visit www.cathaypacific.com.au

wheretostay

The Peninsula has a private chopper from the airport, plus a fleet of Rolls-Royces. Visit www.peninsula.com
 JIA Boutique Apartments in Causeway Bay feature Philippe Starck design, Teage Ezard fare and Shanghai Tang-clad staff. Visit www.jiahongkong.com
 Langham Place in Mongkok has wireless everything and i-phones for guests. Visit www.langhamhotels.com
 The Mandarin Oriental is a Hong Kong institution in the centre of town. Go directly to Vong restaurant for the warm Valrhona chocolate cake. Visit www.mandarinoriental.com/hongkong

wheretoeat

SPOON by Alain Ducasse at the InterContinental in Kowloon offers a view to match the haute cuisine. Look up at the 'sky' of glass spoons. Phone +852 2721 1211 or visit hongkong-ic.intercontinental.com
 At M at the Fringe in Central, Australian ex-pat Michelle Garnaut serves up bohemian pavlova, among other delights. Phone +852 2877 4000 or visit www.m-onthebund.com/at_the_fringe.
 Cafe Deco on The Peak serves up foie gras and mango nori rolls with a view that will take your breath away. Phone +852 2849 5111 or visit www.peakcafe.com/cafed/v_deco.asp
 Dragon-I in Central for Dim Sum on the deck. Phone +852 3110 1222 or visit www.dragon-i.com.hk

wheretodrink

FINDS for Greta Garbo ginger cocktails. Lan Kwai Fong Tower, 33 Wyndham Street, Central.
 Feather Boa for Peach Blinis and chaises longues. 38 Staunton Street, Soho.
 Felix at The Peninsula just because you can. Salisbury Road, Kowloon.
 The Kee Club, but only if you're with a member. 32 Wellington Street, Central.

furtherinformation

Hong Kong Tourism Board hosts the HK Shopping Festival from 25 June to 31 August. Visit www.hktb.com