

Understand Hong Kong

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The influx of mainland shoppers may stoke discontent, but the city is still one of Asia's most hospitable.

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Discover how the grave of Song dynasty's sunset emperors rose to become one of the world's richest cities.

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It's official: Hong Kong was never a cultural desert. In fact, the city's cultural landscape is lushier than ever.

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

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Beyond the shiny facade of skyscrapers, an endearing jumble of styles, eras and influences beckon.

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Hong Kongers are brought up surrounded by a variety of spiritual beliefs, even if many of them never profess to a religion.

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Monuments, festivals and food so rich in different traditions that a simple 'East meets West' label hardly does justice.

Hong Kong Today

Just a few years ago, most Hong Kong residents would say return to Chinese rule did not bring many changes, but since then, for many, things have gone downhill. Rising tensions with mainland China and the Běijīng government dominate Hong Kong politics and public sentiment these days, putting the 'One Country, Two Systems' experiment in peril. In just 15 years, Běijīng has highly politicised a city that was known for its political antipathy during 150 years of British rule.

Best on Film

The Grandmaster (2013) Wong Kar-wai's stylish martial arts drama about the life of Wing Chun grandmaster Ip Man.

Infernal Affairs (2002) A crime-thriller directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak that inspired Scorsese's *The Departed*.

Night and Fog (2010) Auteur Ann Hui's darkly realistic drama on domestic violence and the lives of migrant women.

Election I and II (2005 and 2006) A complex two-part crime noir about elections inside a Triad society.

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

Best in Print

City at the End of Time: Poems by Leung Ping-kwan (Ed Esther Cheung; 2012) Leung Ping-kwan aka Yesi was Hong Kong's unofficial poet laureate.

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

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

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

The State of Play

Hong Kong has witnessed much political strife since the turn of the decade. Critics of the Government have focused on a long list of increasingly intractable issues, from slow democratic reform and the perceived collusion between the government and big businesses, to stifling property prices and the perceived drain on public resources by mainland migrants. The involvement 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 worsening political turbulence.

While many hope that Leung can turn his populist overtures into action, for instance, by providing more social housing, the combination of divisive party politics and the lack of a democratic mandate has caused many to condemn the Government as a weak one, and hopelessly so when faced with vested interests as strong as the largest developers.

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 living are racing ahead of spending power, and punters even have 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. Hong Kong has more billionaires than most countries, but many more struggle to meet fairly basic levels of subsistence. Despite reasonable economic growth in the past few years, Hong Kong's economy has become increasingly reliant on the financial sector and the spending power of mainland tourists.