



HONG KONG CITY OF LIGHT

TRAVEL

A THOUSAND POINTS OF LIGHT SEEM TO SURROUND US
 IN A CITY THAT CAN'T WAIT FOR NIGHT TO FALL. ONCE DUSK DESCENDS,
 HONG KONG IS THE SHINING STAR AMONG ASIA'S METROPOLISES.
 AND WHATEVER THE NIGHT BRINGS—OUR CAYMAN S IS READY:
 IT MAKES ITS WAY THROUGH THE GLITTERING CITY, DANCING THROUGH
 HONG KONG'S STREETS AT ITS VERY OWN SPEED OF LIGHT.

By Elmar Brümmer Photos by David Breun



Glowing red, the magma shoots upward, culminating in an alarming orange high up in the night sky and raining down in yellow streams—these are the images that flash on television screens the world over as air traffic in Europe is virtually shut down by the cloud of ash blanketing its skies. But that need not worry us, for while the sky is just as brightly illuminated as we set out in our Cayman S to cruise the streets of Hong Kong, the only “eruption” here is the explosion of Chinese characters lighting up the nighttime sky.

Bright lights, big city.

I wouldn't want to be a traffic light in Hong Kong. Here a green light, so eagerly anticipated elsewhere, is reduced to a tiny speck of jade, just one in a dazzling array of glaring lights that awakens fantasies and expands on them, only to let them die down again. Even Las Vegas pales in comparison to Hong Kong's nightly light show—glittering proof of

the metropolis's special status among Asia's cities. It is a modern take on Chinese fireworks that brings the slumbering high-rise giants to life, outlines them against the night sky, and covers them with decorative patterns, lending them a certain lightness and elegance. A sort of skyscraper fashion show that gives even the most monotonous of apartment blocks a pretty face. Geometry class in school might actually have been fun with all these neon diagonals and blinking shapes.

Hong Kong is at its most breathtaking when the night is still young and there is a bit of light left in the sky. The dense clouds that rolled in from Victoria Peak in the afternoon are soon dispelled as night descends—the air is no less humid, but the atmosphere nevertheless seems lighter somehow. Between seven and eight in the evening the glass fronts of the office towers begin to glow, and neon signs dot the streets like so many brightly hued flowers. The city is transformed and the skyline takes on a magical allure.

**A CHAIN-OF-LIGHTS REACTION:
LASER, NEON, AND LED NEVER HARMONIZED BETTER.
THEY CREATE THE ILLUSION
THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS DUSK OR DAWN. ARE THE STARS
IN THE SKY ACTUALLY REAL?**

The mood of nocturnal Hong Kong is unique, serene, and dramatic at the same time. The neon signs are an integral part of its special flair: both familiar and foreign, the city almost has the electrifying feel of an early James Bond movie, with an eroticism all its own; you can practically feel the hum of the neon lights. This vibrant metropolis of eternal bustle and change struts its stuff as proudly as any peacock or beauty queen ever could, a thousand blinking messages vying for our attention. Look at me! Stay here! Choose me!

I wonder, amidst these bright lights, what UV index nocturnal Hong Kong has. “Illuminate”—what a lovely word

(let's leave aside the question of who has to pay the electric bill for the moment). The nighttime Symphony of Lights is the pride of Hong Kong, a spectacle that has made the Guinness Book of World Records. Nathan Road, traversing Hong Kong's shopping district from north to south, is as dazzling as ever—Hong Kong's “Golden Mile.” Gold? There is plenty of that, plus every other shade of the rainbow—to the nth degree. A year-round tinsel town, a rainbow-colored United Nations of Neon in which skin shade does not matter. Here it is easy to forget the drab gray of everyday routine—or even that there is a color gray at all. If you think you have seen all the hues that life's bouquet has to offer, Hong Kong is bound to show you a few you ▶



THE FACE OF A BOOMTOWN:
THE NIGHT HAS ITS OWN FACE IN ANY CITY, BUT IN HONG KONG IT IS
MADE UP LIKE ACTORS IN THE OLD-TIME PEKING OPERA.
THE SHOW DOES NOT REALLY START TILL THE LIGHTS GO DOWN.

did not even know existed. It is as if there is some colossal being using an endless palette of neon crayons to scribble over the city at whim.

As we cruise the streets, guided by our Bi-Xenon headlights, I cannot help reflecting on what a perfect match Hong Kong and our Cayman S are: the need for speed manifested in the speed of light. Nightlife is street life—like a video clip on fast forward. The night has a thousand stories to tell. Turn a corner and a whole new script awaits. Flashing images reach out for us like the tentacles of a gigantic octopus and bounce off the windshield of our Cayman S, which seems to get new designer stripes every couple of yards as we travel from one galaxy to the next. We become butterflies of the night, darting through

streets of neon light. We quickly maneuver the radiant avenues, the sparkling side streets, moving onward from possibility to new possibility.

It's as if all of Jiulong were a gigantic pinball machine—and we're happy to play the ball and keep it rolling. Funky! Our perception is altered: our pupils dilate, the play of colors becomes kaleidoscopic. The effect is almost like an acid trip, but without any negative consequences for your health—that is, if you stop the car to enjoy the eye candy, at least.

We've been cruising for hours, often stopping to contemplate the play of lights. Now it's time to turn in for the night and let our imaginations, forever expanded by this experience, roam wild in what are sure to be dazzling dreams. ◀



HONG KONG



“Light,
light,
the visible reminder
of invisible light.”

[T. S. ELIOT]

Powerhouse

Hong Kong (meaning “fragrant harbor”) has a population of 7 million, of which approximately 560,000 are not ethnic Chinese. In this densely populated city, there are 6,480 inhabitants per one square kilometer. The average life expectancy is almost 82 years. Some 73 percent of Hong Kong citizens are hooked up to the Internet. Education is the biggest item in the budget of the Special Administrative Region on China's southern coast, which until the end of 1996 was a British colony.

Light and Day

Every evening at 8 p.m., the Symphony of Lights begins in Victoria Harbour, a gigantic laser show incorporating forty buildings that is accompanied by music. The spectacle highlights five main themes: Awakening, Energy, Heritage, Partnership, and the finale, Celebration.

Infotainment

The handiest and hippest guidebook on Hong Kong is the LUXE City Guide, which has all of the best lifestyle addresses in the city in a format that neatly fits into your jacket pocket. www.luxecityguides.com. For the most comprehensive information on Hong Kong on the Web, check out www.discoverhongkong.com and www.tourism.gov.hk.

Cars under Stars

Porsche Centre Hong Kong, G/F, AXA Centre, 151 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, showroom@porsche-hongkong.com

Porsche Service Centre Kowloon (Jiulong), 7 Wang Tai Road, Kowloon Bay, Kowloon (Jiulong), aftersales@porsche-hongkong.com