

# DRINKING TEA IN CHINA



Correspondent photos by PEGGY NEWLAND

A Victoria Harbor junk boat sails at sunset overlooking Kowloon and Hong Kong Island.

## Local woman finds herself in busy Hong Kong

By PEGGY NEWLAND  
Correspondent

When I drink tea, I usually rip a Lipton teabag from its wrapper, plopping it into a coffee cup, add some tap water, and microwave it on high for two minutes. Then, I dip the bag in and out of the hot water and toss the spent tea into the garbage.

“That’s not tea,” my Chinese friend Sara grimaces. “That’s just gross.”

She tells me of the tea culture in Hong Kong. That loose leaves gathered from wild, often aged trees are grown without chemicals or processing. Sara dumps my tea down the sink. “Puer,” she states. “You need puer – the fermented tea of the ancients. Or else a good oolong.”

I look into my empty mug and decide, why not go to Hong Kong to find these elusive loose leaves? Especially when Sara tells me that it’s a quick flight of “only” 15 hours from Boston to Hong Kong, direct on Cathay Pacific. “They have welcome cocktails on all flights,” she adds. “And their seats go flat.”

Coming into Hong Kong at dawn (after a surprisingly good night’s sleep propped up in a bulkhead seat with a flip-switch footrest) is psychedelic. Lush hillsides lit pink and monolith buildings, layer upon layer, one atop the other, like the pocked white grin of concrete giant. I stare down at the nest of a city already alive and moving –



The multi-colored fruit and vegetable stands of Mongkok.

the harbor filled with ferries and junk boats, oil tankers and jet-skis. Soon, I’m in the hive of the airport.

Not trusting myself to manage the Hong Kong subway at 5:30 a.m., there’s arranged transportation to Langham Place, a hotel surrounded on all sides by the teeming markets of Mongkok. Open-air butchers compete for space with fruit vendors hauling wooden bins of purple mangosteen, pink wax

apples, fuzzy loquats, fuchsia dragonfruit and bushels of kumquats and lychee. One worker, shirtless and tattooed in red and black dragons, sleeps standing up in an alcove. Cars and buses, push carts and bicyclists careen past, swerving around women hauling bunches of orchid and lotus flower to the markets lining street after street. Langham Place sits like a calm oasis from sensory overload. With a

cool marble lobby, hidden alcoves of crushed velvet, an outdoor grotto of red lanterns and palm trees, four restaurants of varying cuisine and decor, and a rooftop pool with 360-degree views to Lion Rock and Kam Shan Parks, Victoria Peak and Kowloon Bay, one could stay immersed in panorama and comfort.

After a two-hour nap in my white-washed room with feather pillows and its view to Fa Hui Park and Golden Plaza, I fuel up on meat dumplings, jasmine tea, Jiang (hot, sweetened soy milk), Youtiao (Chinese fried dough), and spinach Baozi steamed buns. I decide to search for the puer tea.

Mongkok means “busy corner” in Cantonese, and I find busy corners, busy stalls along Tung Choi Street – aka “Goldfish Market” – which is filled with dizzying displays of multi-colored goldfish swimming in plastic bags and aquarium after aquarium of every type of tropical fish, sea horse, and jellyfish.

“Puer tea?” I ask a woman selling knockoff Gucci handbags, sun hats and sundresses.

“Fa Yuen,” she says, pointing toward the intersection of neon Nike signs and blinking Adidas sneakers in flickering fluorescent. Browsing through the sport shoe stores and electronic gadget shops on Sai Yeung Choi Street, I soon find myself on Yuen Po Street, where parrots and parakeets, songbirds and blackbirds tweet in stacked bamboo cages. A woman buys two matching

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## Road trip redo: 1915 Ford taken cross-country

Drivers re-create trip taken by auto pioneer’s son

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) – Drivers from the Historic Vehicle Association are re-creating a cross-country road trip taken 100 years ago by the son of auto pioneer Henry Ford with a drive starting Friday.

The trip begins at the Ford estate in Dearborn, where Edsel Ford and six friends set off on their trip before taking up the responsibilities of adulthood, the Detroit Free Press and MLive.com reported. Edsel Ford, then 21, would go on to help lead Ford Motor Co.

“It was one last taste of freedom before life and family obligations took over,” Matt Anderson, curator of transportation at the Henry Ford museum

in Dearborn, told the Free Press.

“They slept out in tents they secured to the cars. They carried pistols and rifles because of wild animals and criminals along the route. It shows there was a romanticism to the road trip even then,” Anderson said. “It wasn’t about the destination as much as the journey and the company.”

The original trip included a Model T as well as a Cadillac and a Stutz, a pair of luxury models. They covered more than 4,000 miles. Edsel Ford died in 1943 at age 49.

“It was quite a trip. They were all buddies and they had a ball,” said 93-year-old

Horace James Caulkins III, whose father, Horace Caulkins Jr., made the trip.

“Ford dealers along the way introduced them to interesting local people,” Caulkins III said.

This year’s trip includes a 1915 Model T with a top speed of 35 mph. Casey Maxon and Mark Gessler are embarking on the monthlong journey.

“Should be exciting,” Maxon, a historian for the Historical Vehicle Association, told MLive.com. The purpose is to commemorate “the importance of the automobile in our culture, how it shaped our roadways, how it shaped our nation, how in 1915 it all kind of kicked off,” he said.



Photo by TANYA MOUTZALIAS/THE ANN ARBOR NEWS/MLIVE.COM via The Associated Press

Historical Vehicle Association President Mark Gessler, right, and Heritage Specialist Casey Maxon drive around Henry Ford’s Fair Lane Estate in Dearborn, Mich. The two drivers in the Model T along with a following crew will set off on a month-long road trip recreating Edsel Ford’s cross country tour in their own 1915 Model T Touring Car for the centennial of this historic road trip.



# China | Skyscrapers turn into Las Vegas-style lightshow of neon

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blue parakeets, and I watch her walk past a koi pond in a side park full of tree peony and azalea.

With afternoon heat hovering close to 90, I find a cafe and have the local iced coffee/tea, which is just what it sounds like: cream, coffee and black tea over ice. I add a Gai Mei Bao, or coconut bun, because there's always room for coconut. The cafe is cool but frenetic, so I head back to the peace of the rooftop pool before a sunset cruise and dinner at T'ang Court near Kowloon Park and the Central Wharf.

Riding on a junk boat in Kowloon Harbor with a cocktail in hand is a skill I do not seem to have. There must be familiarity of bracing yourself from the multi-leveled waves crashing against all sides of the boat at once, an understanding that you must hold onto something rope-like, and the capability to not careen overboard from the railless confines of a deck. We're like pirates eating canapes and slugging chardonnay as the blazing sun sinks deeply into the thrashing sea.

Once off the junk boat, I wobble on sea legs, through crowds of families hovering on the Central Wharf as the Hong Kong skyscrapers turn into a Las Vegas-style lightshow of neon yellow and green, gyrating orange, electric pink, and flashing cherry red. The spot-lit lasers exploding from rooftops give an extraterrestrial feel to the scene.

The T'ang Court is a serene refuge of hushed, gold brocade, dimmed chandelier, and plate after plate of five-star cuisine. We start with a trio of sliced cod fish with lemon and honey sauce, Wagyu beef, and crispy-fried pumpkin and potatoes in taro nests, then head into sauteed prawns and crab roe accompanied by crabmeat puffs. Wines, like Anna's Secret and Sant'Elena, are poured. Then, stuffed bean curds with egg, spinach and morel mushrooms, fried spare ribs in strawberry dressing, and a signature baked seafood rice in cream sauce.

That evening, I fall into a sleep of stupored happiness.

The next morning, I decide to get some professional help in my quest for custom teas. Talking with Alka Datwani and Titania Shum at the hotel, they point me in the direction of a private tour of the Sheung Wan district, where Cantonese cuisine is local mom-pop noodle shops mixed with authentic medicinal tea shops and artisanal dim sum tastings. I meet with my guide for the day, funk-trendy Johannes Pong. I tell him about Lipton teabags and my friend Sara's reaction the microwaved brew in a coffee cup. He laughs and tells me not to worry.

"Tieguanyin," Johannes states reverently. "From Anxi, Fujian province." He nods. "Even better."

We head out for the morning and stop first at Fung Shing, a local Cha Chaan Teng cafe. Think Miss Wakefield Diner in Hong Kong. Carts of steaming dim sum roll past as grandchildren sit with grandparents eating bowls of Haam Seui Gok (salt water dumpling) and Aleng Yue Beng, or fried fish cake, bouncy in its consistency, and flavored with cilantro and tangerine peel.

"Now, we explore," Johannes says after our snack, and we head back into the twisting streets and walk through backways and alleys, up stairwells, past antique shops, dried seafood stalls full of abalone and scallop, and the herbal markets.

"Bird nests," Johannes points to a locked glass window in one of the shops. Individual nests are lined up like rare jewels. "For soup," he explains. Harvested from limestone caves, where swift birds create nests from solidified saliva (yes, saliva), these are expensive treats. Believed to be highly nutritious and good for the libido, each sells for about \$2,500. I decide to bypass the bird nest and spring for a five-flower tea at a sidewalk tea bar, or Leung

## IF YOU GO

**CATHAY PACIFIC AIRLINES:** www.cathaypacific.com. Four direct flights weekly from Boston to Hong Kong. Ask for Hong Kong Super City Tour.

**LANGHAM PLACE:** Mongkok, Hong Kong. 555 Shanghai Street, Mongkok. http://hongkong.langhamplacehotels.com.

**LITTLE ADVENTURES IN HONG KONG:** 510 Wayson Commercial Building, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong. www.littleadventuresinhong

kong.com.

**MONGKOK DISCOVERY TOUR:** Book through the concierge at Langham Place, Mongkok.

**LAMMA ISLAND:** Take local ferry from Pier 4 along Central Ferry Piers. Make sure to go to the top deck for breeze and views. Especially at sunset and at night, when the Hong Kong Harbor is lit up like Las Vegas.

**AQUA LUNA:** Junk Boat cocktail cruise on harbor. www.aqualuna.com.

Cha Pou. Like a coffee shop, only with cooling teas made from herbs and animal products like turtle shells and jellies, my kudzu tea is delicious and supposedly helpful for detoxing the liver.

"Here," Johannes says, as we walk through a shaded lane. A tea shop, tiny Fukien Tea Co., crouches quietly in old-school elegance. Tea leaves, pressed into oblong cakes and sold in individually wrapped paper, fill one cabinet, and the well-worn flooring shows generational use.

Owned by the Yueng family, who specialize in Puer Bing (stone or hand pressed teas) and Seui Siin (high-fired charcoal roasted teas), this is authentic Hong Kong. Mr. Yeung invites Johannes and me to sit at his back room tea table as he prepares first Tieguanyin, a younger green Oolong tea with a woody aroma, and then Seui Siin, an aged tea roasted for over 70 hours.

Because of the prolonged aging and fermenting of teas, each cup is smoky, strong and without any type of bitter aftertaste, even after over 15 infusions of one pot of tea leaves. We drink Gongfu-style in tea cups called Gaiwan, and when we reluctantly leave the shop, we carry wrapped packs of Wuyi and Tieguanyin teas.

That evening, instead of fine dining, we head to the ferries and cross the crazed harbor to the peaceful confines of Lamma Island. Known as Bok Liu Chau, the island is the ruggedly rural cousin to Hong Kong and Kowloon.

Situated in a cove and surrounded by beaches and granite hills of scrubby brush and pine, this seems like Bar Harbor on the South China Sea. We walk past open-air stalls and point out the live, multi-colored seafood, and the restaurant, Rainbow, cooks our choices.

With the sun setting over Sok Kwu Wan peak and Pic Hic Bay, it's a perfect evening. Lanterns are lit on tables and we dine on Garoupa fish, garlic prawns, and fried crab. For the ferry ride back to Kowloon, I pick up some dragon's beard candy (Chinese cotton candy), iced gem biscuits with sugared icing and an egg tart.

The next morning, it is time to cook dumplings with the Michelin-starred executive chef from Ming Court, Mango Tsang. First, we tour his kitchen, and it's a dance hall of fired barbecue grills, diced greens, roasting ducks, and the intent precision of artful cuisine.

Unfortunately, my cooking skills are laughable: pork leaking from too-thinly rolled dumplings and flour caking my cheeks and a lumpy mess that falls on the floor. Luckily, after a cleanup in the bathroom, I sit down for a nine-course luncheon.

Each course is genius, with a flair toward color and texture. We start with chilled silk tofu and truffle in gold leaf (almost too beautiful to eat), then enjoy drunken shrimp dumplings, flower blossom spring rolls, and Alaskan king crab dim sum. Next is Chinese black fungus and five-spice pork paired with a Hubert Moret burgundy and soon, the signature silky egg white shrimp and the optional roasted pidgeon in lemon juice with sauteed greens. Dessert is mango, coconut, and pomelo in sago cream with black sesame bean curd pudding and a chilled cheese tart. Puer tea is poured, and I drink it knowing the history, tradi-

tions, and aging process.

Flying out in the evening, Victoria Harbor is shrouded in clouds as the sun sets over the peaks of Discovery Bay. Below, the Junk Boats careen, and Hong Kong lights up for the evening.



Photo courtesy of LITTLE ADVENTURES IN HONG KONG

Fruit stands full of fresh mangosteen, jackfruit, pomelo and guava.

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