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# A Month Travelling With Mrs Hunt

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## Chapter 5: Hong Kong

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### Wednesday

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Wednesday disappeared in flight. We left Vienna in the evening, transferred in Zurich and slept on almost flat seats in Swissair's soon to be replaced business class, and awoke mid-afternoon Hong Kong time.

We lived in Hong Kong from the beginning of 1982 through the middle of 1985. Since then I visited a few times for business or transit, most recently in 2002, but Mrs Hunt had only been back once. In 1993. We expected to find much changed. The contrast with Vienna could not be more magpie coloured. In Vienna, a blend exists between old and new. St Stephen's Cathedral dominates the middle of a city that also allows Hundertwasser and his descendants to sparkle. Such accommodation to architectural heritage is almost non-existent in Hong Kong.

Would our flat from the 1980s remain standing? It was still there in 1993 and 2002. Could it survive? Our minds full of such pressing agendas, we alighted in the amazingly huge airport on Lantau Island. No longer an island, it is connected by road and rail to everything else.

Once you could only get to Lantau by boat. In 1982 we hiked from Tung Chung Bay down the west side of Lantau to Tai O with a bunch of folk from our church. Where we started our hike is now an airport.

Last time I was in Hong Kong I bought an *Octopus* card that allowed me unlimited public transport. The rules have changed a bit since then and we found that the card entitled us to the train ride from the airport to Central and return, plus three days unlimited travel on the MTR (the train system). But not the buses. Or the ferries. However, the card is a stored value card, as it was way back in the 1980s (catch UP Australia!!) and we added a few dollars to spend later on the buses. On returning to the airport, you get most of your unused money back. It's a neat system.

And so we got on the speedy train to Central. And that's where it all went pear shaped. We only had to go one station from Central, but we had not reckoned on two factors. First, it was rush hour.

Technically, any hour until 2am is rush hour in Hong Kong, but 5:30pm is double-rush hour. So every corridor, no matter how wide, and every escalator, no matter how many heading in the same direction, were overloaded with people. Manoeuvring ourselves and our suitcases was like swimming in a molasses flood, peppered with large heavy marshmallows (people, that is), all heading the way you didn't want to go.

Second, we hadn't worked out just how vast the MTR has become since we lived there. It meanders around under whole city blocks, sucking residents down off the streets into supposedly more convenient footpaths.



In truth we only had to go about 400 metres, to catch a second train, alight at the first stop and then walk another 300 metres to our hotel. It looked easy on paper. It was murder!

Down escalators, along wide and crowded tunnels, up escalators, through turnstiles completely unsuitable for any size suitcase. And, after Vienna's pleasant chill, we were walking in 93% humidity still clad in unsuitable clothing.

I felt like having a nervous breakdown any moment. My flight reaction was setting in, but there was nowhere to flee. Mrs Hunt declared she could not go further, but the alternative was to just die there and be trampled underfoot .

Of course, Hong Kong people are actually very nice. Had we slumped to the ground in exhaustion, you can be sure we would have quickly been assisted by any number of attentive and friendly folk.

Perhaps this is why Mrs Hunt, on the very last escalator, decided to rest in the arms of the people behind her. While I went ahead with the two huge suitcases, Mrs Hunt carried her smaller bags and my cabin bag. Since her arms were fully employed and her legs tired, the lurch of the escalator toppled her backwards.

I heard the cry of "Help" and saw the panicked look on Mrs Hunt's face as she sat down heavily on the escalator behind her, scattering the already compact rows of Chinese people into a more dense mass. By the time we arrived at the top of the escalator, the weight of oncoming passengers had righted the good ship Mrs Hunt and she staggered onto the landing while a young Chinese woman hovered about felicitously, asking if there was anything she could do.

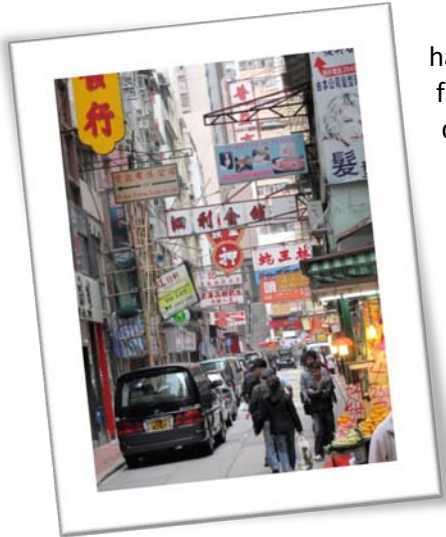
See, I told you they were nice.

Mrs Hunt was bruised, mostly to her leg and self-esteem, but the crowd hurried on and soon we were just two more silly tourists with insufficient knowledge of how much you can throw at the MTR before it bites back.

One more flight of stairs, mercifully short, and we emerged into the thick evening air, already heavy with the threat of rain and dark.

A foreign woman (that is, not Chinese) saw us emerge, instantly summed us up as tourists and enquired where we were heading.

I was tempted to say, "Anywhere out of this hell!" but instead managed to name the Hotel.



"Oh you're nearly there," she replied and seemed to take a half step back which could have been caused by the look on my face which said *Thank you, I could kiss you now!* She pointed down the narrow street, crammed with cars going in three directions, crowded with shops on both sides, narrow footpaths crammed with people spilling onto the narrow road, and said "It's just there past the 7-11."

We only had to negotiate one intersection. A narrow Hong Kong intersection, of course, would be adventure enough for one day, but after the turmoil of the MTR, we just stared down the cars and dared them to try and kill us. We had survived the MTR. We were invincible!

Funny we didn't feel that way. I just wanted to find a womb-like room in the hotel, curl up and make the world go away for a while. But trouble follows the troubled, and

tonight was no exception.

The Hotel was called Mingle On The Wing. It was on Wing Lok Street in Sheung Wan, just to the west of Central on Hong Kong island. Like our other lodging in Vienna I had found it on the Internet. It was medium priced, about 3 stars, and seemed to boast a lot of electronic wizardry. Electronic pass keys for the rooms. Free Broadband. Big LCD TVs with Dolby surround sound. 2000+ music selections and so on. None of this we expected to take much advantage of, but it did sound all very modern and efficient. Now if it had only all worked...

“We’ve given you a room with a balcony,” said the receptionist implying this was an improvement on the rooms without a balcony.

“OK,” we replied innocently, “thanks.” And we went upstairs in a lift slightly larger than the one in Vienna to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor and room 501. The electronic passkey opened the door. So far so good.

Inside the room, where the light switch would normally be, was a vertical row of silver buttons marked *Room*, *Bath*, *Bed*, etc. All the lights in the room were on, so I pressed *bath* and noted with satisfaction that the bathroom lights went off. All pretty simple.

We looked deeper into the room. Actually the room was so small you only needed your reading prescription to see it all clearly. It looked like you would need to open a window to make room to change your mind. The bed was wedged in on three sides. But there was a door onto a small balcony where, should you want to, you could sit in the heat, humidity, noise and odours of the perfumed harbour (*Hong Kong* means *perfumed harbour*). Oh well, this was a room. It was neat and tidy and clean and it did have a big LCD TV screen with Dolby Surround Sound.

We used the bathroom and I pressed the button marked *bath* and ALL the lights in the room went off. I pressed the button marked *Room* and nothing happened. I pressed all the buttons in turn, and then in pairs, trios and all at once. Nothing happened.

In the dark we found the phone and informed reception. Seconds later a young woman arrived with a walkie-talkie and little knowledge. She confirmed that something was stuffed up with the electronics and after a brief conversation with reception invited us to change rooms.

Well, why not? We needed the exercise.

Fortunately, the room was just one floor down. And, just to prove that God looks after even the most sinful, this room did not have a balcony. Instead it was a proper sized compact room with a bed you could get out of on both sides. And the lights all worked as expected. And the TV was appropriately large. I pressed the ON switch on the TV remote. Nothing happened.

Reception was advised and the receptionist herself arrived with a remote control of her own. She confidently keyed in various codes to which the TV flickered responsively. The screen menu came on and she announced that it was now good to go. She apologised for the inconvenience. Instead of saying we had decided to make inconvenience a life goal, I remembered a phrase in Cantonese.

“Mou mun tie (*no worries*)” I said and she giggled in surprise. Fortunately she didn’t test my Cantonese any further. She left, we closed the door and I fell back on the bed and started to breathe again.

By now it was getting into the evening, and although our body clocks were roughly somewhere over Istanbul, we thought we had better make an attempt at an evening meal. But where? Sheung Wan was not part of Hong Kong that we frequented much in 1984, and doubtless everything had changed a few times over since then anyway. So we ventured aimlessly into the busy and thick evening world.

Across the road were shops that sold Chinese herbal medicines. Things that looked like they might have been left behind by a passing llama sat in jars alongside leaves that had clearly not grown anywhere locally. Fancy any of this for dinner, dear? Next.

Nearby was an upstairs cafe but the menu was, reasonably, in Chinese. Along the street, *gweilos* (the name for foreigners) spilled out of a hole in the wall that turned out to be a busy bar festooned with replicas of all the brands of beer for sale.

We came to the end of Wing Lok Street, turned right and found ourselves in an area approaching familiarity. Not that we recognised any of the buildings or shops. We only recognised the street name, Queens Road West, but that much friendliness somehow began to settle the tension.



And then we saw a McDonald's. Safe familiar food seemed like a good idea, no matter how desperately sad it seemed to be in such an interesting place and to be choosing food on the basis of familiarity. Nonetheless, the burgers and fries filled the need. It was a need for restoring our routines, more than a need to assuage hunger.

We retraced our steps to the Mingle on the Wing, stopping by the neighbouring 7-11 to purchase water and beer. And we slept the sleep of the jetlagged and wrecked.

## Thursday

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With the help of a Melatonin tablet, the one that snaps your body clock into the new time zone, we awoke with the sun and after a sleepy conference determined we would go to Stanley today. That's where we once lived—in a 3<sup>rd</sup> floor flat overlooking Stanley Beach and the sea across Tai Tam Bay to the quarry scars on the D'Aguilar Peninsula. In early 1982 the view was obscured by a fine stand of she oaks but a year later a typhoon snapped them off at fence height, affording us a glorious view for the next few years.

In the 1980s Stanley was already a tourist destination. Those who lived there were a mixture of expatriates and very wealthy locals. Anywhere in Hong Kong was expensive to live then (and now) but the prices at distant Stanley were comparable with the more convenient Mid-Levels. Even so, at around USD3,000 a month, the rent was higher than my whole salary. Fortunately, after we forked over 20% of our actual salary towards the rent, World Vision International found the remainder.

Contrasting with those who lived on *our side* of Stanley, there was a ramshackle village on the other side. Houses of tin and cardboard, but with colour TV and surround sound, clustered around a temple half way up the hill. Originally a community of fisherfolk, by the 1980s it was populated by others. There was a Vietnamese audio technician who worked alongside Mrs Hunt at the American School in Repulse Bay. His *English* name was Stanley and he lived in the Stanley village with his family. As did the *amah* (maid) he found for us.

We were to discover that much had changed on that side of Stanley. But first we needed breakfast. To our delight we found a Delifrance which, as its name implies, served croissants and a variety of European style breakfasts. It seemed to be very popular with young Chinese business people. The menu advertised various combinations but the displayed prices bore little relationship to the actual charge at the register. Not exactly *bistromaths*, a form of mathematics described in *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* in which the numbers on the bill bear no relation to the dishes ordered or their advertised prices. At Delifrance they just seemed to discount the extras in some obscure way. So a croissant and coffee would be HKG15 and a glass of orange juice HKG7 but together they were HKG18. In Australia I may have enquired about their system, but here it was just something to accept with gratefulness. Certainly the Delifrance breakfasts were a delightful way to start the day. To be repeated daily too.



Thus fortified, we set out to find the bus to Stanley. Not easy.

First of all, the Star Ferry was gone. Well, not gone, just moved. In our day you could walk to the Star Ferry wharf and catch the bus to Stanley right in front of it. But as we walked along new, unfamiliar, but wonderful elevated walkways towards the Star Ferry we realised it was not where it should be.

OK, we would find it later. Our present objective was to find a bus. The bus terminus had been located under a building to the west of the Star Ferry when we lived there, so we looked for signs to direct us to the terminus. And there it was.



In the same place. A noisy, dusty, dimly lit pattern of bus paths with all the buses of Hong Kong island ready and waiting.

Well, waiting. Not for passengers to get on board, but waiting for drivers to open the doors. Hong Kong bus drivers work to a rule that says the bus doors may not be opened for passengers until the driver is actually ready to leave. As a result passengers line up beside closed doors, watching a driver sitting in his driving seat reading a newspaper or eating a snack until one minute before the appointed moment. Upon which he reaches down, flicks a lever and everyone piles on board.

But wait, we had a choice to make here. The 260 or the 6? Mrs Hunt preferred the 260 because it went through the tunnel before joining the twisty road around Repulse Bay. I preferred the 6 because it went right up the mountain, over Wong Nai Chung Gap (which is hardly a gap at all), and down the other side.

*An explanation for those unfamiliar yet with Hong Kong:* The number 6 bus ride is one of the great bus journeys of the world. It is the cheapest roller coaster ride in the world. The buses are, mostly, English-style double-decker buses. The roads are narrow and carved into the side of the mountain. Every curve requires the bus to inhabit part of the wrong side of the road. Motorists can squeeze past if they have an accurate appreciation of the width of their vehicles. Two buses meeting on the road, which they do a dozen times on each trip, require all the skill of two elephants squeezing into an Austrian lift.

If you occupy an upstairs seat, especially the ones right at the front, you are alternately ducking under overhanging branches, teetering over sheer drops, and sucking your elbows in against the rock walls by the road. I rode these buses every day for four years and never saw a bus accident. The skill of the drivers is finely honed. In the school of close shaves.

The 260/6 choice came down to which was likely to leave first. We chose the number 6, but the 260 left first anyway. Without us. Anyway, the number 6 ride was everything we remembered and a bit more for Mrs Hunt who despite recent experiences on the MTR seemed to have forgotten what terror felt like.

Still we both enjoyed seeing the tall apartment block that the Anderson family used to live in at the top of the pass over the island. They had a swimming pool and a grand view which as they became empty nesters, they gave up for a moored boat in Aberdeen marina.

And around the tight corner just before Repulse Bay the house of a friend who now lives in Connecticut still clung to the cliff below the road as if held up by magic. Or super glue.

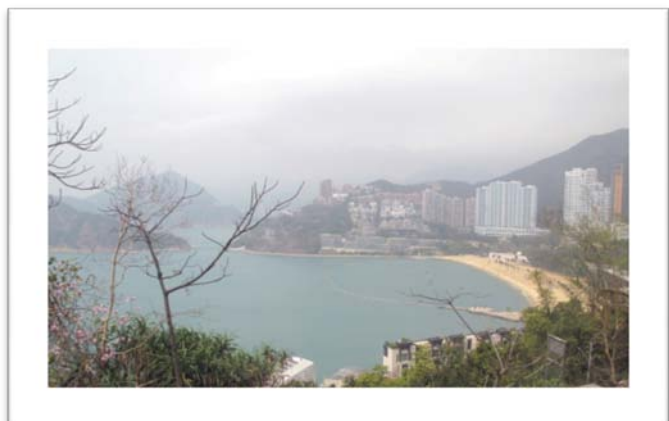
Repulse Bay once had a folly at the western end of the beach. A ramshackle castle that added character and style. As did the original Repulse Bay Hotel in which we stayed on first arriving in the Colony.

Room 103 isn't there anymore. Nor is the hotel. It was completely demolished and replaced with a row of 50 storey apartments, before someone regretted the demolition and rebuilt a replica of the hotel facade.

Nor is the folly. It too has gone the way of progress, now replaced by a row of desirable but unremarkable units.

There was little time to take all this in as the bus lurched on. Repulse Bay was recognisable but more overgrown. More buildings. More apartments. Just more of all. We caught a glimpse of the little supermarket under the Poinciana trees. It remained, if under a new name. And the trees were still shading shoppers.

Up the hill and over the crest to see the Stanley Fort peninsula stretched out below us.



“.” I said, and then getting my mouth to reengage with my surprised eyes “look where the fishing village used to be!” Now modern apartments stretched right up the hillside towards us. Wonder where Stanley, the audio-technician, lived now?

Mrs Hunt was in serious need of a slow walk after that bus trip, so we meandered along Stanley Beach Road towards the place we used to inhabit. The beach was much as we remembered it, although a new complex of cafes and dressings sheds extended along an area that had once been an open railing by the sand. The curve of the shark(?) netting looked much the same. The pontoon we could swim out to. Still there.



And number 14 Stanley Beach Road too. Repainted. And with a fine stand of she oaks obscuring the view to the sea.

Mentally ticking one item off our agenda we returned through the edge of the markets. Much here was unchanged. A few new stalls, but remarkably many still exactly the same 25 years on. The shoe shop. The art shop. The Chinese emporium. Ha! *Emporium* is definitely overstating the elegance of a shop in the narrow, dark alleys of Stanley shopping village.

We wandered out by a thin apartment block that we had once looked at as an

option before settling on 14 Stanley Beach Road. The apartment had been tiny and not much cheaper than the roomy discovery around the corner. Once there had been a branch of the Hong Kong bank on the ground floor, but the space was now occupied by something so uninteresting that we cannot now recall.

Ahead was the once famous French restaurant, Stanley's, where I tried frogs legs (tastes like chicken) but abstained from the escargots. We often entertained visitors there. It was an elegant oasis of Euro-chic in the Orient. But one fears it may now have gone down-market. The pressures of competition, of which there is now quite a lot along Stanley Main Street that lines the harbour. Where once there was Stanley's, one small pub and a furniture store, there is a non-stop line of pubs and cafes. And Stanley's, still in the same building, has been painted a gaudy blue and renamed *The Boathouse*.



Truth to be told we were feeling a bit peckish by now. The Delifrance effect having been completely used up by the adrenalin rush of the bus ride. So our meander towards the shopping complex cum car park at the place where once there was a fishing village, was now made more purposeful by hunger.

The shopping complex proved dull in that modern way that infests so many of its kind. Next to it is Morrison House. What?!

Perhaps as a nod to a growing appreciation of history, Morrison House, which once graced a prominent place near the Star Ferry in Central, was dismantled stone by stone and erected here in Stanley where it serves as a museum and restaurant centre. None of the eating establishments appealed to our snack-oriented hunger so we wandered back to Stanley Main Street and took Chinese food and beer in a warm semi al fresco cafe half way back towards *The Boathouse*.

Behind Stanley's once stood a fish market. I learned there how to order *pomfrit* and *garoupa* from a Chinese hawker, and how to ask her to fillet it for me. Can't remember the Cantonese for any of that now. Although I think the word for a piece of fish was *leung* rather than *go*. But maybe not.



As it turned out, it would not have mattered, because the fish market has gone in favour of a public library. Along the front of the old harbour, new shops, all very modern, have been built, so we walked along inspecting them and bought a postcard.

These shops are very nice. I'm sure the tourists like them. But nothing is the same as the hot, crowded jumble that are the alleys of the old Stanley market just behind this modern row. The old market remains steadfastly touristy in its approach, but I doubt there are any real bargains to be had any

more. And the non-tourist shops, such as the couple of little hardware shops that used to be near the middle of the main alley, are all gone now.

There are T-shirts, clothing of all sorts, shoes, souvenirs, faux jewellery and paintings of Hong Kong galore. Mrs Hunt felt the urge to buy tie-die. And soon it was time to head back to the Mingle. I avoided argument by recommending we take the 260 bus. And this, of course, necessitated a lot of standing in a queue waiting for the driver to open the door of the bus that had been standing there for 10 minutes already.

The 260 hugs the coast almost as far as Aberdeen, passing Deepwater Bay and its golf course and country clubs, offering a glimpse of Ocean Park's cable car, before hanging a right and boring right through the mountain (in a tunnel provided for the purpose). Out we popped on the harbour side of Hong Kong once again, returned to the terminus and walked along the elevated walkways back to our hotel.

After a short rest, checking emails and snoring, Mrs Hunt woke me to ask if I recalled where the Spaghetti House used to be in Tsim Sha Tsui.

"Let's try to find it for dinner," she suggested.

Without the benefit of alcohol, we prepared ourselves to enter the MTR again. And this time we managed to blend easily into the constantly moving throng, even if we both had a better view of where the throng were heading than most people around us. Our point of view allowed us to see that World Vision was still alive and well in Hong Kong. A small thing we had started decades before was alive and well.



Two stations and one change later we popped up in Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui. Very familiar territory now. The Spaghetti House was down one of these side streets. Not Mody Road, for sure. But maybe Humphreys Road? No luck. Just to be sure, we checked out Cameron Road and then headed back to the Holiday Inn on Nathan Road. If in doubt, go up market.

And what a joy this was. A delightful Mediterranean restaurant with a French or Italian chef who personally attended to every table. Whatever we ate (who can remember?) it was uniformly delicious. The service was slick and efficient, typical of Hong Kong's better restaurants. If you dropped a fork, doubtless someone would catch it before it hit the floor, whisk it out of sight and you would find a replacement fork by your plate before your hand drifted below table height.

In such places it seems a tip is a worthy statement.



## Friday

Next morning we wandered over to breakfast once again at Delifrance, feeling like old customers already, and decided we would find the relocated Star Ferry. Mrs Hunt was reluctant to do a lot of walking. It seemed like we had walked a marathon a day since we left France.



But first we had to walk to the Star Ferry. The elevated walkways certainly make this a much more pleasant experience than it used to be down at street level amid the exhaust fumes and noise. Even up in the air it was still noisy, but now you were surrounded by more space, just as many people, and flowers. All along the walkways were boxes of geraniums, begonias and bougainvillea decorating the railings.

The Star Ferry was relocated into a series of new wharves a little further out in the harbour as a result of building the IFC building which towers above any existing

building in Hong Kong. I remember when they built the Hong Kong Bank building behind the Mandarin Hotel. We thought that was breathtakingly tall. Now it is almost invisible in the crowd of larger towers around it. And the IFC tower, the same height as the former World Trade Center in Manhattan, towers above them all.

The erection of this monstrous edifice required more land to be reclaimed around the Connaught Centre making the harbour just that little bit narrower and moving the Star Ferry wharf a little bit closer to its companion on the Kowloon side. If this keeps up you'll be able to walk on one end of the Star Ferry in Central and off the other end in Kowloon without the ferry moving.

Another respectful nod to history can be seen in the way the new Star Ferry terminal looks exactly like the old one. And, of course, the Star ferries themselves *are* the same as the old ones.

The weather was muggy and misty and rain threatened as we stepped off in Tsim Sha Tsui. We were accosted by a pleasant young man who introduced himself as "Jan" with the soft j of Germany.

Jan was a salesman for a property development somewhere nearby called the *Gold Coast*. Although its exact location tested my knowledge of the geography of Hong Kong, it seemed it was out past Tuen Mun on Castle Peak Bay. Wherever it was, Jan assured us, it was fabulous. As a place to stay next time we were in Hong Kong. As a place to invest.

We weren't interested and told him so. He didn't press us but offered a little scratch and win ticket.

"You can win a T-shirt, or maybe a laptop, or a holiday," he explained, "no obligation to do anything."

Sounded like bait to me, but Mrs Hunt had already told him about living in Austria and found out about his wife and kids. Christmas card lists looked to be next.





I scratched my card and behold I had won a T-shirt. I just had to go up to the counter in Ocean Terminal and collect it. No questions asked. OK. Not that I needed another T-shirt.

Mrs Hunt scratched her card and she had won a lap-top. Jan was clearly stunned. Such a consummate actor.

“That only happens once every six months!” he exclaimed with delight. “You are SO lucky!” Then came the catch.

In order to pick up the major prize, Mrs Hunt’s choice of a laptop, a bundle of cash or a holiday, we would have to actually *go* to the Gold Coast estate. A car was waiting to take us there for free. We only had to go for a guided tour of the estate. And they would drive us back. All for free. No coercion, moral or actual (he didn’t say this last bit).

I had to admire the slickness of all this. Especially since we really liked Jan and his friendly manner. Of course, they were selling timeshares or the like and the more they gave us for free, the more we were supposed to feel obligated to purchase something. Furthermore, they would have our contact details and follow up pestering was on the cards.

But the truth was that we already had a laptop, almost enough money, and we were on holiday. And we didn’t want to give up our own lackadaisical agenda for the pressures of a guided tour, no matter how obligation-free.

So we said no thanks to the free trip, no thanks to the money and the laptop, and even no thanks to the t-shirt. Jan seemed genuinely surprised, but didn’t try any harder. And we wished him *auf wiedersehen* and proceeded on our originally intended path into the Ocean Terminal.

As it turned out, we ended up walking a lot further that day than a guided tour of the Gold Coast would have required. And it began in Ocean Terminal alongside which a huge ocean liner, the P&O Arcadia, was moored. Inside the Ocean Terminal had been transformed. Once it had every kind of shop you could imagine. Now it was entirely given over to children’s clothing. And all of it seriously upmarket and, doubtless, high priced. In contrast, most of the people wandering the corridors between the children’s stores were geriatric couples from the ocean liner. Maybe they were buying clothes for their great-grandchildren.



We strolled out of Ocean Terminal and along the promenade that now skirts the harbour all the way along to Tsim Sha Tsui East. Once Hong Kong turned its back on the harbour, but in recent years it has returned to sight. The promenade was busy. Inevitably, a film crew on location. A group of children playing organised games. Students in uniform who said “Hello” as they passed. Some Indian gentlemen escaped from the tailor shops off Nathan Road who tried to interest us with loud persistent helling. *Come on, guys. We used to live here. We know professional interest when*

*we hear it.* Of course there were many other tourists swinging cameras around their necks, just like I was, so the Indian gentlemen quickly looked for easier prey. We strolled and sat from time to time as we went along.

I recalled that there was a Chinese restaurant somewhere in the buildings on the front of Tsim Sha Tsui East and set out to find it. This turned out to be a wild goose chase taking us further and further into shopping arcades and the open plazas of Tsim Sha Tsui East which seemed a hundredfold more crowded than when we opened our first World Vision Hong Kong support office in the Peninsula Centre in 1982.

In the absence of finding any wild geese we decided to catch the train back to Tsim Sha Tsui but somehow only succeeded in walking underground all the way back. By now our body clocks had

ticked past lunch and Häagen Dazs looked very appetising. So we sat at the window table and enjoyed a couple of scoops of cold ice cream. Best lunch we'd had all day.

On the way back onto the Star Ferry we said a cheery *Hello* to Jan, who returned the greeting with a big smile.

But we still hadn't eaten a proper Chinese meal. Could we get Peking duck? Probably not for just two. But it was worth a try. So after the mandatory routine of a siesta back at the Mingle, we took the now friendly MTR two stations towards Admiralty.

A short underground walk from the station is a large mall called Pacific Place. In 2002 I stayed in the Marriott hotel there while consulting with Telstra International for a week. I remembered that there were plenty of places to eat within the mall. My memory, for once, proved reliable.

The Chinese restaurant looked a bit more upmarket for my casual clothes, but Mrs Hunt, who was better dressed on purpose resisted the temptation to tell me so. But no one seemed to object to my baseball cap and polo shirt.

Peking duck was on the menu, but clearly too much for two diners, so we settled for other delicacies without disappointment. Full of lovely food and jasmine tea, we wafted back to our hotel.



## Saturday

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By now we were travelled out. Home beckoned. So, although our flight was not until early evening, we decided to spend it mostly at the airport. After our arrival experience, I organised a car to come and pick us up from the hotel and deliver us to the airport door. Although this cost more than an arm and a leg, it was better than breaking the aforesaid limbs trying to manhandle our bags on the MTR.

We woke as late as possible and dawdled over breakfast at Delifrance, sitting by the 1<sup>st</sup> floor window and enjoying the sight of the old double decker trams decorated with every big brand you could think of—one brand one tram.

The car came at 1pm and in the meantime we read our books and checked our emails. We were getting good at it.

Hong Kong airport is genuinely huge. After checking in with the privileges former frequent travel still afford us, we found the first class lounge was providing a full menu for lunch. For free. Nothing much to do except read, and check emails, so I went for a walk. It took about 45 minutes just to walk around the main waiting area.

When it finally came time for our flight, we found we had another train ride ahead of us. Down a series of long escalators that seemed to approach the earth's core we found a train that zoomed us along to another terminal, presumably still at the same airport. We'll never know, but our plane was out there waiting for us.

Cathay Pacific have a most unusual business class. The seats are arranged in a herringbone pattern. Each seat is a small coffin shaped device, hardly wider than an economy seat but



accessorised with all the usual business class bits. A decent sized TV screen that makes it hard for the cabin staff to hand you a drink. Better headphones. And a seat that folds out flat for sleeping.

But the problems are of two kinds.

First, the seats are designed for one. Mrs Hunt was located across the aisle and we could see one another but not converse. From within your own coffin you cannot see the person beside you. I'm sure this suits individual travellers just fine, but it doesn't work for companions. Especially if your companion would like your advice to make the TV work, or adjust the seat.

Second, we have accustomed ourselves to flying forwards. Not sideways. Doubtless one could get used to flying sideways, just as one can ride trains forwards, sideways or backwards without having a nervous breakdown. But for the moment, my brain thinks seats in planes all face in the direction of travel. Taking off and landing felt distinctly odd.

And our journey would not have been complete without one more, albeit minor, hitch. Cathay Pacific's efficiency meant we arrived in Melbourne just a bit early. The slot assigned to us was still occupied by a flight leaving on time, so they shunted us off to the side and asked us to wait for buses. For some reason, this took a good 20 minutes. The bus that arrived had "Sunbury buses" written on it, and we wondered if maybe that's where they had been called in from. Why it took so long was a bit mysterious. It wasn't like they couldn't see us coming.

