

Waking up was a struggle this morning, that 7 hour time change had us sleepy until early afternoon. I hadn't been able to find a suitable hotel with breakfast, so our first job was to find some food. Three of us can't stomach eggs, which made our choices quite limited. In the end we resorted to McDonalds, something we usually avoid doing in foreign countries (and at home!).

Winter in Hong Kong is often foggy, but today it was reasonably clear. It was a good chance to head up Victoria Peak for some great views. We knew the tram queues would be awful at the weekend, so caught the No. 15 bus instead. It gave us amazing views as we wound our way up the Hong Kong hills and reminded us of Wellington. We didn't bother paying to go up the Peak Tower as there were other viewing spots with the same views for free. Must be some Scottish blood in our family? There were also beautiful views from Luggard Road which wound its way though the bush and around the hills. This "road" was far too narrow for any cars so it was a nice peaceful walking path. We could even see out to Disneyland and the newly opened bridge to Macau.



Victoria Peak Views

We were really keen to ride the Peak Tram and the queues back down weren't too bad. It's a pretty fun ride with some really steep gradients and I think it was more fun going backwards downhill. When we saw the queue at the bottom, we were really glad we'd gone up on the bus.

Our McDonalds had well and truly worn off so we went in search of some lunch. Finding food was far more difficult than we ever expected in such a densely populated city. We headed downhill towards the water, but the streets were completely clogged with crowds of women sitting everywhere. They had suitcases and picnic food, and lots of them had made sitting areas from cardboard boxes. Others were sitting on stairs, gardens and anything else they could find. We thought it was some kind of protest, but they all seemed very peaceful and not one of them was Chinese. It was really puzzling, but even Google provided no answers. We thought there would be food underground in shopping malls or train stations, but it was just too hard to get anywhere with these women everywhere, so we just kept walking. Eventually we found a shopping mall beyond all the women and finally got much-needed food.



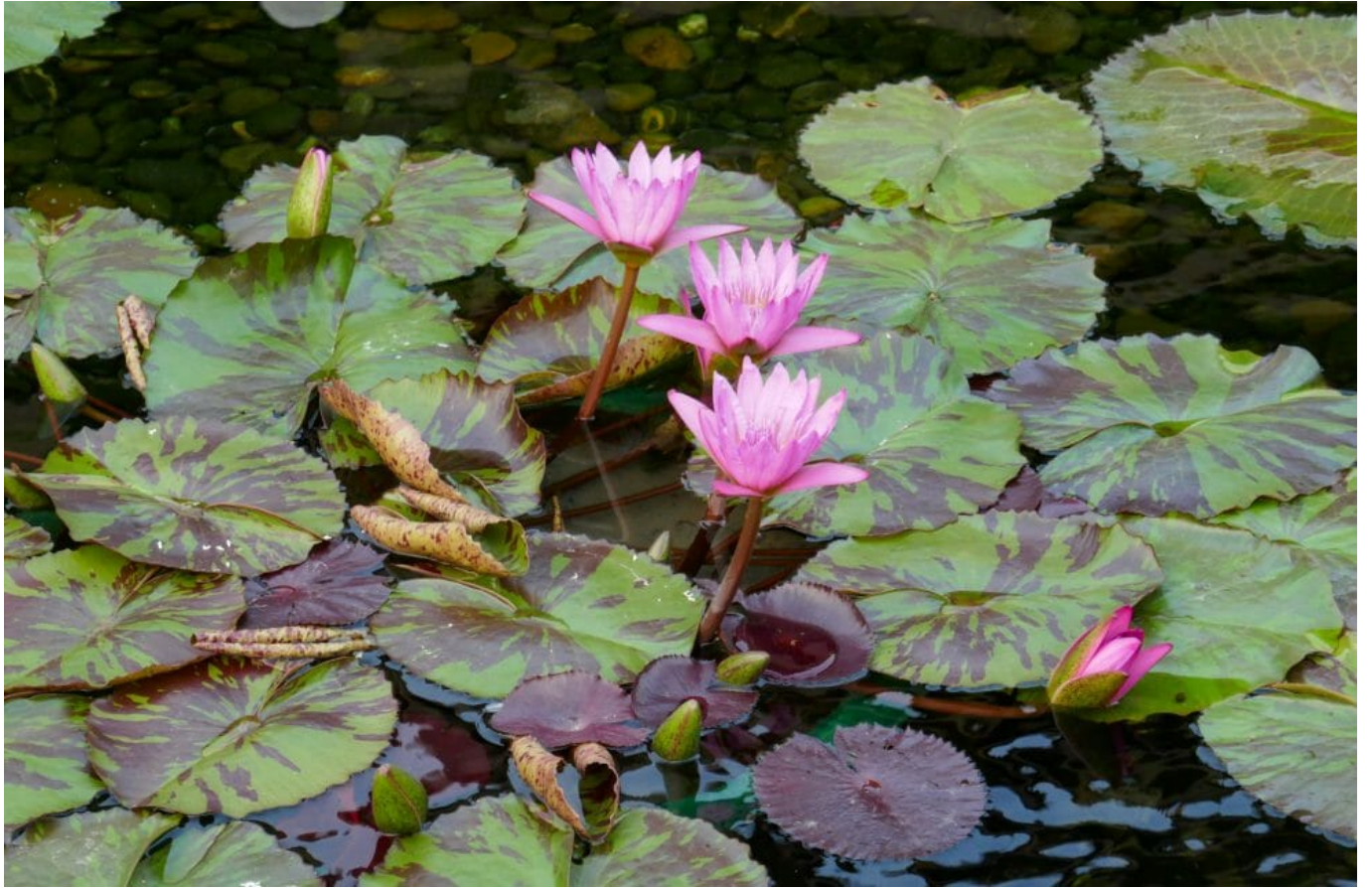
Why are these women everywhere?

We had a new lease of life after eating again, but needed to find somewhere a little more tranquil. We caught the MRT to a nunnery and garden complex a few stops from our hotel. None of us had any idea how late it was and the nunnery closed at 4:30 which had already passed. Fortunately the gardens were open later and that was the best bit anyway, so it was still worth the journey. The gardens were stunning with lots of bonsai and beautiful tropical plants, along with some amazing traditional buildings. It's always fascinating to see how the traditional and modern are blended together in Asian cities.





Lotus Garden







Nan Lian Garden

Chinese New Year takes place in a couple of weeks and the city is already decorated. I guess it's like us putting our Christmas decorations up early. It's the year of the pig coming up, so all things piggy are being celebrated. Here's a few of my favourites.



Marks and Spencers Window Display





Miraplace Shopping Centre





Clothing Store Window

Matt found a really good restaurant just around the corner for dinner. We liked the look of the Peking Duck, but didn't have time to wait an hour for it to be prepared. There were some pretty good alternatives though and we feasted on beef, chicken and dumplings. While we were at dinner I had another google to try and find out what all the women were doing, and finally found the answer. There are around 300,000 foreign maids in Hong Kong. They work long hours six days a week, but must be given 12 hours off on Sunday. They can't afford to eat out, so socialise in the streets. It all made sense now, although it did seem a bit sad.

We finished the day with a walk down the Tsim Sha Tsui promenade, looking across to the beautiful skyline of Hong Kong Island.



Hong Kong Island