



# Hong Kong Foodie Tour: An Immersion Into Local Culture

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*Finding experiences that were intriguing, delicious and sometimes a bit jarring, travel writer Sandy Bornstein tasted her way around Hong Kong, one bite at a time.*



*Locals dine at an outdoor cafe near the Graham Street Market in Hong Kong.*

After flying from the U.S. to Hong Kong, I wanted to take it relatively easy on my first day. I perused options for half-day tours that would hopefully defy my inevitable jet lag. Taking an organized foodie tour was my top choice. I reserved our spots online for the **Central & Sheung Wan Hong Kong Foodie Tasting Tour** and hoped that fatigue wouldn't prevent me from enjoying the tour.

## Foodie Tour Stops in Hong Kong

### **Tsim Chai Kee Noodle—a Wonton Noodle Shop**

My husband and I met the tour at the designated meeting point near the Grand Millennium Plaza. After everyone in our small group had arrived, we walked down the street to an inconspicuous storefront that had stairs leading to a lower level where we entered Tsim Chai Kee, a family run business that first opened its doors in the 1940s.

Our small group sat on wooden stools around a well-worn brown table that had a container of homemade chili sauce and another container of brownish-red colored vinegar. I tasted my bowl of fresh minced fish ball noodle soup with and without the local add on flavorings. Just a few drops enhanced the taste of this clear broth with a densely packed ball of carp and tangerine rind.

Before leaving the small restaurant, I peeked into the open kitchen. Women dressed in red outfits with green aprons were busy making fish balls and other items. The whole food preparation process was open to public viewing.



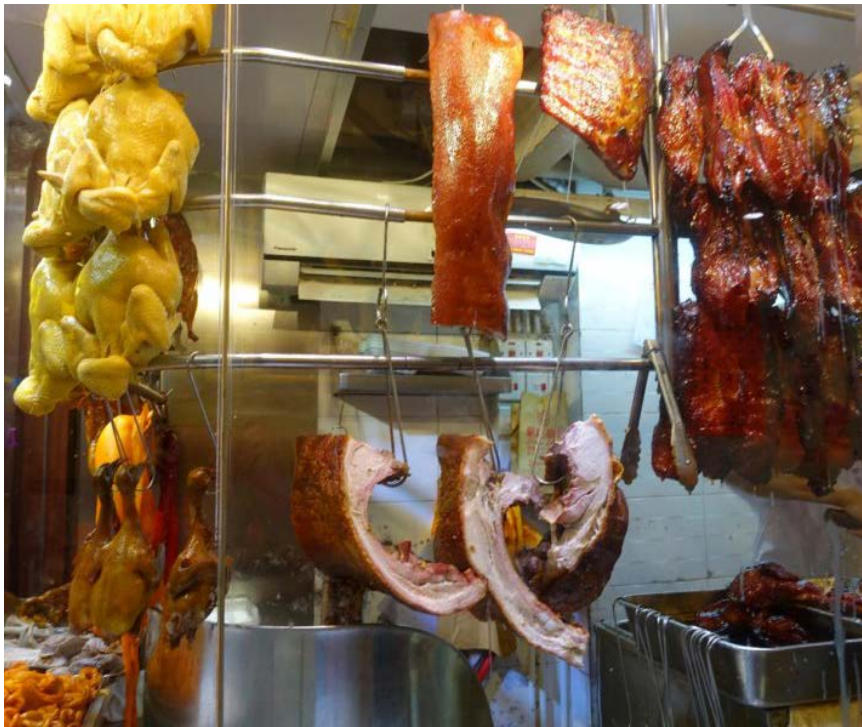
*Women make homemade entrees at Tsim Chai Kee Noodle Restaurant.*

**Lung Kee Restaurant—a Roast Meat Restaurant**

At the front of the restaurant, roasted carcasses and assorted parts of fowl, poultry, meat, and pork greeted patrons at the front counter. Since my days of being a carnivore are behind me, I settled for a few vegetarian dishes while the rest of the group devoured the restaurant’s popular barbeque pork rice and barbeque beef.

When we entered the small kitchen, our small group treaded carefully on the slippery floors. Multiple, full-sized pigs were being roasted simultaneously in a 400 degree Celsius massive oven. Other roasted animals were hanging from their hind legs on metal clips attached to the ceiling. It was a bit overwhelming to see so many cooked animals in such a confined space.





*Hanging poultry, fowl and meat greet restaurant visitors at the front counter of Lung Kee.*

**Graham Street Market**

To get to our next location, we passed by several outdoor cafes. We also wandered by the Graham Street Market, one of the oldest wet markets in Hong Kong. According to our guide, Yammy, the local community has been shopping at this marketplace for approximately 180 years. Vendors sell their fresh produce and packaged food products out of bins and kiosks.

The meat is carved right on the spot while live fish, with fully visible heartbeats, are waiting to be slaughtered. Yammy pointed out a few delicacies such as sharkfin and a very expensive bladder for collagen. Crowds congregated at the more popular venues.

In recent years, controversy has surrounded this prime area as the government and developers have tried to replace the market with apartment buildings and hotels. If buildings eventually supplant this wet market, some of Hong Kong’s traditional life will be lost forever.



*A vendor butchers meat onsite at Graham Street Market in Hong Kong.*

**Kung Lee— Sugar Cane Juice and Herbal Tea**

Super sweet beverages are usually not part of my diet. But, I was thirsty and willing to taste the 100% sugar cane juice. Yammy insisted that everyone try the beverage that is pressed onsite. This family run business was started in the 1940s when the sugar cane was grown locally.

At a nearby table, I couldn't help but watch a young woman add a couple of spoons of honey to a black jelly-like food in a bowl. Yammy observed my fascination. She explained that the entrée was turtle jelly made from turtle shells and that the honey was being added to decrease the bitter taste. Like the sugar cane juice, Yammy mentioned that the local population consumes these items to remove toxins from their bodies.



*Unusual Turtle jelly at Kung Lee.*



### Wong Wing Kee— Preserved Fruit Shop

In this family run business that dates back to 1901, we were given a clear box with an assortment of wrapped items. Yammy rattled off some of the main ingredients—orange peel, hawthorn berries, ginger, citron, lotus seed, plum peaches, and kumquat—while simultaneously making connections to a wide range of traditional Chinese medicinal remedies.

These treats tantalized everyone's taste buds by emitting sweet to sour to salty flavors. Since the Chinese categorize foods into five different types of tastes—sour, bitter, sweet, salty, and spicy, it wasn't surprising that the preserved candies covered the identical range of flavors.

Unfortunately, my requests to the tour organizers and the store management for additional information regarding the connections to traditional Chinese medicine went unanswered.



*A sample snack box with preserved fruit treats from Wong Wing Kee Preserved Fruit Factory.*

### Dim Sum Square—Chinese Dim Sum

Steamed and fried dumplings are a staple of many Chinese diets so I was happy to see these foods included in the tour. To accommodate our groups' diverse dietary requests, we were offered a bountiful feast of some of Hong Kong's finest shrimp dumplings, pork dumplings, vegetable dumplings, fried spring rolls, barbeque pork buns, vegetable stir-fry, and custard buns along with fermented pu'er tea.

The generous portions were heaped onto serving pieces that were passed from person to person. No one left this restaurant hungry. But, we still had one more stop to go. I'm glad that I left room for something that I had never tried before.



*A vegetarian Stir fry at Dim Sum Square.*



*The finishing touch to a Chinese feast, custard buns served at Dim Sum Square.*

### **Hei Lee—Bakery**

Our last stop was at a nearby bakery where everyone selected an individual egg tart from a large tray. The flaky crust contrasted nicely to the creamy, mildly sweet, yellow center. While the display case was filled with tempting treats, I chose not to further indulge by purchasing anything for later in the day.



*A yummy platter of egg tarts at Hei Lee Bakery.*

### **Impressions of Foodie Tour**

With limited time in Hong Kong and an unpredictable appetite due to jet lag, I was happy with my choice to try the local cuisine via a foodie tour. The selected restaurants had been in business for decades. Each had maintained some traditions as they adjusted to changes in Hong Kong cuisine choices. Along the route, and in the designated stops, Yammy shared historical and cultural details and also quickly described the cuisine at each stop. In retrospect, I wish that I had asked more questions about the connections between the items we consumed and traditional Chinese medicine.

No one could complain about undersized portions. I was pleased that the hosts were willing to accommodate my dietary requests. Despite advance warning, some previous tours have remained inflexible. Most of my fellow tour participants took advantage of the behind the scenes kitchen tours.

My understanding of Hong Kong cuisine was expanded by what I observed and the foods that I consumed. If you want to learn more about an unfamiliar culture, a reputable food tour is a great place to start. Reputable food tours are oftentimes listed on a city's visitor site. For this Hong Kong trip, I visited **Discover Hong Kong** and found this [page](#) that highlights several options. I chose to make a reservation before I arrived in Asia. It was a wise choice. There were only two remaining spots left on the tour. — *Article and photos by Sandy Bornstein.*

*Writer Sandy Bornstein used a foodie tour to get to know Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Read about that experience, [here](#).*

*St. Louis offers a very authentic food tour, too, that includes history of the region. [Here's an article](#) we featured last year about that.*



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Sandy has visited more than 40 countries and lived as an international teacher in Bangalore, India. Sandy’s award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, is a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Sandy writes about food, family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences, historical sites, and Jewish culture and history. You can follow Sandy on Facebook and Instagram.

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