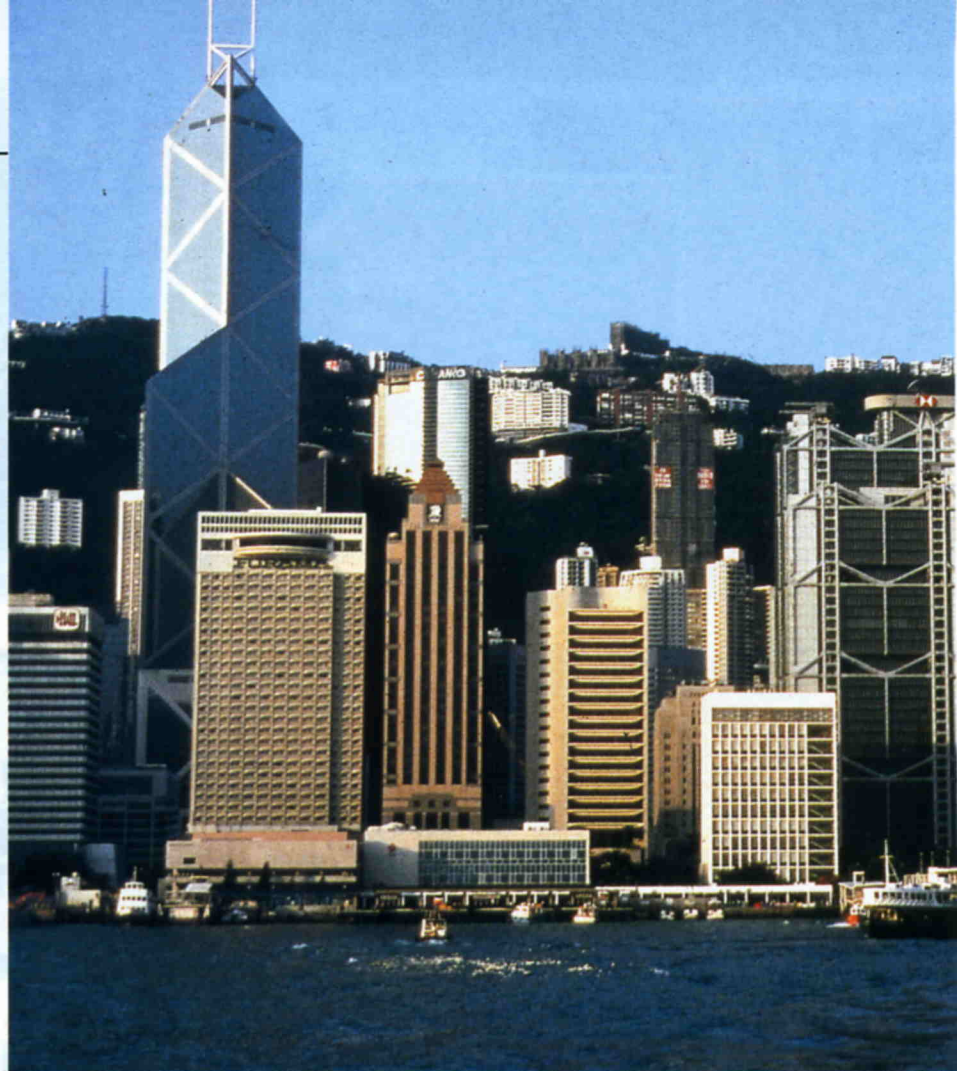


HOLIDAY *in style*

Hong Kong is a land of extraordinary contrasts, from beautiful countryside to neon-lit streets, sharp business suits to waterborne families living aboard junks.

CAROLE FRENCH was captivated by the country.



Captivated by

LOOKING out over the harbour from bustling Kowloon to the awesome skyline of Central is an image which will stay with me forever.

The lights of the Bank of China Tower, the Hong Kong

and Shanghai Bank and the new Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre are almost ghostly against the night sky... a stark contrast to the vibrancy of the colour in Kowloon's Tsim Sha Tsui where neon lights in

reds, lime greens, yellows and pinks are everywhere.

Yes, Hong Kong can feel like an onslaught on the senses but then you only have to travel a few miles to absorb the tranquillity of its countryside.

It's a land of extraordinary contrasts, where there is simply so much to do that every day spent there seems like a lifetime.

My husband and I visited Hong Kong with a fairly loose agenda, we simply wanted to take in the sights, feel the atmosphere, maybe do a little shopping in a country often described as a shoppers' paradise, sample the country's renowned cuisine and enjoy a taste of local, traditional life. We did all of this, and so much more.

The country is roughly

divided into four areas, and, curiously, takes its name from just one, Hong Kong Island.

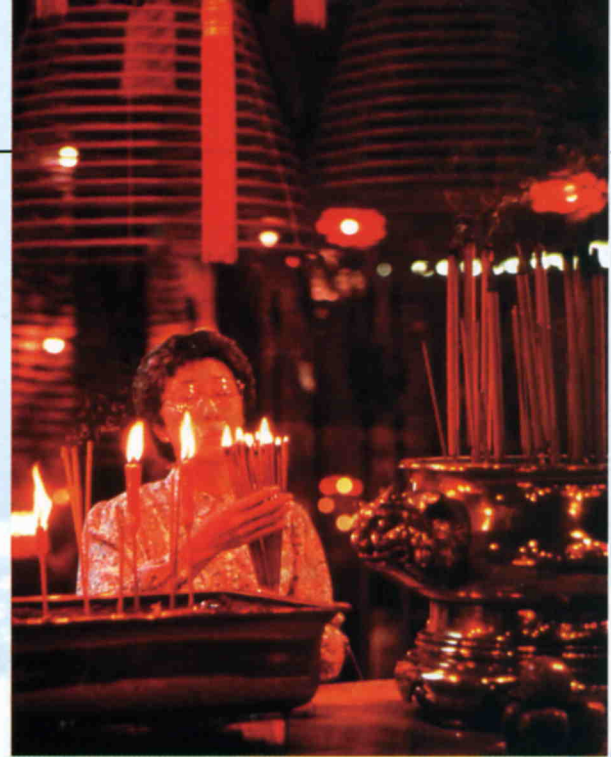
There are over 260 other islands including the beautiful Lantau island where one of the world's largest outdoor bronze Buddhas sits, and which boasts some of Asia's most stunning beaches, harbours and mountains, the Kowloon district with its lively streetlife, swish designer shops, markets and a frenzied nightlife, and the tranquil New Territories where, in some parts, age-old traditions still exist.

RACECOURSE

We stayed in Sha Tin, in the New Territories, overlooking the Shing Mun River and five minutes away from reputedly the world's finest racecourse. The stadium sits around 83,000, and is a must in the social diary.

There's also the Che Kung Temple for a spot of spiritual guidance, the Ten Thousand





The view of Hong Kong Island from Kowloon, left. Man Ho temple, above, one of many spiritual buildings in Hong Kong. Far left, Dim Sin cuisine.

the Orient

Buddhas Monastery which sits on a peak overlooking the countryside of the Sha Tin valley and a railway connection which takes you right up to the Chinese border.

Do make the journey to the border, it's an experience and the transport system in Hong Kong is one of the finest in the world... and the cleanest.

Sha Tin is also where the trappings of tourism are few. Nip out for a paracetamol in a chemist, and you are faced with various remedies pickled in jars. Dine in a local restaurant and you share your evening with real local families. And it's all a ten-minute ride by road into bustling Kowloon.

If we travel back to Hong Kong, which we will do, my husband and I would be tempted to stay in Sha Tin again. Hong Kong is something of an adventure. It can leave you exhausted so it's nice to get back to your

hotel and have a breather.

Hong Kong Island, though, is a must to visit.

Bold contrasts is something of an understatement as you visit the Central Plaza with its business high-rise buildings only to turn a corner and stumble on a market selling traditional crafts. Sharp city suits merge with street urchins, aged trams with limousines.

ORIENTAL

Taking the tram up to Victoria Peak will give you one of the world's most photographed views of the business skyscrapers looking out over the harbour, or take one of those aged trams and head out to Causeway Bay and Wan Chai for real old oriental charm.

Aberdeen, just a few miles south west of Central, is also a must to visit. It is home to some of the world's finest floating fish restaurants, and it was here my

husband and I had a quite memorable meal of lobster exquisitely presented with carved vegetables in the shape of animals..

And Aberdeen, in keeping with the rest of the country, has its own set of contrasts. Along the river from the restaurants you will see numerous residents living on board junks. It's quite a culture shock.

Often throughout my visit to Hong Kong I stood in the street, on a plaza or in a garden and simply observed, storing the image to memory.

Central Plaza was one such image, dining in a Sha Tin restaurant with the sound of Cantonese or Mandarin ringing in my ears was another.

The Star Ferry across the harbour, the Aberdeen residents and Tsim Sha Tsui a few more.

Hong Kong is an enchanting place. It feels like another world and I was, quite simply, captivated by it.

Carole French and her husband stayed at the Regal Riverside in Sha Tin, a riverside hotel with business facilities, a health club, limousine service and restaurants. The Hong Kong Tourist Association can offer guidance for booking hotels.

Flights to Hong Kong are frequent and arrive in the new international airport on Landau Island. It replaced the old airport at Kai Tak.

The most popular time of year to visit is September to the end of February when the weather is less humid.