

Taiwan, Hong Kong & Macau

Triple Your Pleasure

By Kathy Chin Leong



Tourism stereotypes prevail when it comes to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Ask typical visitors and they'll remark that you go to Taiwan for eating, Hong Kong for shopping and Macao for gambling. Really?

To pursue cultural and adventurous pursuits, these destinations deliver a surprising journey that rival hotspots in Europe and America.

Taiwan

The island country of Taiwan has always seemed to hide in the shadow of Hong Kong, a metropolis with an international reputation. If you have never been to Taiwan, which is more low key, chances are, you'll want to

return because one visit is not enough.

Fly into the capital of Taipei and check into the Grand Hyatt Taipei where the concierge and reservations staff speak English to help you get your bearings. Head to the National Palace Museum for meticulous jade carvings, pottery and large-scale screens from ancient China centuries old.

Here's something the typical tourist may miss. The government has established two major "creative parks" representing incubators for design and innovation. The Songshan Cultural and Creative Park, a former tobacco factory, was turned into an inspiring art tank in 2012. Designers, artisans, chefs, musicians and thinkers participate in gallery shows, pop-up boutiques, concerts and more.

A 20-minute subway ride away is the Huashan 1914 Creative Park. The place is smaller but it is also another gem in the rough. Repurposed winery structures from the early 1900s show-cases a theater, boutiques and cafes.

The evening beckons with the infamous night markets. Touristy yes but no one should leave the country without wandering the insanely-packed outdoor booths at the Raohe Street Night Market, the oldest one and the mother-of-all-attractions at Shilin Night Market with over 1,000 stalls. It's all about the exotic food that is classic Taiwan.

For a deep dive into ecology and adventure, book a trip with My Taiwan Tours which specializes in English-speaking guides and various thematic tours throughout. My 27-year-old guide spoke impeccable English and was not only knowledgeable but catered to our every need and concern. Our Classic 5-Day nature tour included Taroko National Park, Sun Moon Lake and Alishan Scenic Area. All three sites are among the chief natural wonders and getting a guide is essential.

Hong Kong

A one-hour flight from Taiwan, Hong Kong has been revered as an international finance center and shopping Mecca. But if all goes as planned, the Cantonese-speaking island is destined to become the Culture Capital of Asia.

Museums, galleries, art-centric hotels and restaurants are elevating Hong Kong's status as an art lover's heaven. In addition to some 55 art galleries, the eclectic city island is home to more than 30 museums.



Macau

Just as hotels and restaurants in Hong Kong feature cinematic flair, artful presentation is clearly on tap with the food scene in Macau. Once a Portuguese settlement like Hong Kong, it is now a Special Administrative Region or S.A.R. of China with its own currency. In this city, a one-hour ferry ride away from Hong Kong, dim sum never had it so Instagram-worthy than at La Chine restaurant at the new Parisian Macao hotel.

The Parisian Macao Hotel may not have the ancient artifacts you hanker for but take it for what it is: big, bold and beautiful. With 2,951 rooms and suites, it is a grand edifice with a half-scale replica of the Eiffel Tower.

The Parisian is a city within a city. It features the Spa'tique spa with barber and hair salon along with 12 treatment rooms. Then there's the couples' room with a soaking tub and dual tables and in the women's locker room? A luxurious chandelier above a large whirlpool tub.

Shoppers will go dizzy hitting some 130 shops and foodies will go nuts over the ten-plus restaurants on site. Kids and adults can frolic at AquaWorld, a water slide with swimming pool. The 1,200-seat theater hosts concerts and events.

Among the largest include the Museum of History and the Heritage Museum.

High-end hotels go all out giving designers voice. Décor melds the historic and modern at Hotel Indigo found in the working class Wan Chai district.

Meanwhile, classic art finds a home at the Inter-continental Hong Kong. This fengshui-inspired hotel features more than 300 original contemporary ink brush paintings. The lounge's wood table centerpiece, carved by a Beijing artist, weighs two tons and is shaped as part whale, part grand piano.

Across the waters at the Ritz-Carlton in the International Commerce Centre, the tallest skyscraper in Hong Kong at 1,588 feet with knockout design. Go to Ozone which holds claim to being the highest lounge in Asia at Floor 118. It takes three elevators to get to the pinnacle but the visual feast is worth the ride.

One Harbour Road, a restaurant on Floors 7 and 8 of the Grand Hyatt hotel is "the place" to toast special occasions. Visitors are whisked to an imaginary 1930s Shanghai mansion amid a large mosaic fountain.



When you want to taste and see the historic Macau, take a cab to historic center for the hilltop Ruins of the Church of St. Paul founded by 17th century Jesuit priests.

In addition to the ruins, the surrounding shops and old-time eateries with Portuguese egg tarts and meat jerky make for fascinating walking and snacking.

This triple volley of a vacation with three island communities provides visitors with a deepened cultural understanding of Asia.