

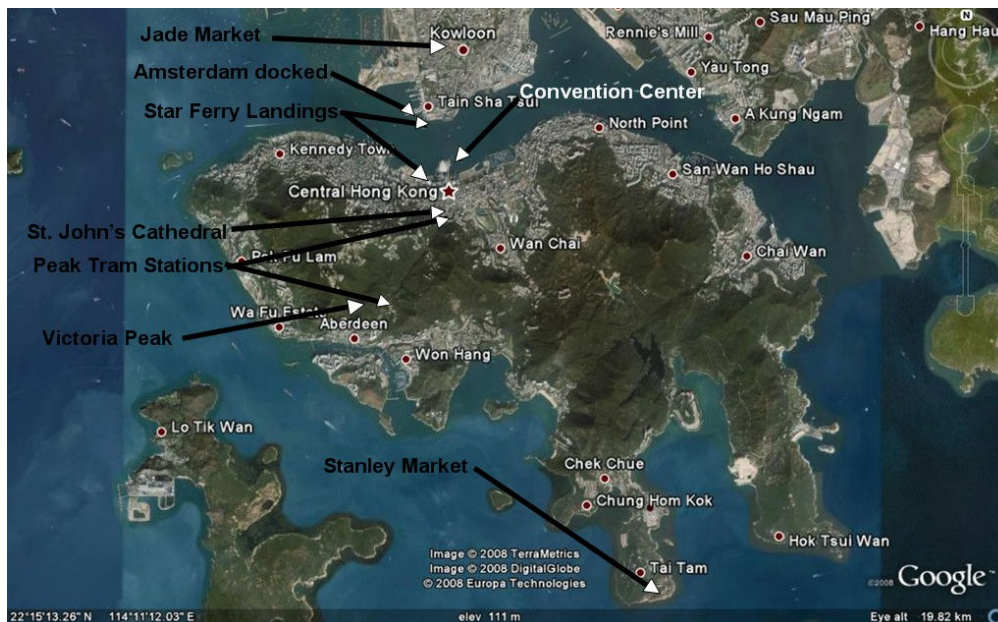
## Day 22 (Saturday 10/11/08) Hong Kong

About daybreak the Amsterdam was beginning the approach to Hong Kong Harbor. We had clear skies with high humidity, just like home in Tennessee, and the temperature was climbing above 80 degrees.

Hong Kong was a British dependency for 156 years until 1997 when, in accordance with a long standing treaty, it was passed to Chinese sovereignty as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Hong Kong is located on the southeast coast of China and is a major commercial and tourist center for the region. This map on the right shows where the city is located.



The Amsterdam docked at the Ocean Terminal in Kowloon. Ocean Terminal is a huge mall which has all the facilities needed by cruise ships and their passengers. Several cruise ships came and went while we were docked for the two days. The map below shows where the Amsterdam was docked on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong Harbor. It also shows most of the sites of interest



that we visited while we made our way around Hong Kong and Kowloon.

Hong Kong consists of 235 islands including the main island of Victoria and also a section of mainland which contains the city of Kowloon. The Amsterdam was docked by

8am at the Ocean Terminal near the Star Ferry Terminal in Kowloon.

As we entered the Hong Kong harbor the distinctive profile of the Convention Center came into view and we documented that Barbara's Library Card had arrived in Hong Kong.



One of the first things we did was make cell phone calls back home to Oak Ridge. We got assurances directly from our daughter-in-law, Becky, that she was doing fine after her back surgery. Calls to the rest of the family got us filled in on other happening on the home front. These calls have to be carefully timed now that we are exactly 12 hours ahead of Oak Ridge time. If we call in the late afternoon, on our time, it could mean a sleepy and grumpy person might answer the phone on the other end. We have to call in the early morning to catch people in Oak Ridge at reasonable evening hours.

After good reports all around from the home front we felt a lot more relaxed for the rest of the day's activities. We wanted to go out to the Stanley Market during the morning hours. Stanley Market is located several miles southeast of the city of Hong Kong in the town of Stanley and consists mostly of open air displays of merchant wares. The prices of goods are lower than in the main part of Hong Kong so for people bent on shopping it is a prime destination. We teamed up with our friends Dick and Anne and caught a taxi to Stanley Market (180 \$HK ~ \$26 US including tip each way) . The route to Stanley Market passed through the tunnel under Hong Kong Harbor and then another tunnel through the mountain that separates Stanley from the city of Hong Kong. We had a nice conversation with the driver on the way. Based on what he told us the price of regular gasoline in Hong Kong is about \$10 US per gallon. However, from decals on most of the taxis it appears that they burn liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). T. Boone Pickens should be happy about that.



We arrived at the Stanley Market scene which we remembered from the visit we made in 2007. The appearance of the place had not changed a bit but after a few unsuccessful attempts at bargaining prices down on some trinkets we concluded that Stanley Market was a shade more upscale than in 2007. The

prices were still reasonable but most items were labeled with a price that was not negotiable. On the right is a photo of a typical scene in Stanley market.

We went in different directions from Dick



and Anne but ran across them as they made their way through the Stanley Market Stalls. Anne was showing off the handbag she got at the Cruise Critic meet-and-greet get-together when the cruise started.

We had agreed on a two hour shopping spree in Stanley Market and that was just barely enough time to cover all the nooks and crannies of the place. We joined up with Dick and Anne then negotiated for a taxi ride back to the ship and arrived about 1pm in time for lunch.

After lunch we decided to make our way across Hong Kong harbor and up the ancient cable car tram to the top of the landmark Victoria Peak. We winged it on our own in order to test our explorer's skills.

We headed for the Star Ferry landing which was just a few hundred feet from the Ocean Terminal where the Amsterdam was berthed. Each of us got a ride across the bay to Hong Kong City for 2.20 HK or about 30 cents US money each way. Later we learned from our table mates that as senior citizens we could have walked through the turnstiles free. Oh well, we wish all of our lessons in life were so inexpensive.

The ferry had a lot of business but was not really crowded. The ferry boats, like the one shown on the right, reminded us of the old ferries that we used to take from San Diego to Coronado Island just for fun on a night out on the town.



Here is a photo of people trouping down the gangway onto the ferry.



The seating area was not crowded and there was a pleasant breeze through the passenger compartment on the way to the Hong Kong side of the Harbor.



The ride took about 15 minutes and we were spilled out into the Star Ferry Central Terminal along with a few hundred other folks.

We needed to walk 3 or 4 blocks to reach the lower terminal of the tram that would take us to the top of Victoria Peak. To our pleasure we found that there is a beautiful mall along the path we had to take. The mall hallways were lined with upscale department stores and banks along with glass display windows and polished marble. The mall was divided into sections connected by a series of bridges across the busy downtown streets. Walking in the mall was a real treat and the bridges allowed us to walk all the way across the business section of Hong Kong without going down to street level. Here are some views of the bridges we took and the congested street scenes below.





On our way across Hong Kong City through the busy passageways we noticed a curious thing. Although vehicle traffic proceeds on the left side, the pedestrian traffic seemed to be right hand oriented, just like back home in the US. Our statistical sample size may be too limited here but it seemed fairly consistent with observations in our walking around Hong Kong and Kowloon.



We particularly liked seeing the two decker buses and trams plying their way through the traffic in the streets below.



After leaving the mall and the pedestrian bridges it was just a short two blocks up the hill to the lower terminal of The Victoria Peak Tram. Finally we saw the fountain that marked the entrance to The Peak Tram Station.

We purchased our round trip tickets at the senior rate of 15 HK dollars (~\$2 US each). The Victoria Peak Tram was built in 1888 by the British and has operated ever since. It has two cars with one car on each end of a cable that runs up the mountain to a

motor capstan and then back down the mountain to the other car. The cars run tracks and balance each other. As one is being pulled up the mountain the other is being let down the mountain. There is a double set of tracks for a short



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distance in a section half way up the mountain where the two cars are diverted onto separate tracks while they pass each other. There was already a group of people waiting for the tram to arrive so they could board. We waited a few minutes and then the tram pulled in to the station.

We boarded with the rest of the crowd and were able to find seats but a few folks were left



standing as shown in the photo on the left. The original purpose of the tram was to haul people to and from their homes on the mountain and the city below. Now the tram is strictly a tourist facility taking people to the top of Victoria Peak where they view Hong Kong, take photographs, or have a meal-with-a-view in the many restaurants. Everyone seemed to be in a jovial mood and we enjoyed leaning back in our seats and being pulled up the very steep grade. First we passed office and apartment

buildings but then the population density dropped off and there was mostly tropical vegetation and large homes on either side of the tracks as we glided up the mountain.

When we got to the station at the top of the mountain everyone rushed off and began their sight seeing in earnest. There was a wide plaza between restaurant buildings and then a path that led out to a vantage point where Hong Kong could be viewed from above.



Similar to Shanghai, the mist and air pollution in Hong Kong was pretty intense. The constant glare from the haze made it difficult to get really good photographs with our simple camera.



Here are some that we got.

The picture below shows the top of Victoria Peak with the antennae marking

the highest elevation. To the left of the antennae is the upper terminal building for the Victoria Peak Tram with people standing at the railings to take in the view of Hong Kong.



With the magnificent view of one of the

major cities of the world in front of us we were happy that the day had been so good for a trip up Victoria Peak.



Finally we had to catch the tram going down the mountain and we arrived

at the base terminal. On the way back to the ferry landing we passed by St. John's Cathedral and there was a fund raising Christmas Card & Handicraft Fair in progress.



The chapel was packed with all kinds of items so we spent a few minutes browsing through the tables.

We thought that the vigorous nature of what we saw at St. John's Cathedral was a hopeful sign for religious tolerance in the Communist People's Republic of China.



We then retraced our steps to the ferry through the mall using the pedestrian bridges.





As we approached the ferry terminal we took a picture of the massive amount of construction taking place between downtown Hong Kong, the Convention Center and the Star Ferry Central Terminal. Although lately we have heard much of the international collapse in real estate and other investments, the building process on the Hong Kong water front appears to be in high gear.

We boarded the Star Ferry and returned to the ship in time for dinner. The Ocean Terminal Building had people posted at key spots with signs indicating the way to the Amsterdam. It turns out that many of the passengers who sailed with us from Seattle or Japanese cities were getting off the ship in Hong Kong. The night before we had talked to a lady in our hallway who was lamenting the fact that she had to pack her stuff and be ready to leave the ship today. However, there were also about 200 passengers joining the Amsterdam in Hong Kong. There was much processing of luggage and people going on at the gangway of the ship. We made our way through the security check and were happy that we were able to enjoy Hong Kong without having to go through the checking-in or checking-out procedure.

Tomorrow we have another day in Hong Kong and after a full night to rest up we will be ready for some serious sight seeing.