



The sprawling Hong Kong skyline is a spectacular sight that visitors can savour in style at the Ritz-Carlton's OZONE — the world's highest rooftop bar. PHOTOS: MHAIRRI WOODHALL

# HONG KONG FOR THE FAMILY

With some flexibility and planning, bustling city can be a wonder world for kids

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

Touring Hong Kong on a three-day layover with a six-year-old sounds like fun, right? Although a slightly laughable concept, with some planning, a flexible schedule and an open mind, it's an entirely possible feat.

Sure, half of our itinerary centred on theme parks, but we managed to slip in a few cultural experiences, as well.

From tackling one of the happiest places on Earth to discovering landmark attractions on a whirlwind sightseeing tour, we conquered most of Hong Kong's family-focused highlights and lived to tell the tale.

## HONG KONG DISNEYLAND

Thanks to its tiny footprint, minimal crowds and accessible location — just 10 minutes from the airport — the world's smallest Disney park is a perfect fit for families short on time.

To maximize the magic with Mickey and the gang, we spent a night at the park's newest resort, Explorer's Lodge. Book a sea view room, and receive priority passes to three attractions and advance seating to Festival of the Lion King — an action-packed live musical production.

We cashed in our priority passes to watch Donald Duck's fantastical journey in the larger-than-life 4D-movie, Mickey's PhilharMagic; ride the high-speed, hair-raising coaster Big Grizzly Mountain Runaway Mine Cars; and explore the haunted Mystic Manor — a park-exclusive attraction with eerily realistic animation.

Hong Kong Disneyland also offers a FASTPASS for two rides: Hyperspace Mountain, the Star Wars themed roller-coaster, and the hugely popular Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh. It's best to visit these attractions early to check them off the list.

To help plan your day, download the Hong Kong Disneyland app for interactive maps, attraction wait times, parade details and locations of character appearances.

## OCEAN PARK

Located on the south side of Hong Kong Island, Ocean Park is a unique mash-up of wildlife exhibits and themed attractions. While we found the park to be much busier than Disneyland, it's still a worthwhile day trip for families visiting Hong Kong. Creating a game-plan is critical for touring Ocean Park.



Mickey and Minnie greet young guests at Hong Kong Disneyland, just 10 minutes from the airport.



The Festival of the Lion King is an action-packed live musical production at Hong Kong Disneyland.

Upon arrival, make a beeline to the Grand Aquarium, to view the more than 400 species of fish and four-storey marine tank.

Afterward, check out the giant pandas in the neighbouring Sichuan Treasures enclosure, then board the Ocean Express train to visit the park's Summit attractions. Here, the spotted seals and walrus at the North Pole Encounter stole the show and the Rainforest's Rapids raft ride was a close second.

Return back to the park's Waterfront via the open-air Cable Car for aerial views of the park and China Sea. Complete your adventure by wandering through the themed streetscapes of Old Hong Kong that showcase architectural styles from the

1950s through the 1970s. Before departing, grab an ice cream or some local street food from one of the stalls.

## STRESS-FREE SIGHTSEEING

If navigating Hong Kong's bustling streets with children feels daunting, catch a ride with Big Bus Hop-On Hop-Off tours. With three routes to choose from, and English-speaking commentary sharing facts about the area's culture, history and architecture, it's an easy way to discover Hong Kong's iconic landmarks.

We opted for the 90-minute island tour that included the Central Star Ferry, Causeway

Bay, Victoria Park and the Victoria Peak Tram. Pack some busy books or colouring pads to help occupy younger kids if they lose interest.

As passengers wear headphones to listen to the pre-recorded commentary, noisy children have minimal impact on other guests. Buses frequent the nine stops every 30 minutes, which also allowed us to pop out for a quick break when our daughter felt restless.

## SKY-HIGH VIEWS

The sprawling Hong Kong skyline is a spectacular sight and there are a few options for taking it in.

Head to the 60-metre-high

Observation Wheel, located at the Star Ferry's Central Pier 7, for sweeping views of Victoria Harbour. Afterward, grab a frozen treat at the on-site Happy Cow coconut ice cream stand.

For a more dramatic panorama, and a local history lesson, take a ride on the Peak Tram and stay for the Hong Kong Sky Tour — an interactive exploration of the island's architecture, neighbourhoods, history and culture.

Or, skip the crowds and savour in style at the Ritz-Carlton's OZONE — the world's highest rooftop bar. The views are unparalleled, and it's a top spot to watch the multimedia illumination show, A Symphony of Lights.

Children are welcome between 5-9 p.m. It's best to arrive early if you want to nab a window seat.

With its craft cocktails and Asian tapas, OZONE is by far our favourite place to enjoy Hong Kong's jaw-dropping skyline.

## TOURING TIPS

Avoid summer's heat and humidity by visiting Hong Kong between November through March. For accommodation, find a centrally located hotel, with a great pool.

We chose the JW Marriott, which included complimentary buffet breakfast and a light dinner in the lounge with my Gold Elite status.

After a day of exploring, the seventh-floor outdoor pool, with skyscraper views, was a welcome oasis. The hotel's Discover Hong Kong package, with BigBus, Star Ferry and Peak Tram passes, is perfect for families looking to save on sightseeing. While the MTR rail system, located directly below the JW, is simple to use and taxis (cash only) are readily available, we found Uber to be best when commuting with a child.

## ARRIVE RESTED

Cathay Pacific's partnership with Air Canada and WestJet provides a seamless option for travellers. We checked our bags in Calgary and picked them up at our final destination.

If it's in your budget, splurge on premium economy. The additional legroom, elevated footrest and wider seat, with lower recline, allowed us to arrive rested and ready to explore.

Watch for premium economy sales or book a standard seat and bid for an upgrade one week prior to your flight for even bigger savings.