

“Jackie has found the magic formula to doing what she loves and making a living”

# LIVING THE HONG KONG HIGH LIFE

Want to lead photography tours but don't know where to start? Lisa Perkovic chats to Jackie Peers, a photographer living the dream in Hong Kong.

**S**hooting from the hip  
 On a steamy Hong Kong morning, five tourists strolling through Kowloon's produce markets with their cameras ready to go are not an unusual sight. What is strange is how they walk past each stall holder, peering at buckets filled with dried fish, watching a cleaver snap down on an entire pig carcass, without once reaching for their cameras. Locals aren't suddenly staring down a long lens or disturbed by blinding flash. What they don't know is that we're all shooting from the hip. From our looks of extreme concentration and the careful cradling of cameras, I think we look pretty obvious but if anyone's cottoned on to our stealth shooting, they're not showing it. »

■ **The folks of Kowloon**  
 Kowloon, Hong Kong  
 One of the many market streets in Kowloon, fascinating for photography. Shot at midday.

**DETAILS**

**Location:** Panasonic Lumix  
**Equipment:** Nikon D300  
**Specs:** 1/80sec; f/3.6; ISO 200  
**Post-production:** minor adjustments using Levels in Photoshop





**DETAILS**  
**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 10D  
 28-70mm f/2.8  
**Specs:** 1/50sec; f/8;  
 ISO 100  
**Post-production:** minor  
 adjustments using  
 Curves in Photoshop

■ **Tap Mun Chau - old dresser**  
 I found this dresser in a dark corner of an abandoned house in the New Territories, Hong Kong. It was surrounded by so much rubbish, you wouldn't even know it was there. The villages are drab in colour, so items like this stand out. Shot in low light with a tripod.

**DETAILS**  
**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Panasonic Lumix  
**Specs:** 1/800sec; f/5.6; ISO 200  
**Post-production:** minor adjustments using Curves in Photoshop

■ **Tanka Fisher lady**  
 Tap Mun Chau, New Territories, Hong Kong. The locals go about their daily chores in the New Territories and it's all very removed from the civilisation of down town Hong Kong. This lady has probably never been to Hong Kong island. She will more than likely have been net fishing around the island. Shot under bright skies.



■ **Wong Chek Yeung**  
 So many of the houses have an air of sudden abandonment; with letters, books, family photos, clothes and ornaments lying undisturbed. Shot in wet weather with poor light, on a tripod inside.

**DETAILS**  
**Location:** New Territories, Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 10D  
**Specs:** 1/100sec; f/8; ISO 100  
**Post-production:** minor adjustments using Curves in Photoshop



**DETAILS**  
**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 10D  
**Specs:** 1/45sec; f/8; ISO 100  
**Post-production:** minor adjustments using Curves in Photoshop

■ **Tap Mun**  
 Tap Mun means entrance way, so the doors work for that. A remote and forgotten corner of Hong Kong.

After a few hours under Walk About Hong Kong founder and guide Jackie Peer's expert tutelage, we've been let loose on Kowloon for a photography tour with a difference. Jackie caters her tours to suit each photographer's needs. Today's tour of the popular market district is about capturing life as it happens.

Shooting from the hip is raw and action-packed. It's hit or miss, people don't have a chance to pose. In a city with more than seven million people, there's hardly any elbow room, let alone space to set up a shot and shoot it. Today we don't get in anyone's way.

Jackie advises us to shoot from the hip – or chest, or stomach – positioning the camera wherever it feels most comfortable. It takes a few goes to figure out how to hold the camera so your shots are level without looking

**PRO TIP**

**ISO IN CONTROL**

Pick out a high and low ISO setting as your safety go-to points. A good place to start for beginners is to use ISO 200 for strong light, and ISO 1600 for shade.

completely ridiculous or overly obvious. This technique is great in markets where the stalls are often operated by elderly people sitting on crates and stools. They're at the right level for your camera, not out of it. Faces are better than backs.

The hardest part, aside from not looking through the viewfinder, is not looking at your shots after you've taken them. Glancing at the LCD screen every two seconds is a dead giveaway. Instead, you've got to trust the technique.

After free styling for a few hours, we stop for fried rice and a debrief in a local tea house. Jackie rattles off our lunch orders while we cull the bad shots. She spends time looking through each of our shots in camera, sharing secrets on cropping, composing and exposing.

Today is definitely not about quantity – by the end of lunch I've dumped most of my shots, there's plenty of cut off heads, out of focus fruits and strange angles. But the handful of keepers are like nothing I've ever shot before.

**Discovering new territories**

Jackie's other photography tours take place far from the crowds; in the idyllic New Territories north east of Hong Kong. A metro ride, two buses and a

ferry take us to the peaceful island of Tap Mun, where abandoned houses, bright temples and stunning views across to China are the perfect subjects for a day of shooting. At this sleepy fishing village we tackle the finer details of lens types, portraits and still life.

Much of Jackie's own photography has been focused on capturing the eerie collection of items left behind on Hong Kong's outer islands. Exploring the islands on treks, sailing trips and these photography tours is the way she likes to spend her days. "People don't realise what you can see just an hour and a half out of the city," says the one-time photographic studio owner. "I can take them out here and show them that it's the small details that matter. Look at the way a kettle is tucked into a crumbling doorway, or how old photographs are still pinned up on walls."

Originally training as a nurse in New Zealand, Jackie always intended on travelling with her profession. She spent four years working in the »

**“Shooting from the hip is raw and action-packed. It's hit or miss, people don't have a chance to pose”**



**10 important things to consider before starting up a photographic tour company**

- 01 LOCATION**  
Choose it wisely. What do you have to offer that others don't? Look for a unique location/subject matter and know it well
- 02 FIGURE OUT YOUR TARGET MARKET**  
Where are they coming from? What is their age group? Will they have free time on weekdays or weekends? In the daytime or just evenings? Use this information to structure your tour and where it takes place
- 03 KNOW WHAT YOUR SUBJECT**  
Know what you're talking about, be it the natural environment, culture or people and the photographic aspect of each
- 04 ITINERARY**  
Know the itinerary like the back of your hand but don't be too specific about it with your guests. This can cause problems if you suddenly need to change your activities
- 05 BACK UP PLANS**  
Have back up locations for bad weather, or for clients unable to use the area due to fitness, allergies etc
- 06 FLEXIBILITY AND PATIENCE**  
Remember you'll be dealing with real people, who are probably jetlagged
- 07 LOYALTY**  
Build up relationships with people and businesses in the areas you'll be conducting your tours. Locals can make life very difficult and they'll need to get used to seeing you around. Also try and use services in the area, take your guests to a local restaurant instead of telling them to bring packed lunches
- 08 DIPLOMACY**  
If you're planning on running group tours, you'll be dealing with people of all skill levels. Don't say "we're going to do this because that's all one of you can do." Plan projects and activities for all skill levels so no one feels left out or left behind
- 09 EQUIPMENT**  
You'll be helping people with all different types of cameras so try and familiarise yourself with as many different camera models as possible
- 10 MARKETING**  
How are you going to get word out about your tours? Set up a website, put an advert in a newspaper, even put up a flyer on a message board just to get started



DETAILS

**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 50D 50mm f/1.4  
**Specs:** 1/50sec; f/3.5; ISO 640  
**Post-production:** minor adjustments using Curves in Photoshop

Hoffman

Hoffman is a one and a half year old Orangutan male, who has been moved into his night cage. Hoffman shares his cage with other Orangutans a similar age. Taken at the Orangutan Care Centre, Pangkulan Bun in Kalimantan Indonesian Borneo.



**“I saw a gap in the market... so we brought the photography tour back into the city.”**

UK, where a passion for photography developed during her travels around Europe. “I would try and get involved in whatever I could in London, and once got a job as the third assistant in a studio...” she says, an experience that was a stepping stone to enrolling in the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology photography course back in New Zealand. Spending 12 years running a busy wedding and portrait studio gave her itchy feet and once the children were grown, Jackie and her husband set off to travel full time.

They eventually settled in Asia, using Hong Kong as their base to explore the mountains of China, India and Pakistan. She, her husband and spaniel Fergus

**PRO TIP**

**LIGHTING THE WAY**

Learning to use centre-weighted or partial light metering will give you greater control over your camera for complex lighting situations.

currently live on their yacht in the idyllic harbour of Hebe Haven, Sai Kung in the New Territories outside of Hong Kong.

**Walk Hong Kong**

Jackie’s guiding business, Walk Hong Kong, aims to introduce visitors to the natural splendours of Hong Kong that exist beyond the shopping malls and the city streets.

“We can take you hiking in some of Hong Kong’s most unpopulated and pristine areas, or guide you through the back streets of Kowloon, explaining the history as we go.” The photography tours grew as a natural addition to these activities. “Of course visitors wanted to take photos, and I found that I could help them, both in terms of locations and technical assistance.”

Jackie has found the magic formula to doing what she loves and making a living. She shares her tips on setting up photography tours and workshops.

**When did you know you were ready to run photography tours?**

There’s no course on how to be a



Orangutan families

This is a candid shot of the roaming female and her baby orangutan that come to the feeding stations at the centre when food is short in the forest. Orangutan research centre, Camp Leakey in Kalimantan Indonesian Borneo.

DETAILS

**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 50D 50mm f/1.4  
**Specs:** 1/100sec; f/4; ISO 800  
**Post-production:** Minor adjustments in Photoshop

photography tour guide and when you’re ready to run a tour. I’d been exploring the New Territories around Hong Kong by myself, just to get orientated, and I loved what I discovered. I started taking some of my new friends on my walks and they seemed to get a lot out of it, so I decided to start taking others too. I founded Walk Hong Kong with Marc Foehn in 2003.

Hong Kong is a stop over destination but a lot of businesspeople who are here all the time get sick of just seeing the same »

DETAILS

**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 50D 50mm f/1.4  
**Specs:** 1/100sec; f/5.6; ISO 500  
**Post-production:** minor adjustments using Curves in Photoshop

Douglas

Douglas is so young he needs care 24 hours a day. Normally an Orangutan would not leave its mother side until at least two years old so a lot of time is spent cuddling the little ones. Orangutan Care Centre, Pangkulan Bun in Kalimantan Indonesian Borneo.



Hong Kong homes of the past

The homes in the New Territories could not be any more different to the skyscrapers on Hong Kong island. These small fishing villages offer a different pace of life.

DETAILS

**Location:** Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 50D 50mm f/1.4  
**Specs:** 1/100sec; f/4; ISO 800  
**Post-production:** Minor adjustments in Photoshop





ON TOUR SHOT

DETAILS

**Location:** Sai Kung, Hong Kong  
**Equipment:** Canon 5D  
**Specs:** 1/500sec; f/6.3; ISO 100  
**Post-production:** Minor adjustments in Photoshop

■ **The daily catch in Sai Kung**  
 Just a short bus ride but a world away from the skyscrapers of Hong Kong, this sleepy seaside town is known for fresh seafood. It can't get any fresher than this. A fisherman sorts his catch.



LISA'S TOUR SHOTS



things. They want to get out into the countryside – they don't have a lot of time – and they want to know how to use more on their camera than just the on, off and automatic buttons. So I saw a gap in the market. A lot of the guests expressed interest in taking photos of the Kowloon markets tours so we brought the photography tour back into the city.

**What's the lesson you teach the most to your students?**

Most of my students are digital camera users that have never used film before. They are quick to take a photo without thinking about the content. People have forgotten to pre-visualise the image. I get them to take a step back and think about their shots before they shoot.

They're usually using the camera on the programme modes, so most camera teaching is using the Manual, Aperture and Shutter priority settings. Everyone enjoys getting to use all the buttons on

their camera, they love learning what each one does.

**Do you have any tricks for explaining aperture/shutter speed/ISO to people?**

Keep it simple, it's a bit hard to put into words. Going through each part separately, talking about it in terms of your creative input and control works well. I want them to see there's more than using what the man in the head office has designed for automatic modes. I often explain it as aperture – lens, shutter – camera and the ISO as the link in between. The only other tip I have is practice practice practice....

**Do you have any plans to expand the range of photography tours?**

Yes, we're going to add more local tours here in Hong Kong. I'll also be starting a photography tour focusing on Orangutans at the Camp Leakey Rehab Centre in Kalmintan, Borneo. In conjunction with

**“most camera teaching is using the Manual, Aperture and Shutter priority settings”**

Orangutan Aid, we're working on raising the awareness about the Orangutans' plight. With the money going towards the “buy a forest campaign”, we become the providers of a home for them, and all the long term benefits associated with it for the indigenous population. We'll see how well received that is, and hopefully will be able to add more after that point.

 To find out more about Walk Hong Kong and Jackie Peers, see [walkhongkong.com](http://walkhongkong.com) and [jackiepeers.com](http://jackiepeers.com)

» IMAGES

**KOWLOON GOLDFISH MARKETS**

» Canon 5D; 1/100sec; f/5.6; ISO 400. All sorts of fish are pegged up on stalls lining the streets for people to buy

**TINY TURTLES**

» Canon 5D; 1/60sec; f/3.5; ISO 500. Penny turtles for sale at the Goldfish Markets

**DRIED FISH, KOWLOON MARKETS**

» Canon 5D; 1/125sec; f/5; ISO 250. Anything and everything is for sale at the Kowloon markets. Live fish, fresh fish, even dried fish...

**SIGHTS ON SAI KUNG**

» Canon 5D; 1/500sec; f/9; ISO 320. Boats line the wharf and jetty at Sai Kung, unloading their catch for eager local customers

