

# BLOWING UP HONG KONG



written by  
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# INTRODUCTION



My first memory of Hong Kong is actually a memory of watching *The Man With The Golden Gun* on television. I don't know why, but something about those

brief glimpses of the city streets, Victoria Harbor, and the Peninsula Hotel struck a chord deep within me. Perhaps it was the way that, in my youth, my father repeatedly regaled me with tales of high adventure in "HK" (all stemming from a week-long furlough during the Vietnam War). Maybe it was because our expensive-looking family room stereo setup (which he shipped back to my mother before he returned to south Vietnam) came from the city's hidden high-tech bargain alleys and no matter where we lived we always had the most exotic system on the block. Regardless of the reason, all I knew was I had to go there someday. I wouldn't be satisfied until I had.

In 1994, I finally got my chance. I had just arrived in Taiwan after graduating from university and needed to make a "visa run" (that's where you leave one country because your travel papers are on the cusp of expiring, go to another country, and then return to the country you just left to get new papers at passport control). Hong Kong was my turnaround port of choice, and as soon as I made the heart-stopping descent into Kai Tak International Airport I fell in love with the city.

There are few cities in the world that truly live up to the illusion portrayed in movies and on television. They're either disappointingly small, appallingly rundown, or shockingly mundane. Hong Kong is one of those places that lives up to its fictionalized grandeur. It's everything you've ever seen on film and then some. The neon lights, the petrol fumes, the jam-packed sidewalks, the towering ultra-modern skyscrapers resplendent in their bright lights—all of it fulfilled and then exceeded every single one of my expectations. That's saying a lot when you think about it.

When the inimitable Will Hindmarch asked me to write a travel book about Hong Kong for *Feng Shui*, I couldn't believe it. "Are you kidding?!" I asked. "I would love to!" I was so excited, in fact, that the very next day I scheduled a "research trip" to Hong Kong. So, in March of 2004, I flew back to Hong Kong to start work on this book.

Hong Kong has changed in the ten years I've been coming here. Strangely, however, it hasn't changed a whole heck of a lot. Although I was lucky to have experienced it before and after the handover back to China, I can't really point to a lot differences in the before and after. There are a lot more Mandarin Chinese-speaking tourists than before, and there's more of a pollution problem on the streets and sidewalks. The cops don't seem as trim or fit as they did when the British ruled. But other than that, the city has remained essentially unchanged. That's one of the magical things about Hong Kong. The skyline may shift every six months as new buildings replace slightly older ones, and some of your favorite stores or pubs may go the way of the dodo, but at heart everything is still the way it's always been. Hong Kong's character doesn't lie in its scenery or superstructure. It lies within its unique people and culture.

I suspect Hong Kong 150 years ago was much as it is today: a trade culture, a fast-moving business culture, a loud culture of social interactions carried out at the top of one's lungs. It's also where the best characteristics of British, Indian, Nepalese, Filipino, and countless other immigrant worldviews have blended over the decades with the affable Cantonese ways of Southern China. It is continually evolving.

Although I've altered real locations and places in the city to mimic the cinematic spirit of *Feng Shui*, I have endeavored to remain true to Hong Kong's character and soul. There's a lot of ground to cover when you write a fictionalized travel book about one of the most densely packed cities on Earth. Hopefully, I covered enough to give you a good feel for the city and its people. Don't constrain yourself to what's written here, though. Like the real-life city, the Hong Kong of your game should be a dynamic, vibrant, and highly malleable place. Change the locations to suite your needs, as we have. Move buildings, transmogrify entire neighborhoods and districts, and blow the hell out of everything in sight. The city can take it. It thrives best on change. Do with it as you will.

You just might find it pays you back in spades.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Chris Jones is pretty sure he invented "Hawaiian pizza" while attending the University of Missouri at Columbia. He thinks it should therefore be called "Missourizza." When he's not sweltering in the heat of St. Louis, he can be found traipsing around Southeast Asia, causing a ruckus and getting thrown out of seedy gangster bars.

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