

HK Expat Survival Guide

How to move to Hong Kong like a pro

Shortcuts: [Pre-Move Checklist](#) • [Arrival](#) • [Housing](#) • [Medical](#) • [Schools](#) • [Money](#) • [Misc.](#)

Important Phone Numbers:

- Police / Fire / Ambulance: **999**
- Police Hotline: **2527 7177**
- Hong Kong Airport: **2181 8888**
- Suicide hotline: **2896 0000**
- International dial code: **+852**

Pre-Move Checklist

To Do:

- **Set up forwarding addresses** for all your relevant accounts and services back home. Consider getting a Virtual Mailbox with scan services (e.g. TravelingMailbox in the USA) if you'll need to take care of important correspondence. Ask your current landlord to pick up any mail sent after your departure.
- **Get vaccinated.** Hong Kong is pretty safe, but get Hepatitis A and Typhoid shots just in case. More info on the [CDC website](#).
- **Renew your driver's license.** Even if you don't plan on driving in HK, you may need it for renting cars in Asia. Apply for an International Driver's License.
- **Unlock your smartphone** so it can be used across all carriers.
- **Bringing your pet to HK?** Start planning this out now. You must get all paperwork completed and reviewed by the AFCD before you move to Hong Kong (or your pet will be put into quarantine for months). All immunizations will need to be taken care of prior to arrival. Read the official AFCD procedure [here](#).

Don't forget to bring:

- **Credit and debit/ATM cards.** Ideally, these should be "no foreign transaction fee" cards. Even more ideally, they should refund foreign ATM fees. If you're American, get the Charles Schwab debit card.
- **Some cash** in the unlikely event your ATM card doesn't work on Day 1. Any major currency is fine, you can exchange it for a good rate here (see "Money" section below).
- **Important documents:** birth and marriage certificates, medical records, academic records/diplomas.
- Extra supply of your favorite **skincare products.** You'll probably find them in HK too, but it helps to have them ready to go so you're not scrambling to find them during your first month.
- **Universal Travel Adapter.** If you're moving from the UK, the plugs are the same. For everyone else: get one of those handy travel adapters so you can use your old electronics. You could also just buy one at the airport.
- **OPTIONAL: proof of address** back home (e.g. bank statements, utility bills) and gov't issued Photo ID. You may be able to set up a bank account quickly with just the above and a letter from your HK employer.

Note: this is all optional because eventually you will get an HKID card, an address in HK and an employer letter for the bank.

Try to bring as little stuff as possible.

Hong Kong is a fully developed city and you can find just about everything here. You'll save yourself a lot of logistics headache if you just sell / give away old furniture back home and buy a new set in HK. Yes, there's an IKEA here. One exception: it can be difficult to find oversized clothing and shoes (e.g. Men's size 12 and above).

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Arrival

You'll probably be jetlagged, so take it easy on Day 1!

- **Get an Octopus card.** This is non-negotiable (they are available at the airport and inside every MTR station). The Octopus is a stored-value card that works on all public transport, convenience stores, and in many casual restaurants. You can even pay with it in public hospitals. Pro tip: you don't have to take it out of your wallet every time it's used—just place your wallet on the card reader.
- **Get a pre-paid SIM card.** This can be done in the airport right after you clear Customs (in the Arrivals hall). You can get a basic 30-day card from **CSL** for about \$200 HKD—this will get you up and running quickly. Otherwise, you can sort out a proper phone plan later and transfer your pre-paid # to it (recommendation: **China Mobile** for best value).

Useful mobile apps to install

Search for these on the iOS or Android app stores (we're not affiliated with any of them).

- **WhatsApp** - used by everyone (including businesses) in Hong Kong.
- **Eatigo** - see available restaurant deals (up to 50% off).
- **HKTaxi** - for ordering taxis to your location. The government has been making life difficult for Uber, so it's less reliable here. Hong Kong taxis are still cheaper than UberX (as long as you can get one!)
- **TakeTaxi** (Hong Kong taxi translator) - very handy if you don't speak Cantonese.
- **Hong Kong Taxi Cards** - another taxi translator. Has over 9,000 HK addresses (US\$1.99)
- **Citymapper** - makes navigating public transit easier. Covers many big cities (including Hong Kong)
- **Food Panda** - food delivery / take out.
- **Hong Kong Weather** - uses Hong Kong Observatory data. Very useful for planning your day and staying updated on Typhoon signals
- **Google Maps** - essential for getting around town
- **Price.com.hk** - find out where to get electronics around town for the lowest prices
- **Klook** - get travel-related discounts (includes savings on Airport Express!)
- **PayMe** (by HSBC) - very useful for sending money instantly (kind of like Hong Kong's Venmo)
- **HK Immigration Department app** - includes useful info on visas and waiting times for Land Boundary Control Points

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Housing (Temporary & Permanent)

"What's a Serviced Apartment? Should I stay in one?"

Serviced Apartments (aka "aparthotels" or "corporate housing") are furnished short-term rentals. While expensive, they are popular with new arrivals due to the sheer convenience factor. Benefits of a serviced apartment include:

- **Very little paperwork** - there's a rental agreement, but no long term commitments. It's closer to moving into a hotel for a month.
- **Flexibility** - stay as little (1 month) or as long as you want. Some expats get so used to the serviced apartment lifestyle that they never move out!
- **On-site services** (varies by property). At the very least, serviced apartments include housekeeping/cleaning, regular linen changes, and laundry service. Some properties offer room service, concierge, car rental services, airport pickup, childcare services, and so on.
- **Facilities** (varies by property). Buildings with Serviced Apartment units often have a laundry room and fitness room (gym) on-site. Some also swimming pool, steam room, sauna, restaurants, etc.

Staying for the first 1-2 months in a serviced apartment (or Airbnb) is **highly recommended**. It will give you time to relax, explore different areas, and lock down a great lease for the long term. Just be prepared to pay double the monthly rental amount when you move in (1 month's deposit is standard).

To browse all the serviced apartment options in Hong Kong, check out YourNewBase.com (no agents, ads, or booking fees).

"How do I rent an apartment in Hong Kong?"

If you're unprepared, finding a place to rent in HK can be a very stressful affair. Let's get you ready for the big day.

The low down:

- **Housing is expensive here.** You will probably have to compromise on one or more of the following: apartment size, building age/facilities, distance from work (convenience factor).
- **Agents/brokers are hard to avoid.** The vast majority of real estate agreements are done through middlemen here. Major real estate agencies (you'll see them all over town): **Century 21, Midland, Centaline, Ricacorp, Savills**. Agents take a **commission of 1 month's rent** (split 50/50 between landlord and tenant).
- **2 year rental contracts are standard.** The lease can usually be terminated in the 2nd year by either party at any time (with 2 months' notice). The rent typically includes government charges and building management fees. The rent **does not include** stamp duty: it's 0.5% of the annual rent, split 50/50 between tenant and landlord.
- **Everything is negotiable**—so be prepared to negotiate! At minimum, you should not be responsible for apartment wear & tear. A good agent can help with negotiations, whether it's regarding the rental price, included furniture, appliances, or something else.
- **There's no shame in the rental game**—as stated above, you should fight for each clause in the rental contract to get the best deal possible. Don't be afraid to negotiate in price increments of HK\$500 (e.g. a \$25,000/month lease might be negotiated down to \$22,500).
- **The market moves quickly:** if you don't commit to a place on the same day, there's a good chance it could be snapped up by someone else. Get your checkbook ready! Other documents to have handy during the apartment hunting process: **passport** (or HKID card), **employment letter**, **employment contract**. Don't worry about credit scores—this isn't really a thing in Hong Kong.

The steps to renting an apartment:

1. **Choose a neighbourhood:** this should happen first (i.e. before you start talking to agents). Agents tend to specialize by district, so it's best to first decide where you want to live. See below for some quick recommendations.

2. **Find an agent:** the best way is through a personal referral—ask around at work to see if anyone has an agent they would recommend. Failing that, the next best way is to physically walk around your target area and walk into a real estate agency nearby. They will have the best idea about what's hot and available the market. There are so many agencies that you might even stumble on three at a time.
3. **Optional: find another agent.** There's no rule that states you can't work with multiple agents at a time. You may quickly realize that one agent has superior knowledge—or is simply easier to deal with.
4. **Look at some apartments!** Your agent will help you put together a shortlist of places to check out based on your monthly budget and other requirements (e.g. number of bedrooms, square footage, desired facilities in building, and so on). Don't be shy: take this opportunity to ask any and all questions about the places you're viewing.
5. **Lock down a place:** if you see an apartment that you really like, you may want to strike while it's available! This is typically done through a "Provisional Agreement" (i.e. you pay a deposit to "reserve" a place). Note: Provisional Agreements don't mean all that much, as the landlord is free to scrap it—and return you the deposit—if they can find a better deal from another prospective tenant. (Unfortunately, this doesn't work in reverse—if you forfeit the Provisional Agreement, you forfeit the deposit!)
6. **Sign the rental agreement** and pick up the keys. Be prepared to pay 3 months' rent upfront (first month's rent + 2 months' deposit). Congratulations—you're officially settled!

"What utilities will I need to sign up for?"

You will need to sign up for **water**, **gas**, and **electricity**.

- **Water:** download form WW01 from the [Water Supplies Department website](#) and mail it in along with a copy of your HKID card. Takes about 1 week to process. Billed quarterly.
- **Gas:** open a new Gas account on the [Towngas website](#). Billed every 2 months (eBilling available).
- **Electricity:** apply online on the [HK Electric website](#). Takes about 2 weeks for new connections (they also require copy of HKID/passport and a deposit for ~60 days of electricity costs). Billed monthly (eBilling available).

Protip: you can use Jetco terminals inside bank branches to pay for tax and utility bills.

"Can you recommend an area to live in?"

Tough question—there are so many to choose from (personal preferences will play the biggest part here). The good news: Hong Kong has an excellent public transportation system, so you can get almost anywhere you want in 30-45 minutes tops. And there aren't any dangerous areas—the city is very safe (even after dark).

As a general rule, **Hong Kong Island** is more expensive than **Kowloon** or the **New Territories** (there's significant price variation within each of them, too). Many expats start out living on HK Island (and may later move to the New Territories to live in a bigger place and/or save on rent).

Make sure you **visit** an area before committing to live there. To get the full picture, see what it's like during rush hour (if you'll be commuting to work every morning).

Some popular expat neighbourhood choices:

- **Young singles:** as close to the action/nightlife as possible. **Soho**, **Sheung Wan**, and **Sai Ying Pun** are the most popular choices on HK Island.
- **Young couples:** close to everything, but away from the noise. Think **Kennedy Town**, **Mid-levels**, and **Happy Valley**.
- **Families with young children:** **Discovery Bay** (Lantau Island).
- **Proximity to international schools:** the **South side** of Hong Kong Island (e.g. Repulse Bay, Deep Water Bay, South Bay, Stanley). More info on schools below.

Some "shot in the dark" neighbourhood recommendations:

- **Work in Finance but want to save on rent?** Try Tung Chung. The Tung Chung MTR line will get you to the IFC in 35 minutes.
- **Want to "get away from it all" when you get off work?** Try living on Lamma Island. Lamma has become a popular choice for English Teachers, artists, hippies, and the like. Just watch out for those weekend tourist crowds.
- **Want to be close to nature (and far from work)?** Sai Kung may be what you're looking for. Beautiful beaches, hiking trails, and Hong Kong's surfing community are all here. Popular with expats who tire of the "downtown" experience.

"I'm OK with sharing a place. How do I find roommates?"

Your best is through **Facebook groups** such as [this one](#) or [this one](#). Listings are snapped up fast, so be proactive and reach out to the poster to arrange a viewing.

Protip: no one really uses Craigslist here and the site gets spammed with scammers and fake listings... so be careful on there.

"But I want to live in a big house on The Peak!! :("

Start gold digging lah. **You can do it!**

"Which Internet Service Provider (ISP) should I go for?"

Honestly, they're not all that different. People generally prefer HKBN, but it's not available in every building. You'll be paying somewhere around \$200 HKD for a blazing fast fiber connection (100M, possibly even Gigabit). Can't really go wrong here.

"Why does everyone have a maid? How do I hire a maid?"

Most expat families employ a helper to take care of everyday tasks—cooking, housekeeping, grocery shopping, babysitting the kids, pet care, elderly care, and so on.

- **Local domestic helpers** can be employed part-time. For example: a local helper may come in 1 day/week to clean the apartment and do laundry. Expect to pay HK\$70-120/hour.
- **Foreign domestic helpers** (usually from the Philippines or Indonesia) can only be employed on a full-time, 2 year live-in contract.

Here are the basics to employing a live-in helper:

- **Salary:** Minimum HK\$4,410/month (most expats pay more than this, along with holiday bonuses for Christmas and Chinese New Year).
- **Food allowance:** employers are responsible for providing either (a) free food or (b) a food allowance of at least HK\$1,053/month.
- **Other costs:** employers must provide accommodation, pay for medical care and insurance, as well as cover all hiring costs.
- **Rest day:** employers must give helpers at least 1 day off (continuous 24 hours) per week.
- **Requirements:** to hire a helper, you must have a minimum income of HK\$15,000/month and a Hong Kong Identity Card (HKID).

Bottom line: hiring a helper is a big responsibility, and not something to take lightly. There are many helpers available for hire, and skill levels / language ability greatly vary. The best way to find a helper is to go through

your personal network (referrals are key). If that's not possible, you may elect to go through an agency to find suitable candidates—and talk to at least a few helpers before making a decision. [Fair Agency](#) is a non-profit employment agency for helpers in HK.

For more information, check out this [informative blog post](#) and the [official Labour Department page](#).

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Medical (Health & Dental)

Case 1: If you have health insurance

Go to any one of Hong Kong's 12 private hospitals. The most popular expat choices are [Adventist Hospital](#) on 40 Stubbs Road (3651 8888) and [Canossa Hospital](#) on 1 Old Peak Road (2522 2181).

Case 2: If you don't have health insurance

Don't fret. Hong Kong has excellent public hospitals with professional medical staff and up-to-date equipment. In fact, there's no guarantee that a private hospital will be a better choice than a public one.

What to do: schedule an appointment with an out-patient clinic near you. Full list of clinics (broken down by area) available on the [Hospital Authority website](#).

"I need affordable dental care!"

There are some recommendations on the various forums (GeoExpat, AsiaExpat).

Protip: need extensive dental work done? Try to get a quote from [Silom Dental](#) in Bangkok.

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Schools

If you're moving to Hong Kong as a family, it's never too early to plan out where the kids will go to school. Note: primary & secondary education are mandatory in HK (kindergarten is optional).

Broadly speaking, schools in Hong Kong can be categorized as:

1. **Government schools** (aka "Local schools"). The vast majority of schools in HK fall under this category—they are free of charge and admission is typically determined by the district you live in. Instruction is in Cantonese, English, and (increasingly) Mandarin.
2. **Subsidized schools** (ESF schools). ESF stands for "English Schools Foundation"—this is a network of primary & secondary schools offering IGCSE and IB curriculums. There are 22 ESF schools spread out over Hong Kong, and fees range from HK\$89,200-115,600 (primary) and HK\$122,900-129,100 (secondary). Preference is given to non-Chinese speakers, and schools only accept applicants that reside in their respective zones.
3. **Private International schools**: these are highly competitive schools focused on preparing children for acceptance into top foreign Universities. These can be further subdivided based on curriculum (e.g. British, American, IB). Costs typically exceed those of ESF schools, going all the way up to HK\$210,900 per year (Grade 12 in Hong Kong International School).

For a complete list of ESF and other international schools (including curriculums, fees, districts), please refer to [this handy Wiki page](#).

"What's the admissions process like?"

ESF and international schools are very competitive (long wait lists are common). The process typically begins more than a year before matriculation:

1. **Decide on a curriculum:** you can narrow down the options based on where you'd like your child to attend University. For example, there are only a handful of schools that offer the American (AP) curriculum at the secondary level.
2. **Visit the campus:** after you have made a shortlist of target schools to apply for, go check them out! Do your research to keep track of upcoming Open Days and Info sessions—it's a great chance to explore the campus, talk to staff/parents/alumni, and get all the details about applying. See if there are schools that may give preference to your child (e.g. based on nationality or family background).
3. **Apply!** Families tend to apply for multiple schools at the same time (this partially explains the long waitlists everywhere). Be prepared to come in for in-person interviews. At this stage, many schools will charge a non-refundable application fee.
4. **Pay the deposits:** once your child has been expected, schools will expect you to put down a refundable deposit that serves as a reservation fee. This can be as much as 50% of the annual tuition.

Protip: it's not the end of the world if your child isn't accepted into your target school(s). Switching schools is very common here—so you can always try again next year!

"What are debentures?"

Debentures are a way for schools to raise money to fund renovations and expansions. Think of them as 0% interest loans—where you're the lender and the school is the borrower.

Upon admission, many schools in Hong Kong require that the parents pay a debenture. The school then uses this money for capital costs, and only repays it once the student leaves the school. It's worth noting that in some cases the debenture is only partially refunded (or not at all).

Debentures are also a way for parents (or employers of expat parents) to have their child be prioritized in the application process. The monetary value of debentures greatly varies—from HK\$25,000 (ESF schools) to HK\$10 million (top International schools).

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\$\$ Money \$\$

How to find a job in Hong Kong:

The job market here can be very frustrating. Employers routinely post job descriptions with 50+ desired skills (just hoping to get every candidate applying), HR personnel are flaky, quality recruiters are rare, and jobs are often given to the candidate willing to be paid the least. But OK, you're here, and you need a job.

The main job search websites in Hong Kong are **JobsDB.com**, **Indeed.hk**, and **LinkedIn**. And just like anywhere else, many positions are filled through internal referrals (i.e. before the job is even posted online).

Job hunting tactics depend on your industry experience level:

- **New/recent grad?** HK is very tough for new grads, both from an opportunity and salary standpoint. You'll be competing with those who are willing to be paid close to 0 (while they live with parents). If you have the option to do so, try getting some experience elsewhere before moving to HK. Without connections or personal referrals, your best bet is to start networking aggressively. Protip: try going to American/British/Canadian Chamber of Commerce events (you don't even need to be a member to join).
- **Have some experience?** Your best bet is to start networking directly with recruiters in your target industry on **LinkedIn**—just add them as a Connection with a Personal note attached. Most recruiters will be more than happy to discuss available positions. Note: if you ultimately get hired through a recruiter, your salary negotiation range will be limited to what was agreed upon between the employer and recruiter beforehand (e.g. \$55,000-70,000/month with no leeway outside of that). Of course it doesn't hurt to also try applying to positions directly—just don't spend too long on each application.
- **Senior level and above?** At this stage, you should be going primarily through your personal network and/or via executive-level headhunting firms. Search for high-level headhunters for your target industry and go from there. You probably already have an extensive professional network on **LinkedIn**—try announcing that you're looking for a "new opportunity" and you may be surprised at who messages you!

Protip: the custom here is to give/accept business cards with both hands.

Opening a bank account in Hong Kong

To avoid hour-long wait times, try to do this **early in the morning** (aim to be the first one in the branch when it opens).

Here's what to bring with you:

1. Your **passport**
2. Another form of **gov't issued photo ID** (e.g. UK driver's license). Can't be expired. An HKID card works best.
3. **Proof of address** somewhere. Can even be a UK utility bill. Ideally, a utility bill from Hong Kong. If you don't have any of these, you can bring a simple Employer Letter (signed and chopped) with your address of permanent residence ([Word .doc template](#)).
4. **HK\$1,000** to deposit as opening balance. Note: the minimum balance requirements differ across banks, and many won't even require you to deposit any money on Day 1.

Opening an account will usually take between 30-45 minutes (not including the wait time). You'll receive a debit/ATM card in the mail within a week.

Credit cards: all the usual suspects are available (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, etc). Credit card rewards are nowhere near as extensive as in the US, but there are many cash-back and air mile options. Some credit cards are harder to get—HSBC, for example, looks for at least 3 months of income history in HK. Others are handed out like candy to anyone with an HKID and a proof of address.

Protip: you can connect your **Octopus card** with your credit card to enable auto-refill (so your Octopus never runs out of money). It takes about 2-3 weeks to set this up (see the [Octopus card website](#) for more info).

Are you an American citizen? If so, head straight to [Citibank](#) (thanks to AML/KYC/FATCA, it's going to be a major pain—if not impossible—anywhere else). In any case, state that you're American immediately so they can direct you to someone that knows how to process those cases.

All other nationalities: the choice is yours. The most popular banks here are HSBC, Standard Chartered, Hang Seng, Citibank, and BOC (Bank of China). DBS is becoming increasingly popular, too. Many just go with **HSBC** or **Hang Seng** because their ATMs are everywhere. If you need specialized services, do your research on the bank websites beforehand.

None of the banks are particularly known for their customer service.

Registering a company in Hong Kong:

Note: please consult a professional. The info below does not constitute financial or legal advice.

- **Sole Proprietorship:** this one is easy. You simply go to the [Revenue Tower](#) in Wan Chai and fill out a 1 page form. Bring your HKID and HK\$2,250 for a 1-year registration (\$5,950 for 3 years). The whole process takes an hour or so. You'll be taxed at 15% of profits, and the first notice to file taxes will arrive 18 months following registration. You can also use your personal bank account for this kind of business. Note: this is not a Limited Company, which means you're personally liable if things go wrong. Which brings us to...
- **Limited Company:** the typical corporate structure in HK. There's a wealth of info out there on the pros/cons of HK as a jurisdiction, accounting/auditing requirements, typical costs, and so on. Bottom line: if you go through a company formation service, it will cost about HK\$8,000-\$12,000 for registration and handling of all the forms. Expect to pay \$15,000/year for accounting (to comply with the mandatory audit). Quotes for registration and accounting will greatly vary depending on who you ask (and whether you require additional services, such as a virtual office or company secretary).

Note: while it's trivial to register a Ltd company, it's not easy to get a business bank account. Before you go with any company formation service, ask what relationships they have with local banks. For startups that are unable to open traditional bank accounts, [Neat HK](#) is emerging as a popular alternative.

For more information, see the [Inland Revenue Department](#) website.

"How do I move money to Hong Kong?"

There are a few options to consider, each with their pros/cons:

1. **The ATM method** - before you leave, get a debit/ATM card with 0 forex fees and ATM fees refunded. Then, just periodically take out cash in HK until you have all of it. This is a slow process, and won't be really be feasible for large sums.
2. **Peer to peer money transfer systems** (e.g. TransferWise, CurrencyFair). Very popular with expats, as turnaround is fast (1-2 days) and fees are competitive. Be sure to read reviews and shop around for the best rates.
3. **Bank wire** - the tried and true method. Be careful of outgoing wire fees and possibly bad FX rates (open a multi-currency account in HK so you can avoid the FX for as long as possible).
4. **HSBC Advance or Citi Gold** - these banks offer Global View / Global Transfer services as long as you link your accounts. Instant and relatively painless (aside from the minimum balance requirements and having to open these accounts in the first place).

"Where do I exchange money?"

Go to one of these two locations, depending on which is closer:

1. [Berlin Money Exchange](#) (entrance from Pottinger street, go up to 17th floor). Best rates in town—much better than at the bank. No ID required.
2. [Chungking Mansions](#) (if you're on the Kowloon side). Seems like a place where you'd get ripped off, but surprisingly great for currency exchange. The trick is to go deeper into the building—don't just go for the first exchange shop you see. Go in 20-30 meters, and there should be a shop on your left. Watch out for pickpockets. Good Halal food in the same building.

"Can my wife/husband work in Hong Kong?"

Yes, but they first need to apply for a **Dependant Visa**. For eligibility criteria and the application process, please see the [government website](#).

Top frugal tips for living in HK

1. **Don't live in Hong Kong.** Har har. Also: don't start a family here.
2. **Live in a less expensive apartment.** This is the main one, as rent is far and away the biggest expense in HK. Spend more time evaluating places, negotiating the lease, etc. It will pay off in the long run. For bonus points, try living outside expat areas—so you'll be able to avoid everything else that's priced for expats (e.g. bars, restaurants).
3. **Buy second hand furniture** (or just get free) from expats that are on their way out. Check classifieds on Geoexpat and Facebook groups for postings.
4. **Party at Club 7/11** Why pay 100\$ for a beer in LKF when you can grab one to go from 7/11 for 15\$? Be sure to check out the happenin' Club 7/11 location on Staunton Street.
5. **Save on groceries.** Try buying local produce at the wet markets (no, Wellcome does not count as a wet market). For more info, see the "Grocery" section below.
6. **Buy a second hand car.** It just makes more sense, and there are many great deals to be had. Better yet...
7. **Don't drive at all.** Unless you live in a hard-to-access area (e.g. The Peak, South side) you're better off just sticking to public transport. It's arguably the world's best system—and very affordable.
8. **Be a medical tourist** (we're in Asia after all). Full-body checkup? Bangkok. Dental work? Bangkok. Transgender transformation? Bangkok!
9. **Marry a local.** Nothing cures Expat spending habits faster than finding out how 99% of Hong Kong lives. Or even better...
10. **Marry a wealthy local.** Boom! Now items #1-9 no longer apply.

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Miscellaneous

Where to party:

The 5 main expat nightlife areas:

1. **Lan Kwai Fong** (we just call it "LKF"). The epicenter of nightlife in HK, and a complete zoo after midnight on Friday/Saturday (lots of tourists and teeny boppers). If in doubt, just go here for the classic HK clubbing experience. Battle plan: start with drinks and a view at **Ce La Vi**, continue to **Tazmania Ballroom**, and end up (ideally after 1AM) at **Volar** or **OMA**.
2. **Soho** (walking distance from LKF). This is where people go after they've "graduated" from the insanity of LKF. Best known for its brewpubs and restaurants. Battle plan: go barhopping on/around Staunton St, with a drink at **Bobby's Rabble**, **de België**, **Brooklyn Bar & Grill**, and **Quinary**. Walk down and grab a gelato at **Emack & Bolio's** (they close at 11). Then, end with a night cap at **Foxglove**. Too easy.
3. **Wanchai** (things get a bit grittier here). The prices are lower... and so are the standards! Perfect for a night after [Horse Race Wednesday's](#). Battle plan: start classy with a drink upstairs at **The Pawn**. Pop by **Joe Bananas** just to tick it off, but make a quick escape to **The Wanch** for live music and a down-to-earth crowd. Optional: take the night to the next level with a karaoke session at **Red MR**.
4. **Knutsford Terrace** (yes, it's in Kowloon!) A relaxing area to have a drink with friends, with a good mix of locals and tourists. Battle plan: try out some new food in TST, then head to **All Night Long** for some live music. Move on to **Arena Bar** for beer pong action, and then for a drink at **Dada Bar + Lounge** for your cocktail fix. Rule #1: if it's your first night out in TST, you **must** have a Flaming Lamborghini.
5. **Sheung Wan / Sai Ying Pun** (hipster stomping grounds). Venues are a bit more spread out, but think of it as an easter egg hunt. Battle plan: after delicious yakitori at **Yardbird**, walk up and try the latest brews at

CRAFTISSIMO. Then, walk over to Sai Ying Pun and pop by [Wine Rack](#) and get a beer for the road. Finish up at either **Music Room** (inside Potato Head restaurant) or **Ping Pong 129 Gintonería**.

Pro tip: while there is very little physical violence, there have been many reports of spiked drinks in and around HK's bars and clubs. Watch your drinks at all times (that goes for girls AND guys!)

Most popular dating apps:

1. **Tinder** is #1 (and it's not even close). Browsing Tinder in HK is extra entertaining simply due to the sheer variety of characters you'll see on there. Guys: be careful of scams and prostitution rings (be suspicious of anyone with a WeChat ID in their profile name)
2. **Everything else.** If you're done with Tinder, check out: **Happn**, **Bumble**, **Hinge**, and **Coffee Meets Bagel**. Each has their quirks, but the basic concept remains the same.

Food recs:

As a general rule, there is no tipping in Hong Kong (a 10% service charge will usually be on the bill).

- **Craving Mexican food?** Try [11 Westside](#) (pricy, but excellent tacos). For good Tex-Mex, go straight to [Taco Chaca](#).
- **Best burgers in town:** [Electric Ave](#) in Sai Ying Pun and [Beef & Liberty](#) in Lan Kwai Fong.
- **Want "authentic Dim Sum"?** Careful, a lot of dim sum in HK is now pre-packaged and shipped from China. Skip the long lines at Tim Ho Wan and chaos of Lin Heung and go to [Sun Hing](#) in Kennedy Town instead.
- **Need a Ramen fix?** Try [Ichiran](#) in TST.
- **Best local food?** See this ["HK Must Eat Guide"](#) for recommendations from an actual foodie.
- **Want to try Russian food?** The best place is [Dacha](#) (make sure you try their homemade infused vodkas!)
- Forget Yelp, it's **OpenRice** all the way in HK. You can't always trust the ratings, though (restaurants can pay to game the review/score system)

"Which tailor do you recommend for custom men's suits/shirts?"

There are a few rules for buying tailored clothing in HK:

1. **Ignore anybody** that tries to sell you a suit on the street (especially around TST).
2. **Be as detailed as possible** when working with tailors. This means telling them exactly what you're looking for: buttons, lapels, pockets, etc. Just saying you want to look like "James Bond" or "Don Draper" will get you nowhere. If you already have a shirt/suit that fits you perfectly, bring it in!
3. When you come in for the first fitting, **wear proper attire** (incl. dress shoes) - this will help with measurements and material selection.
4. If you're getting a bespoke suit made, make sure there are **multiple fittings**. Also, make sure you arrange to pick it up (vs. getting it delivered) - this way, you can try it on one last time and request any last minute changes.
5. **You generally get what you pay for.**

Now for the recommended tailors:

- **Dress shirts:** [Graly](#) (bang-for-the-buck option, starting at \$450/shirt) and [Ascot Chang](#) (best shirts in HK, starting at \$1200/shirt, 3 shirts minimum for the first order).
- **Suits** (off the rack): [Suitsupply](#) is your best bet for getting a quality suit fast.
- **Custom suits** (affordable): [852 Tailor House](#) in Causeway Bay.
- **Custom suits** (the best money can buy): go to [W. W. Chan](#) and you'll be taken care of (expect to pay HK\$15,000+).

Hipster basic needs:

- Looking for a "speakeasy"? Head to [Foxglove](#) for live jazz and proper cocktails (\$\$\$). Code for secret back room is the cube root of 729. Alternatives: [Ping Pong](#) (Gin & Tonic bar) and [J Boroski](#).
- Proper **barber shops**: [Fox and The Barber](#) and [Selvedge Barbers](#).
- **Non-mainstream auditory experiences**: [The Music Room @ Potato Head](#). For dancing: [↪ Club](#) (MIHN). Follow [WM Records](#) and [PUSH](#) for upcoming events.
- **Vegan food**: Check out this great list of vegan cafes, restaurants, and grocery stores published by [Sassy Hong Kong](#).

"Where do I buy groceries?"

Grocery shopping in Hong Kong is like an adventure—you might have to visit 2-3 locations before you find everything you need. Even within the same chain, two different locations may differ in selection.

Your options (from least to most expensive):

1. **The wet market**: this isn't a tourist attraction—it's how many locals buy their fresh produce. While it can be hectic inside, you can't beat the prices. At least go inside and take a look!
2. **Wellcome** and **U Select**: the "bang for the buck" supermarkets in HK. They might not have everything you need, but the basics are covered. Pro tip: check out Wellcome's cheap wine promotions.
3. **ParknShop** (sub-brands: **Fusion** and **International**). The other major supermarket chain in Hong Kong. Will have most of what you need.
4. **Market Place by Jason's**: great for harder-to-find imported products. Just a few locations, but generally good selection.
5. **Citysuper**: for when you absolutely, positively need some special food from abroad—and are willing to pay anything to get it. The "Whole Foods" of Hong Kong.

"GYMS. Tell me everything!"

Warning: gyms in this city use aggressive sales tactics and will tell you stories about deals "expiring today", "limited time offers" and so on. Watch out for sneaky cancellation clauses in membership contracts.

Even mid-workout, aggressive Personal Trainers will approach you and try to sell you on lesson packages.

Gym recommendations for Hong Kong:

1. **Affordable option**: there are government [Sports Centres](#) all over HK. They charge by the hour (less than \$20 HKD/hour), but many opt to just get a pass (HK\$180/month). To join, you need an HKID and attend a mandatory 1-hour orientation/safety lesson. Depending on the location, there are also facilities/courts available for booking (e.g. Tennis, Table Tennis, Squash, Soccer, Badminton, Indoor Golf, Dance Rooms, Volleyball, Basketball).
2. **MMA gyms**: many options all over HK. **Fighting Arts Centre** gyms on Kowloon side, **Pow Muay Thai** and **Espada BJJ** on HK Island side. **Hong Kong Self Defence & Krav Maga** in Sheung Wan for self-defense.
3. **Strength training**: **Pinnacle Performance** in Wan Chai has squat racks and benches, and is a favorite of powerlifters and bodybuilders.
4. **Rock Climbing / Bouldering**: [Attic V](#) in Wong Chuk Hang.
5. **Yoga**: try **Kita Yoga** or **Inspire Yoga**.

If money is no object, the popular choice is **Pure Fitness** (multiple locations, mostly on HK Island).

"So I need a visa for China..."

But you're already in China!

OK, fine. Here's how to do it yourself:

1. **Is this a business trip?** If yes, ask your employer if they can sort it all out for you. If no, proceed to step #2.
2. **Get everything ready for the visa application:** passport (with >7 months validity), copy of your HKID (or HK landing entry slip), 1 passport photo (white background, 48mm x 33mm), copy of birth certificate and copy of parents' passports (for applicants under 18 years old).
3. **Print and fill out visa application** ([Link to PDF](#))
4. Print out a **hotel reservation confirmation letter** for your first few days in China (can be refundable).
5. **Go early in the morning** (opens at 9 AM, be there by 8:30 AM) to the China Visa office at [Capital Centre](#) (151 Gloucester Road, 20th Floor).
6. **Apply in person** and pay the visa fee. Visas could be ready as early as the next business day.

Visa fees depend on your citizenship. Full fee table [here](#).

Don't want to do it yourself? Agency recommendation: [YZ Travel](#). Another popular choice is [Forever Bright](#).

"I have friends/family visiting! Where do I take them?!"

Don't panic, we've got you covered.

- (morning) **Chi Lin Nunnery / Nan Lian Gardens** ([Google Maps](#)). An absolute gem near Diamond Hill MTR station: a Buddhist temple complex, Tang Dynasty-style garden, and craft exhibition rooms all in one location. Bonus points: get lunch at the famous [Chi Lin Vegetarian restaurant](#) on-site (3658 9388, make reservations as it fills up fast!).
- (evening) **The Peak**. Skip the long lines at the Peak Tram. Instead, just take a taxi up... or walk! Find your way to the [Green Trail](#)—remember to wear comfortable shoes and bring plenty of water (takes about 1 hour to walk up to the Peak). Once you're there, go on a scenic stroll for skyline views of HK (the Peak Circle Walk starts at [Lugard Road](#) next to the Peak Tower). For the best views and photos, go on a clear day and get to the Peak 90 minutes before sunset.
- (half day) **Lamma Island**: take the ferry from [Central Pier 4](#) to Sok Wu Wan. It's easy mode from there—just follow the Lamma Island Family Walk to **Tin Hau Temple**, **Hung Shing Ye Beach**, and finish with a meal at [Bookworm Cafe](#) before heading back to Central from the **Yung Shue Wan Ferry Pier**. Make sure to try local snacks and delicacies as you traverse this small island. Hipster alternative to Lamma: **Peng Chau**.
- (half day) **Repulse Bay & Stanley Market**. Start at the [Exchange Square Bus Terminus](#) and take buses #6 or #66 to Stanley (important: do not take buses 6A, 6X, or 260 as the route is not as scenic—you can take any of them on your way back to Central). OK, if you have multiple people you could just take a taxi too. Then, spend a couple hours exploring **Stanley Market** and surrounding areas. Optional: pit stop at **Repulse Bay** with a meal at [The Verandah](#) for a traditional colonial-era dining experience.
- (full day) **Lantau**: there are a few ways to see this island. **For the fit and adventurous**: hike up to Sunset Peak ([complete guide here](#)). **For sightseeing**: take the MTR to Tung Chung, and then take the scenic **cable car** to Ngong Ping (protip: buy tickets on Klook to skip the long line for the cable car). A round trip on the cable car is HK\$210/adult. Once you're there, spend a few hours exploring the **Big Buddha**, **Po Lin Monastery**, and various Buddhist temples in the area. Highly recommended: go on a quick hike along the [Wisdom Path](#) nearby. After you're done, just hop on the cable car back to Tung Chung.
- (full day) **Macau**: take the ferry from [Shun Tak Centre](#) (Sheung Wan MTR station). It costs ~\$180/person and takes 55 mins. Once you arrive in Macau, take a taxi to the **Old Town**. Recommended sights: **Ruins of St. Paul's**, **Guia Lighthouse**, **Senado Square**, **Lou Lim Ieoc Garden**. Make sure to try a Macanese egg tart (pastry). There's a lot to see and do in Macau—we haven't even covered the casinos yet. Read this [blog post](#)! Oh, and don't forget your passport (or HKPR card).

"What are some basic Cantonese phrases?"

Note: unless you're ethnically Chinese, no one will expect you to know/speak **any** Cantonese. They will also most likely switch to English immediately. But hey, it's always good to practice!

- "Good morning": jo-san (jòusàhn)
- "Excuse me": mmm-goi (m̀hgòì)
- "Can I get the bill?" (in a restaurant): mmm-goi mai dan
- "How are you?": lei ho ma?
- "Goodbye": bāaibaai

Want to learn more phrases? Check out this [useful page](#).

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TL;DR

Hong Kong is basically Asia on training wheels. Thousands move here every year. Don't worry—you'll be fine.

Just don't expect it to be like London. Or New York. Or even Singapore. HK is a different beast, and you'll have a far better time if you embrace it for what it is.

Good luck!

Click to [Email this link to someone](#).

Questions, suggestions, insults? Please [email me](#). Last update: June 2018.