6. Practical Tips of Getting Around in Hong Kong

Introduction

Strategically located at the doorstep of China and the centre of Asia- Pacific, Hong Kong has, in the last 150 years, developed into one of the world's leading manufacturing, trading and service centres. Its open economy is built on free trade and free enterprise. Geographically, the territory is divided into four distinct areas: Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, the New Territories and the outlying Islands. Hong Kong is subtropical with a relatively high humidity. Temperature ranges from 10 °C in the winter to 30 °C in the summer.

Languages

English and Chinese are the official languages. Street signs, menus, tourist and government publications are usually bilingual.

Money and Banking

Most banks are open from 9am to 4:30pm on weekdays, and from 9am to 12:30pm on Saturday. There is no foreign exchange control in the territory and the Hong Kong dollar is freely convertible. In Hong Kong, any currency, including mainland China's renminbi (RMB), may be bought and sold in the open market. Visitors can exchange foreign currency at any bank or exchange shop or at the cashier counters of hotels. Daily exchange rates are available through any bank, but the Hong Kong dollar is pegged at HK$7.8 to US$1. The government issues coins in denominations of 10c, 20c, 50c, $1, $2, $5 and $10. There are also three different kinds of notes in denominations of $10, $20, $50, $100, $500 and $1,000.

Transportation

Hong Kong's efficient and low-cost public transport system includes three railways, buses, trams, taxis and ferries. There are three road-only tunnels crossing the harbour.

To and From the Airport

From 6 July 1998, travellers to Hong Kong will be served by one of the world's largest and most modern airports situated at the Chek Lap Kok on the outlying island of Lantau. The easiest connection from the airport to Central and Kowloon is the Airport Express Railway, which takes just 19 minutes to get to Kowloon, and an extra 4 minutes to Hong Kong. Adult single journey fare is HK$115. In addition, express bus service called “Airbus” operates on frequent schedules to popular spots in the city, with stops near most major hotels. An overnight bus service will cover the airport's 24-hour operation. Taxis are also an option and fares from Chek Lap Kok range from HK$200-HK$400.

Railways

The MTR [Tel: (852) 2881 8888] network comprises nine railway lines serving Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. In addition, a Light Rail network serves the local communities of Tuen Mun and Yuen Long in the New Territories while a fleet of buses provide convenient feeder services. The MTR also operates the Airport Express, a dedicated high-speed rail link providing the fastest connections to Hong Kong International Airport and the city's newest exhibition and conference centre, AsiaWorld-Expo. From Hong Kong, passengers can travel with ease to Guangdong province and the major cities of Beijing and Shanghai in the mainland of China using the MTR’s intercity services.

Unlike many other modes of public transport, the operational reliability of MTR trains is unaffected by traffic conditions, so passengers should always get to their destinations on time, barring severe weather conditions. What's more, MTR trains run about 19 hours a day, 7 days a week, from early morning (5:30am - 6am) to 1am the next morning.

Trams

Trams ply the northern shore of Hong Kong Island at a fixed fare from 6am to 1am Tel : (852) 2548 7102]. There is also the century-old Peak Tram, a funicular railway which runs up to the Peak from 7am to 10pm at about 15-minute intervals. Tel: (852) 2522 0922.

Ferries

The Star Ferry Co [Tel: (852) 2367 7065] operates a shuttle service between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. Ferries between Central and Tsim Sha Tsui run every few minutes from 6:30am to 11:30pm and Wan Chai to Tsim Sha Tsui (7:30am to 11pm). The Wan Chai Ferry Pier is within a few minutes walk of the HKTDC offices and the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Taxis

Taxi fares are charged by metered tariff. When crossing the harbour by either cross-harbour tunnel, the two-way tunnel toll is added to the fare. With the other tunnels, only the one-way toll is added. There is an extra charge per piece of luggage (both of these extra charges are signposted in the taxi). Flagfall and charges are displayed. Tipping is usually confined to small change. There are two taxi jurisdictions in Hong Kong -- urban and New Territories. Radio taxis: Tel: (852) 2574 7311 / (852) 2527 6324 (Hong Kong Island), (852) 2760 0411 / (852) 2760 0455 (Kowloon), (852) 2457 2266 / (852) 2657 2267 (New Territories).

Visa

According to Hong Kong Immigration Department, nationals of most foreign countries can visit Hong Kong visa-free. Applicants may submit their visa applications directly to Hong Kong Immigration Department, or through Chinese diplomatic or consular missions in their place of domicile.

Enquiries can be directed to:
Hong Kong Immigration Department
61 Po Yap Road, Tseung Kwan O, New Territories
Tel : (852) 2824 6111
Fax : (852) 2824 1133 / 2877 7711

Visas for Mainland China Travel

All travellers to the Chinese Mainland, except Hong Kong Chinese residents, require visas. The mainland issues single-entry, double-entry and multiple-entry (six months, unlimited entry) visas, the latter designed for frequent travellers who have long-term business establishments (e.g. joint ventures) in the mainland. The Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC in the HKSAR Region at 20F, Capital Centre, 151 Gloucester Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong [Tel: (852)) 2992 1999]. Submission of applications hours: Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm, and the China Travel Service at various locations, Central office, [Tel: (852) 2522 0450], Tsim Sha Tsui office, [Tel: (852) 2736 1863]. Many travel agencies specialising in China travel can also obtain visas. The China Travel Service normally takes 48 hours to issue a visa, but can do so in one day for a premium. The Visa Office takes 24 hours and also offers a more expensive same-day service.