

## **Squiz the World goes to... Hong Kong**

Each fortnight, we give the world globe a spin and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio adventure to visit that country—or sometimes, a fascinating place that's a bit different.

I'm Christie Kijurina. Today is a special episode, because we're taking you to the bustling, ever-changing Fragrant Harbour, Hong Kong. And Hong Kong isn't actually an independent country. Instead, it's a Special Administrative Region—meaning it's part of China, but with its own system of government and laws, at least until 2047. We're talking about Hong Kong today because this week marks the anniversary of the day Britain officially took control of it in 1898, and the date it was handed back to China 99 years later in 1997.

So, strap yourselves in to the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Hong Kong...

### **JUST THE FACTS**

Hong Kong is a small but mighty place on the southern coast of China, perched at the mouth of the Pearl River Delta. Its name means Fragrant Harbour, a reminder of the incense trade that once scented the air. Home to about 7.5 million people—if it were its own country, it would rank around 100th in the world by population size, between Paraguay and Laos!

Hong Kong is made up of over 200 islands and steep, rugged mountains formed by volcanoes during the Jurassic period, that rise dramatically from the sea. With so little flat land to build on, the city has grown up instead of out, stacking its population in some of the world's tallest skyscrapers.

Its subtropical climate and parks are home to a surprising variety of wildlife, from cheeky monkeys and shy porcupines to colourful birds and even pink dolphins in the surrounding waters.

And while it was once a British colony, Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997 but remains a Special Administrative Region, under the “one country, two systems” agreement—an arrangement that's supposed to last until 2047.

Speaking of history... how did Hong Kong become this fascinating place? Let's do some...

### **Time Travel**

Long before the skyscrapers and neon lights, Hong Kong was home to farmers, traders, and pearl fishers. Over time, it came under the influence of Chinese dynasties like the

Qin, Song, and Ming. When northern China was invaded by the Mongols, many people moved south, including to the area that would later become Hong Kong.... each group leaving their mark and turning Hong Kong into a melting pot of people and cultures.

Its deep harbour made it a magnet for merchants and pirates alike. One of the most famous was Ching Shih, a pirate queen who ruled the South China Sea!

In the 1840s, after a conflict known as the Opium Wars, Britain took control of Hong Kong Island, then later Kowloon and the New Territories through treaties and a 99-year lease. They brought with them Western-style buildings, new street names, and a focus on English-language education.

Trade boomed, the population exploded, and the city grew quickly—sometimes too quickly. Fires, typhoons, plagues, and dengue fever hit hard.

In the 20th century, wars and revolutions rattled the region. Japan occupied Hong Kong during World War II, but after the war, Hong Kong bounced back, transforming into an industrial powerhouse.

By the time Britain's lease was about to expire, Hong Kong was ready for its next chapter, handed back to China in 1997, with a promise of “one country, two systems.”

And speaking of that British influence, one of the biggest changes was the introduction of British-style schooling—so let's find out more because it's...

## Time FOR SCHOOL

Education has always been important in Hong Kong. The earliest records of a school in the region date back 950 years, to 1075 CE and when the British arrived they noted that small village schools were very much a thing.

School in Hong Kong today is still a big deal—education is highly valued, and kids work hard to succeed. Modelled on the British system, kids do 6 years of primary and 6 years of secondary school. Most schooling is done in the local language, Cantonese, but English is also taught. This bilingual system helps kids stay connected to local traditions while also linking them to the wider world.

Education is free in public schools and similar to Australia, the school day runs from 8 am to 3 pm. School uniforms are common, with kids often wearing neat shirts and ties or dresses and skirts. And when it comes to lunch, while many schools have a canteen or cafeteria, it's common for kids bring home-packed lunchboxes filled with rice, noodles, dumplings, or steamed buns. Yum!

Oh, and while we're talking about home, imagine living in the most crowded place on Earth...

## BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Once upon a time, Hong Kong was home to the most crowded place on Earth... Kowloon Walled City. Picture this: up to 50,000 people living in just a few city blocks!

While all of Hong Kong was under British rule, these city blocks remained under Chinese control and so were largely ignored by planning rules and police. This place was a maze of apartments, shops, factories, and narrow alleys, all stacked on top of each other like a giant game of Jenga. Sunlight barely reached the ground. There were self-taught doctors, dentists, noodle shops, and even entire families living in rooms built from scrap metal! I've stuck a link to an amazing video in the episode notes if you want to check it out.

Despite its reputation for being a bit lawless, it was a tight-knit community. Kids played in stairways, neighbours shared meals, and life buzzed day and night.

In the 1990s, both governments agreed to tear it down and build a park, but the legend of Kowloon Walled City lives on as a reminder of Hong Kong's incredible resilience and creativity.

And speaking of creativity, food is one place where the Cantonese really let it shine. I think that means it's...

## DINNER TIME

If you love food, you'd love Hong Kong! This city is a paradise for your taste buds, where East meets West in every bite.

Dim sum is a favourite—a Cantonese tradition of small plates like dumplings, buns, and spring rolls, served in steaming bamboo baskets. Families gather at bustling tea houses for yum cha, which means “drinking tea,” while sharing bite-sized treats

Seafood is super fresh thanks to the city's location by the sea—shrimp, crab, and fish often star on dinner tables. Roast goose and barbecued pork are also local legends, served with rice or noodles.

Street food is everywhere—curry fish balls on skewers, egg waffles, and pineapple buns that don't actually have pineapple in them but have a sweet, crunchy top that looks a bit like one!

And one of the most iconic dishes is wonton noodles—a steaming bowl of egg noodles topped with dumplings filled with shrimp and pork, all swimming in a clear, tasty broth. Want to try it at home? Check out the wonton noodle soup recipe in the episode notes and get a taste of Hong Kong in your kitchen!

## THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1 What does the name “Hong Kong” mean? (Fragrant Harbour)

Question 2 Who was the famous pirate queen who ruled the South China Sea? (Ching Shih)

Question 3 What is the name of the palace in Hong Kong that was once the most crowded place on Earth? (Kowloon Walled City)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Hong Kong.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.