

TRAVEL

Why you want a layover at Hong Kong International Airport: Catch a flick, try the golf simulator or get a massage

The already-massive Hong Kong International Airport has plans to expand and upgrade in the next few years, offering travellers even more play-while-you-wait experiences and adventures



A common connection for those flying even further east, there's more to do in Hong Kong on your layover than curl up and take a nap.

ISTOCKPHOTO

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HONG KONG

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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For many Canadian arrivals, memories of Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) exist in a fog – suspended in a sleepless vision of jetlag, this first step into Asia off a 15-hour flight from Toronto (or 13 hours from Vancouver) can be a tiring one. A common connection for those flying even further east, there's more to do here on your layover than curl up and take a nap.

Turning 20 years old next year, HKIA is a place apart – literally. Sometimes referred to locally as Chek Lap Kok, it's built on an island of the same name, one largely created on reclaimed land to accommodate this massive airport in one of the most densely populated places on Earth. Through this little island passes a staggering amount of traffic – including more than 70 million passengers last year and more cargo than any other airport in the world.

And it's only going to get bigger. Plans are in the works to add a third runway and the airport authority will be spending more than \$1-billion in the next few years to further upgrade the place, expanding Terminal 1 with more shopping, dining and check-in counters, plus a new children's play zone.

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Getting oriented



Terminal 2 is the smaller of Hong Kong International Airport's two terminals.

MIKE CLARKE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

With some 7.6 million square feet of space split between two terminals (Terminal 1 was the world's largest when it opened almost two decades ago), you would think HKIA could be a rather daunting airport to navigate – but, for most people, it's not. Laid out in a fairly logical way (and thoroughly signposted in English), Terminal 1 – which handles the lion's share of the airport's traffic – clusters much of its dining, shops and services into a multitiered area at one end, with the terminal reaching out from there, in a long linear plan that roughly resembles a "Y." Both moving sidewalks and an ultra-efficient Automated People Mover (APM) system, capable of transporting 7,200 passengers an hour, move people to distant gates, a handful of satellite concourses and to the much-smaller Terminal 2.

If you have two hours



Workers go about their day at the old outdoor Jade Market in Kowloon, Hong Kong, in 2012.

KEES METSELAAR/NYT

Typical of Asian airports – but almost unheard-of here in North America – HKIA includes a number of actually fun attractions that hold only a tangential connection to travel. Almost all of these are found in Terminal 2, including the Aviation Discovery Centre, located on Level 6. Here, you can walk through a museum dedicated to the history of flight (complete with a number of airplane

models), sit in an airplane simulator and even get some fresh air up on the SkyDeck, which is equipped with telescopes and overlooks the area surrounding Chek Lap Kok.

And that's not all – Terminal 2 is also home to GreenLive AIR, an indoor golf simulator with both nine- and 18-hole courses and (for families) the Dream Come True Education Park, a sort of kids' play area on steroids, where children can dress up in costume and actually act out a number of different professions, including doctor (complete with operating room), fireman, policeman and – naturally – pilot.

And because HKIA is so efficient and well-connected, two hours is probably plenty of time for a good, sit-down meal. The original location of Hung's Delicacies on Hong Kong Island rose from an obscure hole-in-the-wall to a Michelin star and its Terminal 2 location has become a perennial favourite for those passing through – order up everything from duck tongues in Chinese liquor, to sesame-flavoured chicken's leg tendon. As for Terminal 1, Charlotte April Harris, head of sales and marketing for Kowloon-based Charlotte Travel, who has travelled through HKIA dozens of times, loves both Crystal Jade (for Shanghainese dumplings) and Ho Hung Kee for good, local fare. "Although it does get busy, it's the best place in the airport to give you a taste of Hong Kong during your transit," she says.

If you have four hours



Travellers facing a long layover can fill the time with a 'flash visit' to Hong Kong Disneyland, seen in 2015.

JUSTIN CHIN/BLOOMBERG

At HKIA, you can actually catch a flick between flights – Terminal 2 is home to Hong Kong's largest Imax screen, with seating for 350 people, showing first-run, feature-length movies. Take some time to chill, too, at Terminal 1's Relaxation Corner, a free-of-charge oasis of calm where you can stretch out on lounge chairs, plug in your phone and forget about that long flight (massage, acupressure and reflexology services are also available here in sessions as brief as 20 minutes).

And four hours should be enough time to get outside the airport for a while. Just across from the airport on Lantau Island (reachable by bus, or less than 10 minutes in a taxi or Uber) sits the Citygate Outlets – the largest outlet mall in Hong Kong, which, in addition to 80 stores from top international brands, includes more than a dozen restaurants, a cinema and a spa.

If you have six hours



Travellers seeking to explore beyond the airport can take the Star Ferry across Victoria Harbour.

A major international hub, HKIA isn't just about air travel – it also serves as a massively busy regional transit terminus, meaning that a longish layover can take you plenty of places in the surrounding area. In addition to a major bus station there's the Skypier, which provides ferry services to both Macau and mainland China, and the Airport Express train, which departs from a terminal located between Terminals 1 and 2 at 12-minute intervals, carrying you to Hong Kong's Central Station in a brisk 24 minutes.

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So, plan a little excursion. With a minimum six-hour layover, Cathay Pacific offers its passengers a "little piece of Hong Kong" tour, including a "flash visit" to Hong Kong Disneyland that includes round-trip shuttle service to and from the airport and a park ticket for a little more than \$60 (a person). Or you can choose your own adventure. Kowloon Station, one of three stops on the Airport Express line, is even closer to HKIA than Central, and from there you can explore this raucous quarter that still retains a hint of Hong Kong's raffish history as a port city. Browse knock-off Ray Bans at the Ladies Market, commission a custom-made suit from the eager tailors on every corner, or take the Star Ferry across Victoria Harbour, the skyscrapers of Hong Kong's iconic skyline spread before you and wooden junks cruising by alongside.

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