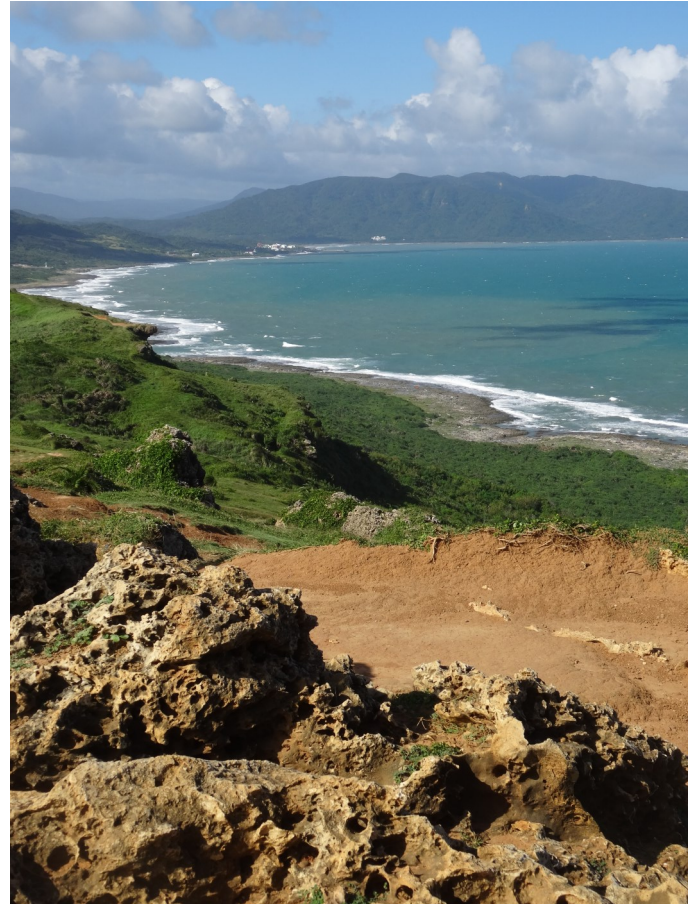




We also stopped in a small town for lunch and Molly and I found a very nice café where we shared a cheese and meat plate and accompanying drinks (tea and beer). Other than these stops we had several restroom breaks – but otherwise the day was spent driving through some magnificent scenery.

The ocean roads (on both sides of the island) had the feel of California Route 1 to some degree, although the vistas were not as expansive here. Nevertheless it was magnificent coastal scenery and the several viewpoints where we stopped for 20-40 minutes each gave us some great views and excellent spots for photos. One particularly attractive spot was soon after we had turned north along the Pacific where the wind was blowing really hard and our guide had a strict rule about not getting too close to the cliff edge. I guess he didn't want to lose any of his customers!



Left: Wherever we stopped on the windy coastline it seemed that there were dozens of young ladies dressed in flowing dresses and skirts and posing to catch the wind. It would appear that they had dressed specifically for the occasion!

In addition to the ocean views there always seemed to be a backdrop of hills and mountains. Taiwan has several mountain chains running essentially north-south down the central portion of the country and we were told that there are many peaks that are almost 3000 meters (close



to 10,000 feet) high. Most of what we saw today was lush forest that entirely covered the hillsides. In fact, there was a two hour period when we left the coast (a local ordinance prohibited buses to keep the coastal area relatively pollution free) and drove along a very twisty (and at times very steep) two lane road that was completely surrounded by trees. The trees that we have seen in Taiwan are not only plentiful but comprise many varieties that are completely foreign to us – much like the flora in New Zealand.

We arrived at our hotel having climbed a few miles from the ocean in the dark (it was only 6pm but fully dark) so we didn't get a sense of its position until daylight. (It was a lovely location and had an interesting lobby—see below). It is one of many hotels in native (aboriginal) areas and features hot tubs (available both outside and in every room) much like several places we have stayed in Japan. Although we seemed to be passing through towns over the final few miles, we have been advised that dinner tonight will be in the hotel, so we have to choose from a somewhat limited menu.

We went to the “Italian” restaurant, which in fact turned out to be a set dinner and a mixture of Italian and Japanese. The host tried to persuade us that the wait might be too long for some of the dishes but after a protracted debate and some help from our tour guide, we decided to give it a try. It turned out to be a very good meal at a reasonable price – and there was no long wait for any dish to appear. In fact, we both commented that, if we had not had the debate and simply been seated, we would have thought this a little rushed for any typically Italian restaurant. So, we had a very pleasant evening and successfully missed the local talent floor show.



Thursday October 19

Today was another day of driving with lots of scenic views along the way. We made three sightseeing stops and several restroom stops; we also stopped at a take-away so that we could buy a picnic lunch to eat on one of the longer stretches of driving.

From the hotel we went down the mountain road back to the coast road and then spent most of the day along the Pacific Ocean, with just one relatively short excursion inland over the coastal mountain range and back. The coast was very impressive – much like California Route 1 – with some high cliffs, some water level views and lots of huge breakers most of the way.

Our first viewpoint was at an area of “beach” where the sandstone (?) rocks had been eroded into shelves and plates, which made walking towards the sea somewhat treacherous but very interesting. In addition to the eroded rock (with formations reminiscent of some we had seen several years ago in New Zealand), there were areas covered by what we assumed was lava.



It was very “foam-like” but very sharp so its use as a “hand rail” was not recommended. The area was very windy and there were some spectacular breakers, each adding to the excitement of the visit.



The next stop was at an even windier location where a pebble beach provided a path to a bridge that spanned an estuary to a small island. The bridge was an eight arch dragon shaped structure which made the walk a little bit more strenuous than a more conventional bridge would have provided. However, with the addition of very strong winds, the going was even tougher, not to say somewhat dangerous at times. Our guide had suggested that we might not be able to make the crossing if the winds were too strong but he led the way and a majority of our group did in fact make it across – and back.





The Dragon Bridge



Between these two stops and the major attraction of the day at Taroko Gorge, we made one other stop at a jade factory. Apparently Taiwan is famous for its jade (isn't everywhere?) but very few people were in a buying mood, especially as we wanted to see the gorge in daylight. And we did!

Taroko National is one of the nine national parks in Taiwan and was named after the Taroko Gorge, the landmark gorge of the park carved by the Liwu River.

Taroko Gorge and its surrounding area are well known for their abundant supply of marble, leading to its nickname, "The Marble Gorge". The rock now seen in Taroko began over 200 million years ago as sediment on the bottom of the ocean. As the sediment collected, it was subject to increasingly large amounts of pressure which eventually hardened it into limestone. Over the past 100 million years, tectonic compression between the Philippine Sea Plate and the Eurasian Plate supplied additional pressure that ultimately changed the limestone into marble. Uplifting forces from the plate collision pushed this rock above the surface of the ocean to where we see it today. The region is still being uplifted by approximately 0.5 cm per year. The gorge itself was carved into the marble by the erosive power of the Liwu River.

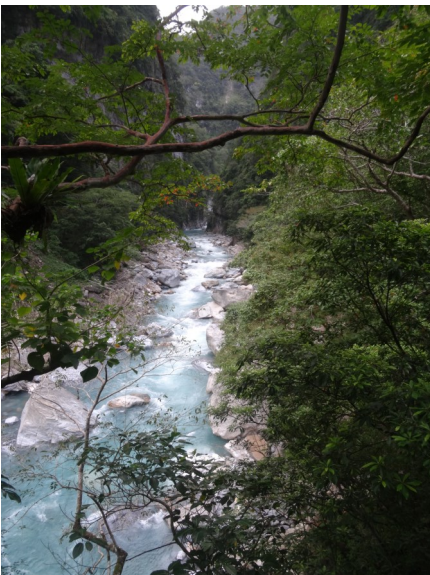
In addition, there is known to be jade in this gorge. This jade is only found in Taiwan and it supplies the jade market in Hualien.



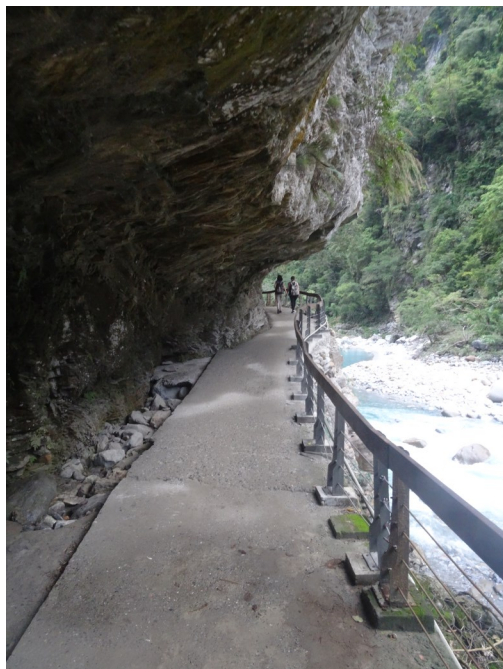
The gorge stretches into the mountains almost directly from the sea for almost 20 Km. Our walk today along the Shakadang Trail took us on a path that was only 1.5 Km in length and was perhaps 30 to 100 feet above the river level, a river that was a beautiful aquamarine and green. It had the appearance of a glacial flow and was as rapidly moving as any such river but it isn't clear what exactly causes this color. The gorge walls are essentially jade marble so perhaps those minerals create this shade.

The path was about six feet wide in most places and went under a few overhangs that made

headroom limited for anyone over five feet tall. It was paved in places, broken rock in others and wet underfoot at times. Nevertheless the walk was not too strenuous – although the humidity didn't help once again – and most of our party made it the whole 3 Km round trip. And it was well worth it. The steep cliff walls of the gorge (2000-3000 feet high?), the many waterfalls and the rapidly cascading river below made for a very memorable trip.



*Spectacular
Taroko
Gorge*



A great walk

Once back on the bus and on the 25 minute drive to the hotel, we once again hugged the gorge and, if anything, the scenery was even more spectacular than that we had seen on the trail. Certainly it was exciting to follow this narrow road with its many tunnels as darkness fell. The driver did a fantastic job under very difficult driving conditions. Fortunately, we follow the same road back tomorrow in daylight so we should get some great views of the amazing waterfalls and the canyon walls.

We arrived at the hotel at 5:30 and once again it was quite luxurious. The tour claimed to provide five star accommodations and I don't think anyone would disagree with their assessment. We cleaned up and went to dinner about 7:30 in the Chinese restaurant in the hotel. It was an excellent meal and cost less than \$100. We met an Australian couple who were on the other bus traveling the same route as us and struck up a very pleasant conversation. It was about 9:30 by the time we retired.

Friday October 20

We left our hotel at 9am and made three stops on the short run down towards the ocean to get some more spectacular pictures of this magnificent gorge. It seemed all the more impressive today from the road than it did yesterday from the walking trail, although brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies perhaps helped.





One of the stops was at a shrine commemorating the 225 known dead military personnel who helped built this road along the gorge and beyond to the west coast.



Built to commemorate and celebrate the lives of those who built the Central Cross-Island Highway through Taroko National Park close to the east entrance, the picturesque Eternal Spring Changchun Shrine is a beautiful temple sitting on top of a natural spring gushing out of the rocks into a waterfall.

Due to the power of the Liwu River running over a fragile combination of green schist, thin marble, and quartz located over a fault, there is a constant erosive force on the rocks. Cracks in the rocks allow for natural spring water to flow through, and while typhoons and rainfall greatly increase the amount of water causing it to gush through the rocks, minimal or no rainfall does not cause the stream to stop, with the stream of water below the shrine bearing the name "Eternal Spring".

The construction of the highway PH8 was a very labor-intensive process, requiring more than 5,000 workers daily to bore through rock with explosives and hand tools to construct the 192 km long road network from Taroko to Dongshi ultimately taking 3 years and 9 months to fully construct. The workers were primarily KMT soldier veterans, of which 226 died in work-related incidents. Their dedication of blood, sweat, and tears is honored in this shrine.

Much closer to the road than the Changchun Shrine and Temple is a cave in which there stands a memorial featuring three statues beneath which are the names to those who died. We were able to visit the cave but time did not permit the long walk to th



The gorge – with cliff sides approaching 4000 feet in a very narrow U-shaped channel – was stunning; we tried mentally to compare it with Colca Canyon in Peru (much deeper but much wider) and the Grand Canyon in the USA (similar in depth but again much wider) and, at least on this day, it seemed more impressive than either. A guide book compared it to Zion National Park in the USA and it does bear a striking resemblance in that one views it from the river bed and gets the sense of height and steepness of the gorge walls. Since we were in Zion only a few weeks back, we had a good comparison in our minds; I think Taroko is difficult to top. Maybe the ruggedness and forested cliff walls or the rapidly flowing river make Taroko appeal to the senses. Whatever the reason and how realistic the comparison, this was an amazing hour as we descended to the Pacific Ocean.

It was Chang Kai-shek's son who oversaw this mammoth road building project and he was the master-mind behind the many innovations that ultimately led to the country's modernization and entry into the global market. At least according to our guide (I have not been able to independently verify it), Chang Kai-Shek's son, who took over as premier after his father's death, did much to bring Taiwan onto the world scene and make it a country as prosperous as most in the West. He started by abolishing Martial Law but, perhaps more importantly, saw the importance of the industry that was being established in Silico Valley. He sent Taiwanese engineers and scientists to work and study in the USA and they, in turn, returned with the knowledge necessary to set up factories to support the semiconductor and integrated circuits industry. This same vision led to Taiwan's leadership in component manufacturing and improved quality in its textile business.

From our observations it appears that there has been a significant impact on this country by Japanese industry and many world-recognized Japanese corporations have major manufacturing plants in Taiwan. Similarly, there is a major contribution from mainland China and trade between the two seems to be both significant and "friendly" despite the obvious political barriers.

"Made in Taiwan" today seems synonymous with quality and value (not the old stereotypical "cheap") and, from our brief exposure, the country seems headed in the same direction as Japan and South Korea as far as industry is concerned.

Our day of magnificent scenery was not over by any means. We traveled up the Pacific coast for another fifty miles or so and everywhere the scenery was spectacular. We made a couple of stops for photos but otherwise we were on the bus all the way back to Taipei.



The coast is very similar to that in California with the coastal mountain range coming steeply down to the ocean. The road hugs the water for much of the way (where there is sufficient land to carve out a road at that level) but often climbs several hundred feet above the ocean and seems to hang on the cliff side. It really is an amazing engineering feat and, judging by the frequent road works, one that needs a lot of ongoing maintenance. The views it provides, however, are spectacular and at least as beautiful as those from California Route 1. It was a great 2 ½ hour drive, even after the rain and the mist started as we got closer to Taipei.

The final 45 minutes into the city was on expressway and included several tunnels, one of which was 13 Km long. The rain was quite intense by now and the city was shrouded in clouds as we reached the end of our journey and said goodbye to our guide, driver (special thanks for a safe trip on very tricky roads) and our fellow travelers.

Taiwan Route 9 (or California Route 1??)

The tour company provided a shuttle from the bus drop-off point to our hotel but a combination of traffic (Friday rush hour), weather and – in our case – distance gave us another 2 hours before we checked in. We had seen on the city map that our hotel was out of the center some but hadn't realized just how far it was. Actually, the distance from the Westin where we had stayed last weekend is only a few miles but traffic and very long red lights (up to 2 minutes) make it a long journey. Fortunately the hotel is only a few minutes' walk from the Metro station so we will make use of that system for our next three days.

Tonight we ate at the Chinese restaurant in the hotel and had another excellent meal. We have found that dinner prices are very reasonable, even in the cities, but a bottle of wine can be quite a bit more expensive than we are used to. All in all, however, the evening meal costs have been very reasonable.

Saturday October 21

We were up a bit later today as we had no “bus leaving” deadline to meet. We had breakfast in the lounge and talked to the receptionist there about places to see. She was very helpful and we have things planned for the remainder of our stay in Taiwan.

Today we got used to the Metro (actually very easy) and found our way to the Taipei 101 building. This had been the tallest building in the world when built but has now fallen to about sixth position. Still, at over 1500 feet and with an interesting design (resembling bamboo supposedly) in glass it is an impressive building and towers above most others in the city.



***The Taipei 101 Building
and nearby reflections***

We chose not to go up to the top of the 101, partly because it was a little cloudy today and partly because we have been up lots of tall buildings. Instead, we chose to spend a little time on the huge shopping mall which covers the first five floors of the tower and then we walked outside and people-watched. The area close to the tower is a favorite for locals and has a number of pedestrianized streets so we were able to see families enjoying their Saturday from the vantage point of strategically placed benches.



Street scenes in Taipei
And a great way to teach kids
about firefighting

We walked to another Metro station and came home by a slightly different route and felt confident in our ability to get around Taipei as needed. Tonight we ate at Ruth's Chris Steakhouse which is a few minutes' walk from the hotel. While we are fond of Asian cuisine and have had several excellent meals during our stay in Taiwan, we occasionally find ourselves in the mood for a good steak. And they don't come much better than Ruth's Chris!

Sunday October 22

After breakfast we walked to the MRT station and went to the old part of Taipei which had been much of the city in the 19th and 20th centuries – at least until after World War II. We visited a couple of temples (the first of which was very crowded, primarily with Buddhist worshippers) and the second was one of the older Taoist buildings here. Despite the fact that there was active worship (including some chanting at the first one), tourists and locals mixed and no-one seemed to mind photography.



*Buddhist
(left and
right)
and Tao
(below)
Temples*



We then walked through this old neighborhood following a suggested route from one of the guide books. This gave us not only a path to follow but provided a brief description of the buildings that we saw. The walk took in 20 sites but we managed to cover only about half of them in our five hours of walking.

There were buildings of historical significance, including one hall built to celebrate a Japanese emperor's coronation in the 1930s. This was also where the Japanese surrender took place at the end of World War II and where Chiang Kai-Shek made speeches when the Peoples' Republic was formed.



Chang Kai-Shek

Zhongshan Hall was built in 1928, during the Japanese colonial era, to commemorate the accession of Emperor Hirohito. The hall served as an important activity center during the Japanese colonial era. After Taiwan's retrocession, the building was renamed Zhongshan Hall and used for the reception of foreign dignitaries.

We also saw the north gate of the old city (built in the mid-1800s), the recently renovated old post office (built in the 1930s) and a number of sites of significance to Taiwan's more recent history.

***North Gate
and
Post Office***



Modern Taipei



We ended our tour at the Peace Park, which is a beautiful area set in the middle of the city.

It was here that early demonstrations against the post WW II government of Chiang Kai-Shek (while he was still premier of all China) took place and where tens of thousands were killed. It seems a little ironic that it was in Taiwan that Chiang Kai-Shek established the "second China" after losing the civil war to Mao Tse Tung – and became a hero to the Taiwanese!



The 228 Peace Memorial Park is a historic site and municipal park. The park contains memorials to victims of the February 28 Incident of 1947, including the Taipei 228 Memorial that stands at the center of the park and the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum, housed at the site of a former radio station that operated under Japanese and Kuomintang rule. In 1947, a group of protesters, angry over a brutal police action against Taiwanese civilians, took over the station and used it to broadcast accusations against the Kuomintang government. The action formed part of a chain of events now referred to as the February 28 Incident. A subsequent, more severe crackdown by the Nationalist government restored the station to Kuomintang control and ushered in Taiwan's period of white terror. Two years later, the Kuomintang lost ground in the Chinese Civil War and its leaders retreated to Taiwan.

So, we spent about six hours away from the hotel on a beautiful day – not too hot, less humid and mostly sunny – and thoroughly enjoyed not only the sites but just being amongst the local people, all of whom appeared to be very friendly and helpful.

Tonight we ate at one of the hotel restaurants and had a very good four course meal with grouper (excellent) as the main course.

Monday October 23

Molly woke up this morning with a stomach upset so she had a light breakfast (cup of tea) and then went back to bed. We had an afternoon tour planned but by noon Molly still wasn't up to it but she insisted that I go.

I (somewhat reluctantly) left the hotel and took the Metro to downtown, had a coffee lunch at Starbucks and waited in the Westin Hotel for pick up for the tour. We left about 1:20 (only five customers in all) and drove about 45 minutes to the northeast coast of Taiwan. Here we made three photo stops to view the amazing crashing waves coming onshore. Once again, the mountains go straight down to sea level and there is a minimal amount of flat ground – just enough for the narrow road and a footpath promenade. The scenery was magnificent; it seems that the east coast of Taiwan has a lot of great views along this coast.



*Crashing waves,
unusual sand-
stone
and iron ore
Rock formations*



*Defunct Gold and Copper Processing
Plants*

Taiwan's Northeast Coast

From Pacific Ocean level, the small bus climbed up a winding narrow road to the old gold mining town of Jiufen. Gold had been discovered near here in the late 1800s and had been mined until the 1970s, mostly through the Japanese Occupation era but into the Chang Kai-Shek regime. Copper had also been mined but both metals are now depleted and the town of

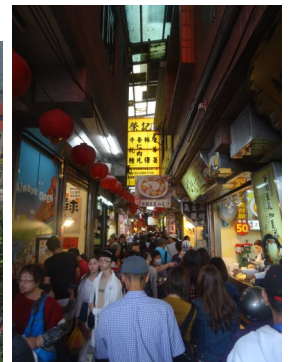
Jiufen has been turned into a tourist attraction on top of the hill overlooking the beautiful coastline.

Despite the earliest reference to the production of gold in the island dating to 1430, awareness of the wealth of Taiwan's gold districts did not develop until the late Qing era. In 1890, workmen discovered flakes of gold while constructing the new Taipeh-Kelung railway and in 1893 a rich placer district was discovered in the hills of Kau-hun that produced several kilograms of gold a day. In the next year, the promise became greater than ever after a Chinese "expert" with experience gained in California found gold-bearing quartz in the said hills.

The resulting gold rush hastened the village's development into a town, and reached its peak during the Japanese era. The claim was owned by the Fujita Company, the first Japanese company to mine quartz in Taiwan and which occasionally made an income of a few thousand yen per month from the Kau-hun gold operations.

Gold mining activities declined after World War II, and the mine was shut off in 1971. Jiufen quickly went into decline, and for a while the town was mostly forgotten. Today, however, Jiufen is a renowned tourist attraction and draws many tourists from Japan and from Taipei during the weekends.

The town is basically one long narrow street lined with shops, cafes and tea rooms and has the feel of a Middle Eastern souk. We were given an hour to stroll through the area and eat if we liked before meeting our guide again. At this point we walked down about 300 steps to meet up with the bus again and complete the tour by driving back into Taipei.



Jiufen



I was first off the bus at the Westin and was soon at the Metro station to make my way back to the hotel. I managed to get started just before the main rush hour so the train was not so crowded and I was soon back at the station closest to the hotel. Incidentally, this particular Metro line (mostly over-ground) is unmanned (driverless) whereas the much longer trains in the city center appear to be manned.

When I got back Molly was feeling better but still not in the mood for any real food. So, I dined in the Executive Lounge and had a perfectly adequate meal of cold cuts, cheese, various hors d'oeuvres and a nice wine. We have often said that one could make a meal of the food available in Asian Executive Lounges but this is the first time that I have actually proven it to be true. And there were still late evening snacks to complete the day!

Tuesday October 24 (Elizabeth and Chris' 25th Anniversary)

We had breakfast in the hotel, checked out and took a taxi to the airport in time for our 1:40 China Airlines flight to Hong Kong. The flight and meal were excellent and we arrived on time at 3:345pm (same time zone as Taiwan). The bags took a long time to reach the carousel but then it was an easy train ride and a shuttle bus to the hotel. Since Molly was still not feeling up to a dinner out, we filled up on food and wine in the Concierge Lounge. As we have said, hotels in Asia provide excellent service in their lounges so we were well satisfied with our evening meal.

Wednesday October 25

We had breakfast in the lounge and then left the hotel via the Pacific Place Mall. Here we were able to top up our Octopus cards for transportation in Hong Kong. We then took the Metro one stop to a place close to the bottom of the series of outdoor escalators that allow an easy climb about ½ mile up from the waterfront. It's fascinating to see all the shops and markets from the vantage point above the roads and then to meander down the steep streets to see the fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and fish for sale.

Hong Kong Island is dominated by steep, hilly terrain, which makes it the home of some rather unusual methods of transport up and down the slopes.

Since it was officially opened to the public on 15 October 1993, the escalator system has played a very important role in pedestrianizing the Western District. The daily traffic exceeds 85,000 people, although originally forecast for 27,000.

The escalator system is 800 meters (2,600 ft) long with a vertical climb of 135 meters (443 ft). The total travel time is twenty minutes, but most people walk while the escalator moves to shorten their trip. Due to the geographical situation, the same distance is equivalent to several miles of zigzagging roads if travelling by car. It consists of 18 escalators and three inclined moving walkways. According to Guinness World Records, these escalators together form the longest outdoor covered escalator system.



The one-way escalators and moving walkways run downhill from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and then uphill from 10 a.m. to midnight daily. If users want to travel in an opposite way, they need to use the staircases and ramps along the escalator, which consists of total 782. Apart from serving as a method of transporting, the system is also a tourist attraction and has restaurants, bars, and shops lining its route. There is an entrance and exit on each road it passes, often on both sides of the road.



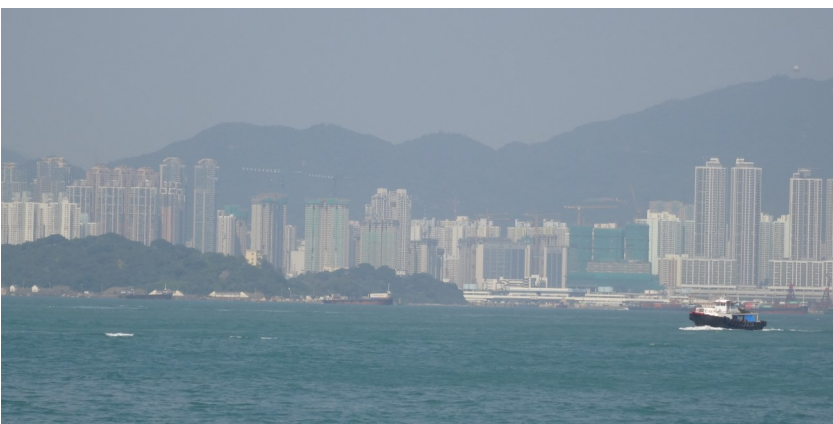
*Market stalls near
the escalator*



Once back on the level ground we took one of Hong Kong's trams to the end of the line at Kennedy. Here we sat and watched the activity on the water between Hong Kong and Kowloon and the ever-changing skyline. We said last time we were here that, with the amount of landfill that both cities are creating, we should be able to walk between the two. It's not the case yet but it seems to be getting closer by the minute.



Hong Kong and Kowloon across the water



We then took the tram back to our hotel, having spent a very relaxing day simply wandering and people watching. It is nice to visit a place like this several times and not feel that every tourist spot has got to be seen.

We had afternoon tea in the hotel and went for dinner at one of the many restaurants in the mall beneath the hotel. It was crowded (even though we were dining early) but we had a good Thai meal.

Thursday October 26

After breakfast we took the bus to Stanley Market and spent about 3 hours strolling the narrow street full of souvenir shops, having a drink and ice cream and spending our Hong Kong dollars.



Stanley Market is a street market in Stanley on Hong Kong Island. The street is a typical example of a traditional old open-air market in Hong Kong and has since a major tourist attraction, well known for its bargains. Many of the stalls or shops in Stanley Market sell Hong Kong souvenirs as well as clothing - particularly silk garments and traditional Chinese dress - toys, ornaments, luggage, souvenirs, paintings, and Chinese arts and crafts. The market grew out of Chek Chu Tsuen, a nearby village.



Layout of the Hong Kong Territory

Mainland China is north beyond Kowloon

Stanley is at the south end of Hong Kong Island on the South China Sea

It was about a 45 minute bus ride each way – with good views of resort hotels, beaches and steep hills – so it was after 3pm by the time we returned to the hotel. This meant we had time for afternoon tea and plenty of time to relax before dinner in the rather exclusive Chinese restaurant in the hotel. It was an excellent meal with superb service.