

Understand Hong Kong

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'The city is dying' may be a popular refrain in town, but write off Hong Kong at your peril!

HISTORY 284

Discover how a 'barren island with hardly a house upon it' became one of the richest cities in the world.

ARTS..... 295

This is official: Hong Kong was never a cultural desert. In fact, the city's arts scene is livelier than ever!

CINEMA 303

From the sublime to the slapstick, Hong Kong's film industry has entertained and enlightened world audiences in equal measure.

ARCHITECTURE 306

Unearth an astonishing mosaic of buildings behind the city's facade of modern skyscrapers.

MACAU'S HISTORY & CULTURE 310

Uniquely Macanese festivals, traditions, language and cuisine combine Chinese and Portuguese cultural influences.

Hong Kong Today

The election in March 2012 of Leung Chun-ying as Hong Kong's fourth post-1997 Chief Executive has taken the territory into uncharted political waters. For many, a malaise has set in, what with global economic uncertainties, spiralling living costs and an increasingly tricky relationship with the city's great neighbour – and master – to the north. But one certainty is that this indefatigable city will always find a way to win through.

Best on Film

In the Mood for Love (2000) Wong Kar-wai's masterpiece of smouldering love in 1960s Hong Kong.

Little Cheung (1999) A gritty take on the realities of post-1997 Hong Kong.

Love in a Puff (2010) A chain-smoking tribute to contemporary Hong Kong life.

My Life as McDull (2001) A heart-warming animation about an indigenous pig character.

Comrades: Almost a Love Story (1996) Two mainland migrants take a reality check in this maddening city.

Best in Print

Hong Kong State of Mind (Jason Ng; 2011) A crash course on the city's idiosyncrasies.

The Hungry Ghosts (Anne Berry; 2009) Restless spirits haunt this expertly crafted tale.

Gweilo: Memories of a Hong Kong Childhood (Martin Booth; 2004) A much-acclaimed memoir of life in 1950s Hong Kong.

Hong Kong: A Cultural History (Michael Ingham; 2007) The definitive title in this category.

Triad (Derek Lambert; 1991) A gripping (though violent) British police superintendent v Chinese underworld yarn.

The State of Play

Hong Kong has witnessed much political strife and public discontent with the government since the turn of the decade. Public grievances have centred on a long list of increasingly intractable issues, from slow democratic reforms and perceived collusion between the government and big business, to stifling property prices and the drain on public resources of mainland immigrants. The interference of Běijīng's Hong Kong-based proxies around Leung Chun-ying's ascent to the top post in town marks a definitive dynamics shift in the local political landscape, and serves as an ominous forewarning of what's to come as the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle increasingly comes under threat.

While many hope that Leung can turn his populist overtures into action by, for instance, providing more social housing, the realities of Hong Kong's peculiar political system are such that, even with the introduction of a more representative legislature for the 2012–17 period, the balance of power will always tilt in the landed elite's favour.

Basic Economics

Inflation hit a 16-year high in 2011 and, while it may have slowed down since, the truth is that for many, Hong Kong has become a depressingly expensive place to live. The costs of utilities, public transport, food and, crucially, housing, are racing ahead of people's spending power, and one now has to pay double for the luxury to dream about winning the lottery after the price of a Mark Six ticket went up to HK\$10 in 2010. Despite the reasonable economic growth rates of the past few years, a widening income gap has appeared. Hong Kong has more billionaires than most countries, but many more people struggle to meet fairly basic levels of subsistence.