

Hong Kong: Much more than a competition conundrum

Living in this great city has made me realise how one's lifestyle can change drastically depending on where they live and how they choose to live. This piece is my homage to Hong Kong, a city I have been grateful to discover, that is much more than a financial epicentre and competition conundrum.

As a small clarification regarding Hong Kong, for all those who may think otherwise or hold misconceptions regarding it, Hong Kong S.A.R. is not a country, although it has its own Legislative Council, currency, and passport and, in a sense, language, which is the predominantly spoken local language of Cantonese. And no, Cantonese is not a dialect, but rather, it is a language as much as Mandarin. However, one need not know either to have great time with friends, family or even roam around alone in the city.

This mega city, as seen in the eye of the world, is always running ahead in the financial race and also in the race to perform the best academically. An image is created of the magnificent Hong Kong Island skyline with big names such as HSBC, J.P. Morgan and Bank of America Merrill Lynch, or that of a local student with their head in a book for a majority of the hours in a day. These assumptions and expectations are not false. The skyline is equally blinding as it seems in pictures, and there are indeed students in the city working hours to get the perfect scores.

However, much like most realities, there is a part of the tale that remains untold or under-represented. So, I am here to clarify myths about this fast-paced, never stopping city with the longest elevator in the world and perhaps working hours as well.

Hong Kong, in fact, is the perfect place for a weekend getaway. It is not just about rigorous academia or competitive financiers. It is a place of historic significance and perhaps the perfect example of a city where east meets west. A Hong Konger is quite a dynamic individual - one of the largest consumers of western media, and simultaneously as that of the belief in what the Chinese call 'feng shui.' They are one of the first to catch on to the newest global fashion trends, walk down

Queen's Road with brands such as Louis Vuitton and Prada, to small Chinese fashion boutiques, or alternatively, go for a spree in the ridiculously loud and bright Causeway Bay - the ideal destination for teenage shoppers and kids. At the same time, people in Hong Kong can stop everything; cancel any reservations at one of the many Michelin star restaurants in the city from Aberdeen Street Social to 99 Noodles in Tsim Sha Tsui on the Kowloon side.

However, this city, not only in a cultural sense, but also in a geographical one, is much larger than most may think. If one takes a ride on the unbelievably efficient and timely Hong Kong MTR System, arguably the world's best public transport,



they will be amazed to find out that, just by crossing the magical Star Ferry with a spectacular view of Victoria Harbour, with the Hong Kong Cultural Centre on one side and the concrete jungle of Hong Kong Island on the other, this whirlwind of a city has so much more to offer. There is delectable range of street food, starting from egg waffles to sui mai, and endless rows of Chinese manufactured toys, porcelain teacups, calligraphy, and much more are available at the cheapest price (with a good bit of bargaining of course) in the 'place for tourists' - Ladies' Market Mong Kok. By contrast, there are also relaxing pier views and small cafés such as Little Cove Espresso, selling the best Avocado bagels ever, at the end of the

New Territories in Sai Kung, one of the best destinations for foodies willing to sprinkle the extra hundred HKD.

Now, one may think it must be so suffocating living in this uber competitive city, skyscrapers everywhere, with a serious bubble tea fever; one must long to see nature, be it by the beach, going for hike, or a boat ride. Well, luckily, Hong Kong provides even those. From the numerous hikes throughout the city, to trips via boat or cable car to Lantau Island, where sits the Big Buddha, or the small island Cheung Chau, this city can take one on a rollercoaster ride when it comes to scenery. Speaking of which, rollercoasters are also available at Hong Kong's very own Disneyland or their version of a Six Flags, known as Ocean Park.

From the hazy spectrum of lights and deafening music at the clubs and restaurants at Lwan Koi Fung (the city's clubbing district), to the peaceful sound of Buddhist prayer at Lantau Island, or waves crashing on the shore at Big Wave Bay, Hong Kong is the complete melting pot of culture, style and food; a great weekend getaway.

Hong Kong is not necessarily a place one would call a 'city of dreams.' Rather, it is a city of reality, where cultures integrate, endless drafts get thrown into the trash can in hopes of coming up with the perfect résumé, and where ideas are challenged for the better, and people are able to witness the profound fusion of feng shui and fun.

Hong Kong might breathe competition and ambition, but at its heart are those traditional Chinese values dating back a thousand years, and an exterior that screams and concretises the phrase ville des lumières. It is a place that is so much more than an enigmatic financial and competitive arena. And although this metropolis may not be where everyone thinks of going for a small visit; one thing is for sure - if one wants to go enjoy an extravagant city, but relax and rewind and indulge in flavourful food by the beach as well, Hong Kong is undeniably a place unlike any other to embark upon that voyage.

By Shayeza Nawar Walid
Photo: Shayeza Nawar Walid

Tracing the historical footsteps in Islam - Madinah

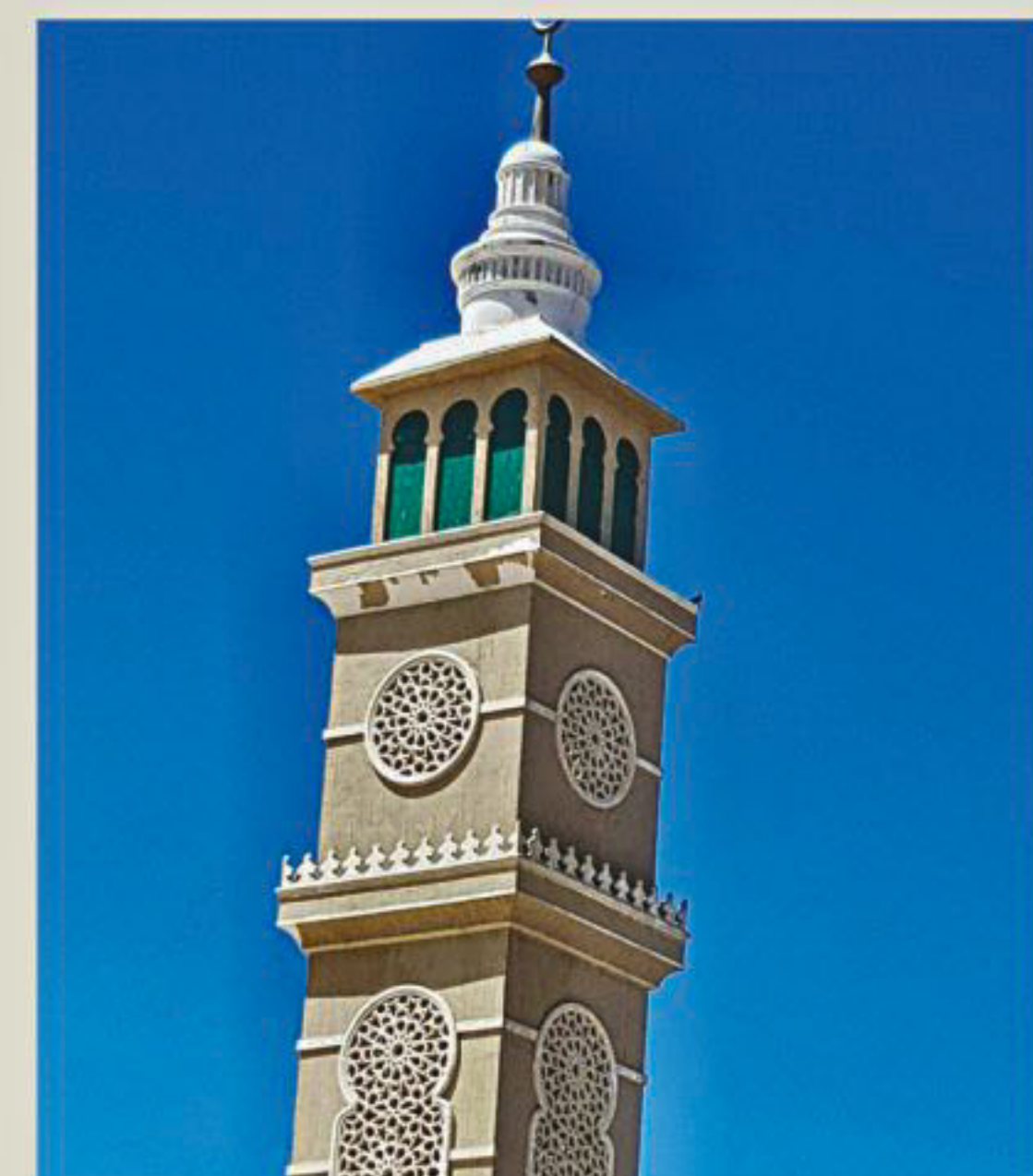
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THE UHUD BATTLEFIELD

After their defeat at the battle of Badr, the Quraysh of Makkah assembled in the valley of the Uhud mountain with numerous soldiers. The Muslims suffered some loss, but they were the ultimate victors. There are the graves of over 70 Sahabis here. The main battle was on the red mountain known as Uhud. In this battle, the Prophet (pbuh) lost his teeth, and suffered other injuries.

THE FIRST JUMMA OF THE PROPHET

On one Friday, after leaving the Quba mosque, the Prophet (pbuh) was met with the villagers of Banu Salim bin Auf, which was a village nearly two and a half kilometers away from Masjid-ul-Nabawi. The villagers requested for Him



to remain there and honouring their request, the Prophet (pbuh) said his first Jumma prayers there. Thus, the mosque became known Masjid Al-Jum'ah.

TURKISH ARCHITECTURE

The Muslim Ottoman rulers play a crucial role in setting up Makkah and Madinah. They considered themselves as the "Servants of the holy cities- Makkah and Madinah," as part of their former titles as rulers. During Hajj, they bore the valuable gifts from the Ottoman Emperors and the general people of Turkey. Makkah and Madinah at that time were not filled with so much grandeur. Even today you will see plenty of buildings made during the Turkish rule.

FOOD AND OTHER THINGS

I fully enjoyed the Labang from both Makkah and Madinah. Also, the stores in Madinah have good fruits and tasty varieties of bread. The Pakistani and Indian hotels have the typical oily and spicy foods. The Turkish shawarma, pizza, burger, milk, bread and bananas also tasted great. For buying dates, Madinah is the best place.

There are plenty of mosques in Madinah, many of which are related to the history and life of the Prophet (pbuh). If you have time, do checkout the Madinah Museum. Madinah also has a number of established educational institutes, namely the Islamic University of Madinah, Taibah University, and Madinah College of Technology.

Translated by Iris Farina
Photo: Shahana Huda