

# Postcards

TRAVEL  LEADERS®

WINTER 2013

## EXPLORE THE SOUTH PACIFIC

AUSTRALIA, FIJI  
AND NEW ZEALAND

## RIVER CRUISING

SEE EUROPE'S  
GREATEST CITIES  
LIKE NEVER BEFORE

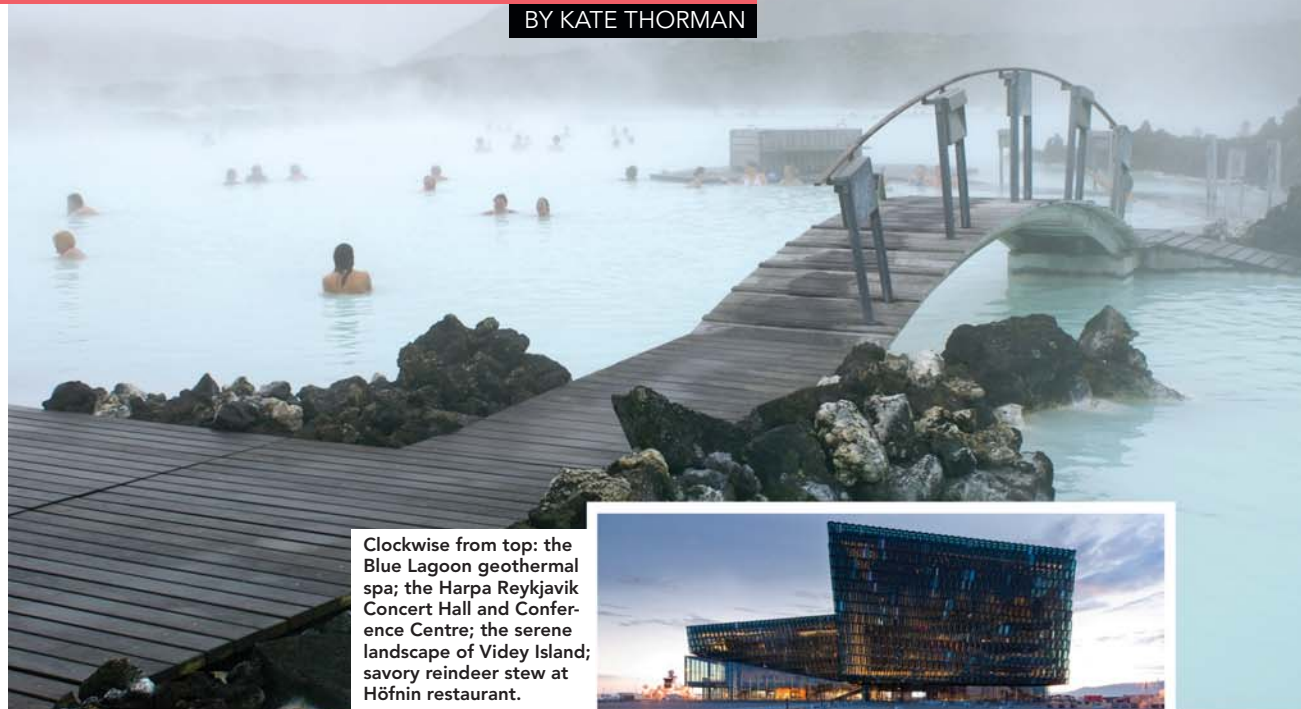
## HONG KONG

AN INSIDER'S  
GUIDE TO THIS  
BOOMING  
EASTERN PORT



# 36 Hours in: *Reykjavik*

BY KATE THORMAN



Clockwise from top: the Blue Lagoon geothermal spa; the Harpa Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Centre; the serene landscape of Videy Island; savory reindeer stew at Höfnin restaurant.

For a tiny island stranded in the middle of the North Atlantic, Iceland inspires a disproportionately large sense of awe. Natural wonders such as the aurora borealis and gigantic waterfalls fit right in with the Viking-descended society's belief in magical creatures. In the capital of Reykjavik, the landscape and history fuel a modern city with an almost painfully cool arts, food and music culture, which has bred both Björk and Sigur Rós.

Leave your bags at the sleek Hilton Reykjavik Nordica, whose glass-and-wood design and stunning views remind you that this is a Scandinavian country. No two destinations in Reykjavik are more than a mile or two apart, but stay right in the middle of everything at the chic Radisson Blu 1919 Hotel, located in an elegant, historic building.

Start your exploring on Laugavegur Street, its colorful buildings packed with art galleries, cafés and trendy boutiques. At Kraum, peruse a curated collection of works by local artists and designers. Pick up fashion by young Icelandic designers at Kiosk, and visit Nostalgia & Spúútnik for vintage shopping. Beat the cold with traditional Icelandic outerwear from 66°North and the Nordic Store.



Brush up on art and architecture at the Reykjavik Art Museum Hafnarhús. Catch a performance at the new Harpa Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Centre, the country's first real orchestral space and an architectural marvel. No trip would be complete without a soak in one of the city's 16 thermal baths; head

to Laugardalslaug to swim with the locals or marvel at the Blue Lagoon, an easy stop en route to the airport.

When you need a break, Reykjavik's coffeehouse culture provides numerous charming outposts to warm up in, including Kaffismiðja Íslands, Prikid, The Laundromat Café and Grai Kotturinn. Come mealtime, get your fill of traditional Icelandic cuisine—think reindeer, puffins and all kinds of seafood—in stylish and cozy settings at spots such as Sægreifinn, Silfur, Dill Restaurant and Höfnin.

The sun may go down early here in the winter, but rather than going to bed, Reykjavik's weekend nightlife is such a big deal that it has its own name: *riúntur*. Join the locals at lively spots such as Boston, b5, Dillon, Bakkus and Kaffibarinn for drinks, dancing, making new friends, and, possibly, even a Björk sighting. After all, this is Iceland, where anything can happen. **TL**

**Contact your Travel Leaders agent to book your trip today.**

# EASTER

From its sprawling marketplaces to the lure of its cos



turn the corner off the bright waterfront boulevard and stop short, my eyes fighting to adjust. Behind me—I look back to check I’m still in the same city—a new harborside promenade faces sleek high-rises branded with names such as HSBC and Philips. Before me is a dark alley, its cobblestoned path rapidly getting narrower. Unidentifiable dried roots overflow from pungent shops, and red hangings embroidered with gold Cantonese characters announce each establishment. It would seem I have found Chinatown. Except that I am in Hong Kong.

Surprising as it may be, experiences like this—perhaps disorienting to a first-time visitor—are common in Hong Kong. A city of contrasts, this longtime port on the South China Sea is as cosmopolitan a city as any, with Cantonese and English just two of the many languages both spoken and represented in place names throughout the city. Here, cultures have coexisted and overlapped for so long that they can no longer be separated and individually defined.

It’s no wonder, really, considering this 423-square-mile area has

been a major trade center between East and West for centuries, and, over the last 200 years, been controlled by both Great Britain and China. A British colony for nearly 160 years, Hong Kong came into its own in the 20th century before being ceded back to China in 1997. As a special administrative region, the city has maintained most of its autonomy, allowing it to have a distinct identity separate from that of mainland China.

Even within its borders, the city-state’s numerous neighborhoods—divided amongst a peninsula and numerous islands by Victoria Harbour—stand out from one another, defined by the cultures that have settled there over the years.

Small, mountainous Hong Kong Island is home to such varied areas as Sheung Wan, the traditional merchant neighborhood into which I stumbled, as well as Central and Wan Chai. These days, while Sheung Wan’s Bonham Strand West still houses tiny local shops, the area has become a trendy spot for contemporary art galleries and boutique hotels.

Neighboring Central boasts the antique stall-lined Hollywood



# N PORT

metropolitan hub, Hong Kong is Asia's city of contrasts.

BY KATE THORMAN



A panoramic view of the Hong Kong cityscape; below, the swimming pool at the Ritz Carlton.







The Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

Road, skyscraper designer malls such as IFC and The Landmark, and carefully planned outdoor spaces such as Hong Kong Park. Here, too, can be found international hotels, including the elegant Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong and the opulent The Landmark Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong, as well as the Asian outposts of European designers. But just when you think Central is overly developed, it turns out to also be the gateway to the towering and scenic Victoria Peak, accessible by way of the world's oldest funicular.

Continue east from Central and you'll stumble into Wan Chai, whose dilapidated colonial buildings have only recently seen preservation efforts. Looking for the Blue House—a bright blue 1920s tenement building that now houses a cultural center—I unexpectedly stumble upon The Pawn, a stylishly restored former pawnshop that now serves up pub food with a Chinese twist.

Across the harbor, in Kowloon, new juxtapositions appear. Aboard the hundred-year-old Star Ferry, I peer past the waterfront hotels—including the impressive, award-winning InterContinental Hong Kong—toward the maze of neon lights behind. Tsim Sha Tsui is home to landmarks such as The Peninsula, where afternoon tea is a post-colonial must, as well as the International Commerce Centre, where The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong boasts a 118th-floor swimming pool and spacious modern rooms. Acclaimed eateries like the elegant Hutong sit just blocks from the famous Temple Street Night Market, known for its abundance of bright lights, greasy street food and designer knockoffs.

Even deeper into Kowloon, in Mong Kok, foodie attractions like the Michelin-starred Tim Ho Wan dim sum restaurant find a foil on Fa Yuen Street, home to factory outlets for big name foreign designers.

Not to be pigeonholed as a big city, though, Hong Kong reinvents itself yet again the further you venture from the harbor. The New Territories boast a bucolic, tropical beauty inconceivable amidst the downtown skyscrapers. Getting off the metro at Tin Shui Wai, in search of the Ping Shan Heritage Trail, I wonder yet again if I am in the same city as those sleek high-rises and dark alleys. I follow the trail past canals and through quaint enclaves, perusing flea markets and lunching on local specialties like *Poon Choi* at a pace unheard of on the harbor.

Back in Central, it's tempting to break Hong Kong's idiosyncrasies into an East-versus-West identity battle, except that the next day, as I wander around the neighboring, residential mid-rises, I stumble upon a mosque. How can I be surprised? This is Hong Kong. **TL**

**Contact your Travel Leaders agent to schedule your trip of a lifetime to Hong Kong.**

LET'S  
GO ▶

Explore China with **Globus** on its **Essence of China with Hong Kong** tour. This 10-day adventure will begin in Beijing with stops in Xi'an and Shanghai before crossing over to Hong Kong to commence this memorable journey. In addition to walking along the Great Wall of China, other highlights include viewing the Terracotta Warriors, a noodle-making demonstration, a Peking Opera performance and a show of the music and dance from the Tang Dynasty. Several dates are available April through October, 2013. From \$2,989 per person (airfare not included).





The Pavilion of Absolute Perfection in the Nan Lian Garden; below, incense coils in the Man Mo Temple.

