

Hong Kong, China – Day 27 Oct. 24:

We arrived off the Hong Kong coast at daybreak where we bobbed on a gentle swell until the pilot arrived and the Amsterdam proceeded into the harbor. The location of Hong Kong on the southwestern coast of China is shown in the map on the right.



We had been Hong Kong in 2008 and in the meantime it appeared that more large buildings had been added to the landscape on the harbor entrance, like the one shown in this picture on the left.

The sun was shining but the air pollution and haze was thick so visibility in the distance was limited.

We proceeded into Victoria Harbor which separates the Island of Hong Kong from the section known as Kowloon on the China mainland. Travel Guide Barbara was on the ship's PA system and gave explanations of the passing scene. In the Central Wan Chai district on Hong Kong Island there was the expected wall of high rise buildings but a recently added rock sea wall was visible, as shown on the right. It had been put in place to protect small boats from rough water of typhoons.

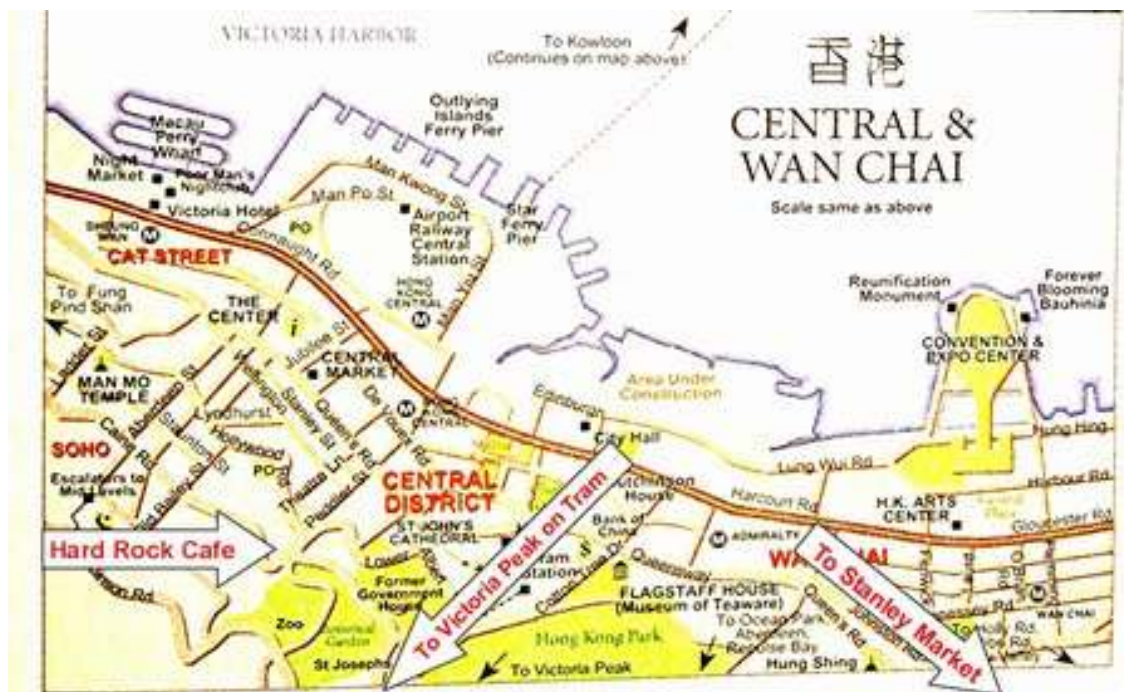
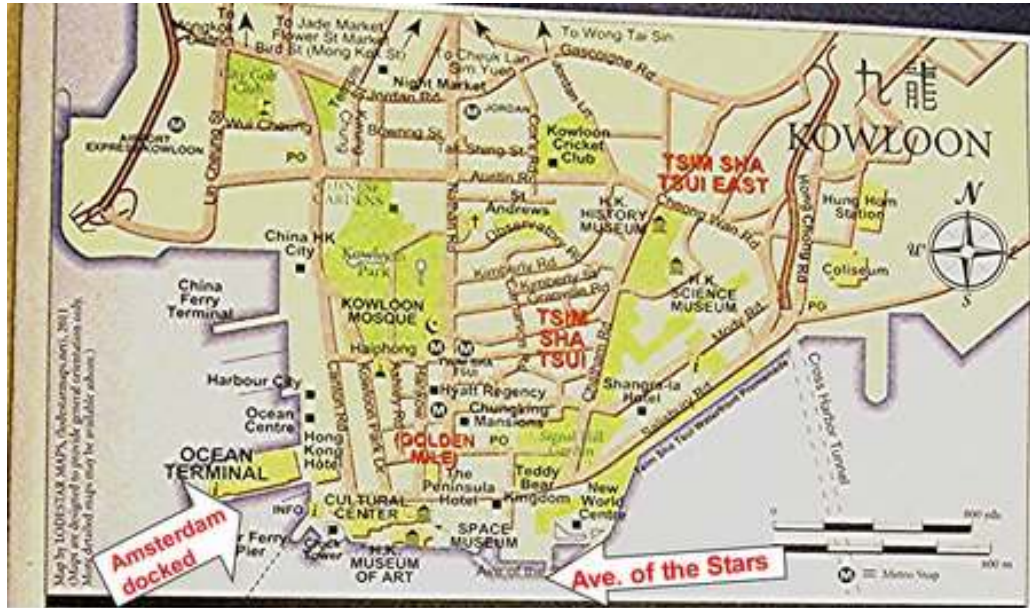


The old Peninsula Hotel on the Kowloon side of the harbor came into view. It has been dwarfed for many years by the high rise buildings around it.

The Amsterdam tied up at the Ocean Terminal in Kowloon. On our prior visits the ship was located on the northern side of the pier so that the view of Hong Kong Island was partially blocked by the terminal building but on this trip we were on the south side, as shown on the right. The incredible buildings and Victoria Peak in Hong Kong across the harbor were clearly visible from the decks of the Amsterdam.



As soon as possible we left the ship with Bob and Esther planning to go up to the top of Victoria Peak on the tram and make a shopping visit to Stanley Market on the other side of Hong Kong Island. Maps of Hong Kong and Kowloon are shown below with some sites of interest indicated.



We decided to purchase tickets from the Big Bus Tours representative on the street in front of the Star Ferry building near the Ocean Terminal in Kowloon. The Big Bus Tours is a Hop-On Hop-Off (HOHO) bus system that covers Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. A 48 hour pass on the “Big Bus” included tickets for the Star Ferry to Hong Kong, the Victoria Peak Tram and a sampan ride over in Aberdeen cost \$40 USD per person. We took the Star Ferry across Victoria Harbor to the main Wan Chai District of Hong Kong. The ferry boat loading and unloading process was not as traumatic as the ferry boat ride in Xiamen, China a couple days ago. The relatively uncrowded loading ramp is shown on the right. Helpful Big Bus employees outside the Star Ferry terminal soon got us onto a bus headed for Stanley Market. We were on our way in the open top



level of a double decker bus with earphones giving us a running description of the passing scene, as shown on the left.



We passed through the canyons of the Wan Chai District and then up Happy Valley where a race track has been located since British colonial days.



A tunnel took us through a foothill of Victoria Peak and we popped out on the southern side of Hong Kong Island looking down on the city of Aberdeen which is famous for the fleet of sampans that have filled its harbor for centuries. Modern development has encroached on what used



to be a simple village of fishermen but the sampans are still on the water and some are available to take tourists on a ride around the Aberdeen harbor.

Near Aberdeen we passed a gas station and were able to catch the price of gasoline as shown on the below.

Gasoline was selling for 5.29 Hong Kong dollars (HKD) per liter. The current conversion rate is \$7.70 HKD per \$1 USD and there are about 4 liters per gallon so the cost of gasoline here is only \$2.75 per gallon. On the other hand, diesel was advertised at 11.75 HKD per liter and that converts to a pricey \$6.10 USD per gallon.



From Aberdeen we took about 15 minutes to arrive at the town of Stanley and the famous Stanley Market.

The Stanley Market is a favorite shopping destination for travelers to Hong Kong. Tour busses were arriving and the crowds thronged into the narrow streets and alleys that were lined with goods for sale.



Today we were disappointed by the reluctance of the shop keepers to bargain and haggle about the price of their wares. This aspect of “retail therapy” is a vital part of the shopping experience in these Asian ports. We felt a little short changed on



treatment we sought. Some shop keepers put up signs with more restrictions than in the good-old-days and there were signs discouraging the bargaining over prices.

We bought some silk ties, silk jewelry bags, and some other incidentals at prices that were reasonable and lower than we might pay in the US. However, the days of super low prices and good deals for volume buying appear to be coming to an end at Stanley Market.

Near Stanley Market was a real estate office with some of their listings shown in the window. A couple of examples are shown here.



The real estate office didn't look particularly upscale but the house prices seemed high to us. For example a 2780 square foot home had an asking price of 43 million HKD (\$5.6 million USD) and a 3200 square foot residence was priced at 180 million HKD (\$23.4 million USD).

After spending about two hours at Stanley Market we boarded a HOHO bus, using our "Big Bus" passes and headed back to the main Wan Chai district of Hong Kong. Our next adventure was to catch the tram that takes people up the steep slope of Victoria Peak to the area at the top where the city can be viewed. We worked our way through the process of catching the tram to Victoria Peak. We merged with packed crowds of other tourists of all nationalities, all armed with busy cameras. The tram ride went smoothly but on the way we relearned that viewing the city and taking pictures on the way up the mountain is difficult because of fairly dense shrubbery on each side of the tram tracks. There are plenty of viewing and photo opportunities at the top so a good view on the way up is not essential.

At the top end of the tram line we got off in the huge terminal buildings filled with souvenir shops, food courts and restaurants. We worked our way through that maze and out into a courtyard. We took a pathway that led to a place where we could look down over the city. As on prior visits to this site we were disappointed by the rather tacky display of souvenirs for sale along the pathway, as shown on the right.



The view of the city, although filtered through a



thick haze was amazing. Here are a couple photos from the pathway on Victoria Peak.



Some others were taking in the sights from an old fashioned rickshaw, as shown on the left.

The pathway from the tram terminal is not actually at the very top of Victoria Peak. This photo from the pathway taken towards the terminal shows the mammoth building with people viewing the city from the roof and the actual top of Victoria Peak covered with antennae and some nearby high rise apartment buildings.



After about an hour we worked our way through the waiting line and took the tram back down Victoria Peak. Esther was looking for some memorabilia from the Hong Kong Hard Rock Café. We got some directions from a friendly “Big Bus” representative and boarded a bus going in the right direction.

During the short ride to the Hard Rock Café we got a couple pictures showing that pet care must be a thriving business in Hong Kong.



We came to our bus stop and got off. After a few moments of

confusion, Esther spotted a sign in a stairway and we were hot on the trail to the Hong Kong Hard Rock Cafe.



The affable Hard-Rock clerk had a complete inventory of goods and Esther's shopping list was soon taken care of.



We were pretty thoroughly lost in the heart of Hong Kong at this point and with energy quickly ebbing we hailed a cab and were able to get back to the Star Ferry pier without any trouble. Going into the Ferry building Barbara saw her opportunity and we got the confirming evidence that her library card had arrived in Hong Kong.



We got back to the Amsterdam for dinner. Later we left the ship and went a short distance to the elevated promenade over Victoria Harbor next to the Star Ferry building in Kowloon. We and a lot of other tourists were gathered there to see the famous Hong Kong “Symphony of Light” show that takes place every night at 8pm. On queue at 8pm the light show started with music and lights flashing on the buildings across Victoria Harbor in the Central District of Hong Kong.

Here are couple pictures of the show. We were disappointed by the event. Our camera settings were probably not the best for this night-time show but there really wasn't much to see. The green lasers we tried to show in the picture below were seldom in evidence. The Hong Kong light shows that we saw in 2007 and 2008 were much better. Check out the Hong Kong entries in <http://2007gwv.thestansfields.com> or www.2008AsiaAucruise.thestansfields.com.



Although the light show was less than we had hoped for, the day of touring Hong Kong and vicinity was fun and we were able to do everything on our agenda. Tomorrow will be more relaxed without a fixed itinerary and we are looking forward to that.