

Chapter 1

The Best of Hong Kong & Beyond

A Chinese Blessing

There is an old Chinese curse that says, “May you live in interesting times.” I’d like to amend the ancient curse into a prayer for you and yours:

May you shop in somewhat dirty street markets but contract no disease. May you never pay more than 100 of anything (yuan, Hong Kong dollars, euros—whatever). May you gaze at the new China and understand that you see the future—and it is powerful. May you return often, in joy and safety.

With the 2008 Beijing Olympics considered to be a turning point for the Chinese government, everything has become cleaner and more generic, brighter, and even garish. Hong Kong still shimmers as an oasis, although prices are higher on most items (except designer goods, which cost 20% less than in mainland China). This is the new China, and it has been built by the world’s finest architects. You can’t help but be impressed. Stay tuned for World Expo 2010, opening in Shanghai as you open these pages.

If you’re antsy about the rate of exchange on the dollar against the euro, Asia is your new best friend. The rush is on, so get going now. This chapter will help guide you to the best, the brightest, and the most brilliant according to budget.

This is a short chapter with short sentences. If you also like pictures, please see my blog, www.borntoshoplady.blogspot.com, and go to the portions on the various explorations done for research trips. There's little repeat information, so you won't get bored and you can see some snapshots of the merchandise available.

Please remember that coming up with a single best of anything is difficult. "Best" is a subjective thing. Each choice here is based on a combination of location, value, and convenience.

Also note that I find little crossover in merchandise in the cities this book covers; once you have left a destination, you may not have the luxury of another crack at a particular item, often resulting in the "Why didn't I buy more?" syndrome. Remember the Moscow Rule of Shopping and grab it when you see it—after bargaining, of course.

The 10 Best Stores

Along with my alphabetical list below comes the usual disclaimer—these choices are based on my personal visits. China is changing fast. As soon as we go to press, a bigger or better store might pop up.

Ashneil

Far East Mansions, 5–6 Middle Rd., shop 114 (up the stairs), Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong (MTR: TST).

Calling this a store may lead you to believe it is bigger than a postage stamp, which it is not. More than two shoppers make it feel crowded. But that's only because it's piled high and deep with handbags of all sorts. These babies are no fakes either. They're excellent-quality items that look like styles you know and love—but, with no phony parts; they're totally legal. Prices begin at around \$250 and go up (sometimes way up), but you often can't tell the difference between these bags and the \$2,000 versions. You can have your purchases delivered to

the U.S. (saving on the Customs allowance), order something made in a custom color, or buy small leather goods such as belts and wallets. Credit cards accepted. Yes, Birkin.

Blanc de Chine

Pedder Building, 12 Pedder St., room 201, Central, Hong Kong (MTR: Central).

Armani meets Shanghai Tang (see below). Expect to pay \$500 or more for a jacket, but the quality and appearance will melt you. Men's, women's, and home-styles.

City Super

Times Square mall (MTR: Causeway Bay); Ocean Terminal, Harbour City, Kowloon (MTR: TST); IFC2 mall (MTR: Central); all Hong Kong.

As the name implies, this is a supermarket. The branches are not all equal—the one at Times Square is the best—but all are good enough to qualify for this list. You can buy Asian products (which make great gifts) as well as bath and beauty items and housewares.

Hu & Hu Antiques

1685 Wuzhong Lu, Shanghai (no nearby Metro).

If you aren't interested in furniture, then you can skip this establishment. If you love to look at pretty things and adore high style with ultrapanache, this is the most chic furniture store in all of China. The woman who runs it is American-Chinese and speaks English like few others in Shanghai. In addition to two warehouses filled with furniture, you'll also find smaller tabletop and gift items. I bought an ancestor scroll once. Have your taxi wait...even if it's for a few days.

Maylin

Peninsula Hotel Shopping Arcade, Salisbury Rd., Kowloon, Hong Kong (MTR: TST).

The Birkin bags are all gone but the store has expanded and is now heavy into woven leathers that look surprisingly like, hmmm, what was that Italian brand? Prices hover around \$250 for a nice sac. They take credit cards but are not big on charm.

Shanghai Tang

Pedder Building, 12 Pedder St., Central, Hong Kong (MTR: Central).

This is undoubtedly one of the must sees, must dos of Hong Kong, even if you don't buy anything. In fact, there is a good chance you *won't* buy anything. Still, the store is gorgeous to look at and inspirational in its creativity.

Shanghai Tang stocks souvenirs and fashions, Mao mania, and original artwork by contemporary artists—all imported from China. Get a load of the gift wrap! Wander, drool, buy, have a cigar, sit down for tea, or shop 'til you're late for your next appointment.

Note: In Kowloon, Tang has moved out of the Pen and into its own little cutie-pie building (was that a police station?) in the Heritage 1888 complex at Salisbury Road and Canton Road. It's not as glam as the flagship, but worth a look-see.

Shiatzy Chen

7 the Bund, Shanghai.

Religious encounter of the fourth dimension. Okay, so that's a little glib, but I am sincere. The first few times I walked into this store it was truly a religious experience; the earth moved. The Taiwanese designer makes men's and women's clothes as well as accessories; they have stores all over Asia. The look is "Armani meets Blanc de Chine" kicked up many notches into couture. In short, this is gorgeous clothing, usually beginning at \$1,000.

Airports & You

Many businesspeople are in such a great hurry getting from meeting to meeting that they wait to shop at the airport duty-free shops as they're leaving town. Depending on your point of departure, this may or may not be such a hot idea.

The **Hong Kong** airport may be a virtual shopping mall, but note that prices are not the same as in town. Even duty-free prices are high. I suggest hitting the gift shop at your hotel in Hong Kong if you're willing to pay top dollar anyway. Gift shops will have slightly more budget-friendly prices and less pressure of the "Oh my, I'd better grab it" variety.

The **Beijing** airport's duty-free shop is excellent for last-minute shopping. I can't tell you that the prices are the lowest in town, but the selection is wide enough for all of you last-minute shoppers to at least accomplish all of your shopping goals.

Shanghai's Pudong airport gift shops are even more sophisticated in the TT (tourist-trap) department. I've stocked up on chocolate-covered litchis and the most extraordinary embroidered satin bedroom slippers. Yes, there is a Shanghai Tang here, so you know this place is with it. Shanghai's Hong Qiao airport is neither new nor spiffy but has some basics for giftables.

Taipei's airport, which you will use if you fly EVA Air, is the biggest surprise—the old-fashioned CSK airport is gone and this new beauty has tons of shopping and eats. Yep, even a Starbucks. Note that this airport may have better shopping than in town and is a far better hub to Asia than Narita (Tokyo), so worship for awhile if you can.

The **Hanoi** airport has some kiosks and stands, but really, folks, forget it in terms of anything other than a way to stretch your legs or avoid boredom before boarding. Bring your Kindle or a paperback.

Space 798

Dashanzi Art District (no nearby Metro).

Yes, I know it's off the beaten path; but this trendsetting reclaimed factory is well worth it, with all sorts of shopper's delights in store for you: photography, art, and a little bit of clothing. Look, touch, and splurge. You can even grab a drink or a light meal to reward yourself for making it out there. (See p. 292 in chapter 10 for tips on how to get there and make the most of your excursion.)

Suzhou Cobbler

3 Fuchow Rd., Shanghai.

Don't sneeze or you will miss this tiny shop that specializes in a sophisticated twist on an old Chinese art: the embroidered slipper. About \$50 a pair, but they look like a million.

Urban Tribe

133 Fuxing Rd. W., Shanghai.

This is a lifestyle brand that sells ethnic Chinese, nomadic, north country almost looks Tunisian (I know, I know) fabulous clothes, and home-style. If you can't get to the flagship, pop into the boutique in the Portman Ritz-Carlton.

Great Inexpensive Gifts

- **Hello Kitty!** I do not happen to be a Hello Kitty freak; I don't even like cats very much. That said, I adore pop culture and am impressed by the destination specific Hello Kitty merchandise I found in various Chinese cities. I got Post-it notes with Kitty at the Pearl Tower as well as Hello Kitty Shanghai wallets. My best buy was a group of Hello Kitty Hong Kong spiral-bound mininotebooks, each with a different local scene—I love Kitty with the dim sum.

- **Chinese tea.** From high-end brands and makers (such as Fook Ming Tong, in Hong Kong) to any old brand in a great-looking package sold on the street or at a Chinese department store, tea makes a very traditional gift, and it doesn't break. Prices vary with brand and venue. If tea strikes you as old hat, look for the flower teas that are the size of a Ping-Pong ball and open into a beautiful blossom inside the cup as you make the tea. Excellent party trick. Buy flowering tea (of the jasmine variety, for example) in a gift bag for about \$10 to \$12.
- **"Jade."** I buy "jade" doughnuts by the dozen at the Jade Market in Hong Kong and then string each one individually as a gift. They cost about \$1 each and are not real jade. If you're willing to pay \$10 to \$15 per gift, you can purchase animal figurines. At \$15 to \$20 there are calligraphy brushes with jade handles...very chic but heavy in the luggage.
- **Chops.** You can be sure that no one else has one of these. A chop, or Chinese signature stamp, costs about \$25 and can usually be carved while you wait.
- **Chopsticks.** Okay, so more people in your social circle are likely to have a few sets of these. But I found some really chic ones—pearl inlay and all that—in Hanoi (not in China, incidentally). They are indeed a bargain at about \$2 per pair.
- **Perfume bottles.** Many people like perfume bottles painted on the inside, but I prefer the fake antiques that look like smoked glass from the 1920s for \$10 to \$20. I have a collection of tiny cinnabar bottles for which I paid about \$15 each. They are fake antiques, true, but good-looking nonetheless.

The Best Shopping Experiences

- Trolling for bargains on Fa Yuen Street, Hong Kong
- Having a garment made-to-order in Hong Kong
- Having a garment copied in Hanoi
- Any flea market in China
- Shenzhen and the new China

Best Alternate Retail Concepts

Insider Concierge

InterContinental Hotel, Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong (MTR: TST).

Insider Concierge is an InterContinental trademark for a program in which the chain's superduper concierges locate whatever you need. Actually, any good hotel concierge can provide this service, but InterConti backs this up with a fabulous team and an international marketing plan. The concierge can even arrange for potential purchases to be brought to your hotel room for you to look at, or for fittings to be done in your room.

Xintiandi

Huai Hai Rd. E., Shanghai (Metro: Huang Pi Nan Rd.).

Maybe it's not fair to call this an urban-renewal effort—it's an entire city of stone houses that have been renovated into bars, restaurants, and shops with walkways in between and the most chic customers in all of China. You don't come here so much for the shopping as for the whole package, usually at night, when the stores stay open late and you drink and stroll and then have dinner. The concept proved so exciting that there are now five of these villages dotted around China—the newest is in Foshan, in the Pearl River Delta.

Best Twist on an Old Theme

Jade and antiequy doodads hung from a silken cord is not a new look and can be found in markets and stores in Hong Kong and China. Yet we never found another source besides I Tre, in Hong Kong, that is doing such thick and elaborately knotted cords; they are sold with pendants for about \$100. New World Centre, no. L063, Kowloon, Hong Kong. © 852/2722-4617.

Best Postcards

For old-fashioned-style postcards with a fun technology, find the 3-D postcards of the Great Wall at any of the TTs at Badaling. The one I keep posted on my office wall is from China National Publications Import & Export Corp.

For new graphics and hot Chinese fashionsitas, the postcards from **Shanghai Tang** can't be beat. Sometimes you can get one free with a purchase.

The Best Sources for Antiques

Antiques in China are tricky—you simply don't know what's real and what isn't. Hong Kong's Hollywood Road is an excellent stroll for antiques shopping, getting an overview of what is available, and learning about the prices. Don't buy anything serious from a dealer who is not known in the trade.

Macau is an excellent source for antiques—that is, if they weren't just made right there!

Both Shanghai and Beijing abound with shopping ops for small decorative items and antiques, real and fake. Prices can be half those in Hong Kong. But then, reliability can be, too.

The Best PVC

If you're looking to save bucks on a handbag, you can spend time looking for a leather wannabe made of PVC. Finding a good one is hard. Shenzhen's LoWu Commercial Center is filled with bad ones but there's a tiny store in Hong Kong that carries both leather and PVC bags and will honestly tell you which is which. Stop by **St. Louis Boutique**, New World Centre, no. LO40GF, Kowloon (☎ 852/2368-2707). Real leather

bags will cost \$150 to \$300, as elsewhere, but the PVC stuff is around \$100 and worthy of your sniff.

Best Markets

Jade Market

Kansu and Battery sts., Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, Hong Kong (MTR: Jordan Rd.).

Two tents' worth of dealers with beads, jade, more jade, and a few antiques. Do-it-yourselfers will go wild. Check out Jenny Gems. To reach the market from the Metro, walk or take a taxi.

Panjiayuan Antique and Curio Market/Dirt Market

Huaweiqiaxi Nan Dajie, Beijing (no nearby Metro).

If you are a flea-market person, you owe it to yourself to arrange your trip so that you have a few hours here. Also known as the Dirt Market (it once had a dirt yard), the market includes some aisles of dealers under tin rooftops, and masses of real people with their goods laid out on the ground. Beware of fakes. The best time to shop is before 10am, before it gets very crowded. Open Saturday and Sunday only.

Pearl Market (Hong Qiao Market)

Near the Temple of Heaven, Beijing (no nearby Metro).

This indoor mall sounds a lot more romantic than it looks, but if you can adjust your expectations, you'll be on your way to heaven...and the Temple of Heaven is conveniently across the street.

The first floor has watches and small electronics (including Mao lighters), along with leather goods and fakes. Also on this floor is luggage, which comes in handy when you run out of packing space and are desperate for cheap new bags. At the

far end of this floor is a series of stalls selling Chinese arts and crafts and souvenir items. Next up is a floor of pearls and pearl wannabes, beads, gemstones, clasps, and more beads. The rear of this floor holds a small mall of antiques shops.

There are two more floors of jewelry stores. **Note:** Another building stands virtually next-door—new and modern and spiffy. I do not include it in my “best of” thoughts.

Most Overrated Market

Go to Hangzhou for many things, including the heart-stopping, more-than-magical *Impression Westlake* performance (nights only; www.hzyxxh.com) but do not make the trip for the Night Market.

The Best Tailors

Prices in China for custom-made clothing may be less than in Hong Kong, but don't be tempted. If you want top-of-the-line quality that competes with the best of Savile Row, you want a Hong Kong tailor whose family probably came from Shanghai and who does things the old-fashioned way, by hand.

W. W. Chan & Sons Ltd.

Burlington House, 92–94 Nathan Rd., 2nd floor, Kowloon, Hong Kong (MTR: TST); 129A–2 Mao Ming Rd., Shanghai (Metro: Shi Men Rd.).

Best City for Cheapie Copy Tailors

Hanoi. We tested tailors in Bangkok (not in this book), Shenzhen, and Hanoi, and Hanoi won hands down.

MY BEST FINDS

by Suzy Gershman

- **Shinco DVD Player:** I thought Shinco was a no-name Chinese brand, but the Sony store near me in Paris also sells it. So do Fortress and Broadway, two reliable electronics chains in Hong Kong. My latest score is a portable DVD player the size of a CD player for \$135. It's dual voltage (110–220), so I can use it anywhere in the world.
- **Face Cream:** I can't tell you that wrinkle creams and moisturizers really work, but I'm not taking any chances. I like the big-name brands, the ones that cost about \$100 a jar (sorry, I can't afford the ones that cost \$1,000). I used to buy them at duty-free stores. Now I buy from the stands at the Pearl Market in Beijing.
- **Eyeglasses:** I have bought eyeglasses and had the prescription filled at the Eye Mart in Beijing and been pleased with the adventure and the quality. But my best treat is to go to **New Fei Optical** in Kowloon (Hong Kong), where I can get designer frames plus my prescription for about \$100 per pair.
- **Chinese Shirts:** From Kenki, a small chain of arts-and-crafts clothing stores in Hong Kong, I bought reversible velvet-silk Chinese big shirts for \$40.
- **Custom-Made Jewelry:** I brought a set of aquamarines that I bought in Brazil to Hong Kong and had a pair of David Yurman-like earrings made in sterling. It took 1 week and cost \$250, not counting the price of the stones.
- **Designer Fashion:** Not just any designer mind you, but Taiwanese legend **Shiatzy Chen**. I fell into a sale with prices marked down 20%, and I got a men's tailored black silk Chinese-style jacket that would make the door gods weep (for a total of \$455).

MY BEST FINDS

by Sarah Lahey

- **Armani Sweater:** I found a Giorgio Armani Collezione pale sage double-breasted cotton tunic at the **Joyce Warehouse** in Aberdeen, Hong Kong, for \$40.
- **Embroidered Silk Tote:** Lots of vendors at the **South Bund Soft Spinning Material Market** sell accessories along with yard goods; here, I bought several stunning tote/carry-on bags for \$10 each. Large enough to hold my computer, travel pillow, and other necessities, the bags are made of jewel-toned heavy-duty embroidered silk.
- **Eyeglasses:** I brought my prescription (and my husband Tom's, too) from home and had several pairs of eyeglasses made. The best selection of frames and best prices (under \$75/pair) were at **New Fei Supply** in Hong Kong, but I also had a pair (\$90) made for my husband Tom at **Ming Jin Yuan**, at the Beijing Eye Mart. Glasses for my daughter Meredith, who has a simple Rx, cost \$20 a pair in Shanghai!

MY BEST FINDS

by Aaron James

- **CDs:** In Shanghai you can find cheap and legal CDs in local stores—just weed through racks of Backstreet Boys and eventually you may find something decent.
- **Video Games:** I found Game Boy and other game system cartridges and cassettes in the Shanghai street market. Video-game cassettes are cheap and contain several games in one. Of course, they may not be legal, and they may repeat the same game over and over.
- **Mao Bags:** Street vendors, especially in Shanghai, sell these. An over-the-shoulder Mao bag is a must for any young revolutionary.

- **Custom-Tailored Shirts:** In Shanghai I visited the showroom of W. W. Chan & Sons Ltd. (my father's tailor from Hong Kong) and was fitted for my first custom shirts. The quality of the shirts is unmatched. I work in the music business in L.A., so I like to wear a good shirt, with a simple, almost invisible monogram on the cuff, with a pair of jeans. If I'm really going to dress up, I can throw on a blazer.

MY BEST FINDS

by Jenny McCormick

- **Hair Sticks:** Plastic chopstick-style fashion statements that you poke into your hair—everything from faux tortoise shell to Burberry plaid. Talk 'em down to \$1 each. Best selection: ground floor of the Pearl Market, Beijing.
- **Fake Jade “Doughnuts”:** The Pearl Market and elsewhere, about \$1. These babies are great for stringing individually onto a cord or chain of your choosing to make a striking pendant.
- **Bamboo Handbag:** About \$10 at the Dong Tai Market in Shanghai.
- **Mao Watch:** About \$2. Available at most street markets but sold by the dozens at Hong Qiao and in the booths along Wangfujing, both in Beijing. Extra points awarded for their excellent kitsch value.