ROAD TRAVEL REPORT: HONG KONG

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO...

- Road signs are always in English and Chinese.
- Some of the roads in Hong Kong are steep and narrow.
- There are 1,928 km of roads and 524,845 licensed vehicles, giving Hong Kong one of the highest vehicle densities in the world.
- Drivers generally abide by the rules of the road.

ROAD REALITIES

DRIVER BEHAVIORS

- Drivers generally abide by the rules of the road.
- Bus drivers may speed, make quick stops, or turn abruptly.
- Many drivers ignore the motorcyclists on the road. RIDING A MOTORCYCLE OR BICYCLING CAN BE HAZARDOUS.
- Cars are generally well maintained.

GENERAL ROAD CONDITIONS

- Hong Kong has a well-developed infrastructure.
- Lantau Island—much larger and less densely populated than Hong Kong Island—is very hilly and mountainous. It is connected to the Kowloon Peninsula by the world’s longest suspension bridge—the Tsing Ma Bridge—with both a road and a railway.
- Hong Kong Department of Transportation provides snapshots of current traffic conditions on major roads. Updates every 2 minutes. Web: http://traffic.td.gov.hk/selection_e.htm.

URBAN TRAVEL

- The condition and maintenance of urban streets and roads is good.
- Streets tend to be congested during the day. Traffic jams are common, pollution levels are high, and parking is difficult to find.
- Hong Kong is easily toured on foot.
- The Mass Transit trains run frequently and are safe and easy to use.
- The Hong Kong International Airport in Chek Lap Kok, 25 miles from Hong Kong’s city center. Bus, taxi, rail, and ferry service is available to the main islands and the mainland.

RURAL TRAVEL

- The condition and maintenance of rural roads is good.
- Be alert for stray cattle and water buffalo in rural areas.

PEDESTRIAN TRAVEL

- If pedestrian and bike paths run side by side, do not walk on the bike path.
- Zebra crossings: Their locations are marked by yellow beacons (usually flashing). The crossing itself is indicated by black and white strips. Along each side of the crossing there are zigzag black and white markings. Do not walk in the zigzag area; vehicles may need it to stop safely for the zebra crossing.
“Green man” crossings: There are traffic lights that signal drivers to stop and pedestrian lights that signal pedestrians when to cross. The crossing itself is marked by two rows of studs on the pavement. It may also be marked with yellow stripes. Do not start crossing the road if the “Green man” begins to flash. At some crossings a beeping sound accompanies the “Green man” light. A continuous beep tells blind pedestrians it is safe to cross; an intermittent beep tells them to wait.

Do not cross the road within 15 meters of a crossing; use the crossing.

Guard rails and pedestrian barriers are used to separate pedestrian traffic from vehicular traffic where traffic is particularly heavy. The guard rails will lead you to a pedestrian crossing. Do not climb over these rails or barriers.

Footbridges, pedestrian subways and elevated walkways provide the safest means of crossing extremely busy roads. Some footbridges and subways have ramps and escalators as well as steps. Do not cross within 15 feet of a footbridge or pedestrian subway.

In the Central District of Hong Kong many streets have elevated, covered walkways, connecting hotels, office buildings, and shopping areas. On many streets, pedestrians rely exclusively on these walkways.

SEASONAL TRAVEL

The climate is unpredictable. Torrential rains can occur in the rainy season, particularly in June and July. The rainy season typically runs from June to August.

Hong Kong averages 2-3 typhoons per year. They generally occur during the rainy season. A well-developed monitoring and notification system is in place.

Winter can get very cold; freezing conditions are unlikely.

Holidays and festivals celebrated in Hong Kong: Jan.1-New Year’s Day; in Feb.-Chinese New Year; April 5-Cheng Ming Festival; April 6-Day after Cheng Ming Festival; in June-Tuen Ng (Dragon Boat Festival); July 1, 2-SAR Establishment Day; Last Monday in August-Liberation Day; in September-Day following Mid-Autumn Festival; October 1, 2-National Day; in mid-October-Chung Yeung Festival; December 25-Christmas; December 36-Boxing Day.

POLICE ENFORCEMENT

The rules of the road are enforced by a very reputable police force.

All drivers involved in road crashes are tested for possible influence of alcohol.

ROAD REGULATIONS

Traffic drives on the left.

An International Driver’s License is not required, if you have held a U.S. license for at least 6 months. It will be valid for 12 months. After that, you can get a local driver’s license without taking a test if you have been a resident of the U.S. for at least six months.

The minimum driving age is 18. The legal blood alcohol limit is 22 micrograms of alcohol per 100 ml of breath or 50 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood.

If a vehicle has seatbelts, the law requires drivers and all passengers to use them. The police strictly enforce this law.

The speed limit is 50 km/hr in urban areas and 80 km/hr on highways unless they are otherwise marked.

Do not enter a cycle way or cycle lane.

Motorists, who drive irresponsibly and have a road crash in which someone is killed, can be fined up to $6,500, imprisoned for up to five years, and lose their license for a minimum of two years on the first conviction.

Using a handheld cellular phone while driving is illegal. The maximum fine for doing so is $260 US. (Hand-free devices, such as headphones and speakerphones are permitted.) All registered vehicles must carry valid third-party liability insurance.

Specific information on driving permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, and mandatory insurance, consult the Hong Kong Transport Department web site at
All vehicles over 7 years of age must undergo annual inspections.

For detailed information on driving regulations, road signs and markings, and traffic lights consult the Department of Highway’s website: www.info.gov.hk/td/eng/advice/road.html.

ROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

BUSSES

- Public transportation is generally safe. However, the New World First bus union maintains that the average bus driver works from 11-13 hours a day. They often are so exhausted they fall asleep at the wheel.

- The China Motor Bus, although providing the most extensive service, is considered an unsafe bus company.

- Many drivers speak some English; but if possible, have destination written in Chinese characters.

- Buses run throughout Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories.

- Buses, taxis, and the mass transit railway (MTR) are readily available, safe and inexpensive.

- Buses may be very crowded during rush hour. About 90 percent of the population of Hong Kong depends on public transport.

- The ride may be a little rough on older buses.

- Minibuses are red and yellow, travel everywhere in Hong Kong and will stop on request. Destinations are also written in English, but the lettering is very small.

- Maxicabs are yellow and green and have the same design scheme as the minibuses. They have definite routes.

- Tram service is available only on Hong Kong Island.

- Have a good supply of coins; all fares on buses and trams must be paid with exact change – or there is an extra charge.

- The MTR is the most popular form of public transportation. It is rated one of the most sophisticated systems in the world, but tends to be crowded during rush hour.

- The Light Rail Transit system links the northwestern section of the New Territories. It links the cities of Yuen Long and Tuen Mun.

- CityBus, which operates a domestic bus network is considered a reliable company.

TAXIS

- If you have problems on a taxi ride, note a taxi driver’s license number and call the police hotline at 2527-7177.

- Taxis can be hailed. They are easiest to board on side streets, at hotels, or at taxi stands near bus stops. If a taxi is available during the day, it will have a red “For Hire” flag raised. At night, the taxi sign on the roof will be lit.

- Taxis cannot pick up passengers on streets that have a double yellow line. On streets with a single yellow line, passengers can be picked up from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm.

- Many drivers do not speak English. Have your destination written in Chinese if possible.

- Taxis are hard to find during shift changes or if it is raining.

- On Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, taxis are red; in the New Territories, taxis are green.

RENTAL CARS

- Renting a car is not recommended due to the difficult driving conditions.

- Few people use rental cars in Hong Kong. Some rent them for travel to the New Territories.
MOTORCYCLES & BICYCLES

- It is not advisable to ride a bicycle in the city due to congested traffic conditions.
- Bicycling is a relatively safe way to explore the less-populated areas of Hong Kong, such as the New Territories and Kowloon.
- Children under 11 years old must be accompanied by an adult when riding on the roads.

CRIME & SECURITY

- The crime rate is low. Exercise normal precautions for traveling in a large city.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

TOURIST ASSISTANCE

- Emergency calls are free in Hong Kong and can be called at #999.
- Police with red patches on their uniforms speak English.
- The availability of roadside and ambulance assistance is good.
- Directory assistance is free. Dial #1081.
- The Hong Kong Tourist Association office in New York City can be reached at e-mail: hktanyec@hkta.org or website: www.hkta.org.usa.
- Tourist facilities are widely available.

MEDICAL CARE

- Excellent medical facilities and many western-trained doctors practice in Hong Kong.
- Hospitals and doctors do not accept credit cards and usually expect immediate payment in cash.
- Many hotels have a resident doctor.
- 24-hour hospitals include the following:
  - Queen Mary Hospital, 102 Pok Fu Lam Road, Hong Kong, Phone: 852 2855 3838
  - Queen Elizabeth Hospital, 30 Gascoigne Road, Kowloon, Phone: 852 2958 8888
  - Prince of Wales Hospital, 30-32 Ngan Shing Street, Sha Tin, New Territories, Phone: 852 2632 2211.
- US medical insurance is not always valid in other countries. Medicare and Medicaid do not cover medical expenses rendered outside the US.
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- The Hong Kong Tourist Association office in New York City can be reached at e-mail: hktanyc@hkta.org or website: www.hkta.org.usa.

EMBASSY INFORMATION

- Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of The People’s Republic of China and has three geographical areas, which are the New Territories, Kowloon Peninsula, and Hong Kong Island. Many residents speak at least some English.
- Updated information on travel and security conditions in Hong Kong is available from the US Consulate General, 26 Garden Road, Central, Hong Kong. Mailing address is PSC 461, Box 5, FPO AP 96521-0006. Phone: (852) 2523-9011. Fax: (852) 2845-4845. Website: www.hongkong.usconsulate.gov/
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Association for Safe International Road Travel
11769 Gainsborough Road, Potomac MD 20854, USA
Telephone: (301) 983-5252
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