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Things to do in Hong Kong

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High-rise Hong Kong: the city skyline as ‘museum of architecture’

A web of walkways connects some of the world’s finest towers, from IM Pei to Zaha Hadid Architects

Edwin Heathcote

12 HOURS AGO

16

This article is part of FT Globetrotter’s [guide to Hong Kong](#)

Hong Kong’s incredible density and three-dimensional complexity is characterised by its towers. It is intensified, however, by a network of layers of circulation. There is no single street level but rather a lattice: pavements, bridges, escalators, stairs, covered walkways and air-conditioned sky-bridges. While wandering through the city, you might find yourself in a corporate lobby or sharing a glazed bridge with office workers, sharp-suited lawyers or lounging nannies, picnicking on their day off in ingeniously constructed cardboard shelters.

You’ll also find a tightly focused collection of some of the finest towers and skyscrapers in Asia, or indeed anywhere. The city districts of Central and Admiralty have become a kind of museum of architecture, a wonderful tracking of trends and technology over the past 75 years or so. There is not much left from earlier periods — with the exception of the occasional sculptural lion, cannon or war memorial — but that does not limit its range of expression.

You can cover this display of architecture easily and freely. The myriad walkways are not always easily navigable, but they lend themselves to a leisurely, compact architecture walking tour, which, if you can find your way around, involves barely any walking at all.

The Henderson (Zaha Hadid Architects)

2 MURRAY ROAD, CENTRAL



Newest, shiniest, most expensive: The Henderson building, by Zaha Hadid Architects © Virgile Bertrand

The newest and shiniest, most transparent, most expensive and most public of this group of towers is the Henderson. From the office of Zaha Hadid Architects, it is one of the biggest and best projects the practice has completed since Hadid died in 2016.

The 36-storey tower sits on what is said to have been the world’s most expensive building plot per square foot. It looks like a bundle of thick glass rods tied together in a low waist, with glass panels in hundreds of complex curvatures — a manufacturing feat only made possible by computer-aided design and production. Organic and fluid, this is a significant and elegant tower.



“Organic and fluid” ... © Virgile Bertrand



... “It looks like a bundle of thick glass rods tied together in a low waist” © Virgile Bertrand

It is also, for an upscale corporate office, remarkably accessible, tied into the island’s network of elevated walkways. There are lush and intimate tropical gardens at an elevated lobby level and, above these, snaking, silvery and sinuous sky-bridges act as canopies.

The third-floor office lobby, with its Jeff Koons balloon sculpture, is open to the public. As is the lower lobby with its extraordinary scooped golden ceiling. Auction house Christie’s has taken space inside too, meaning its floors will be filled with a rotating show of art and the theatre of the auctions themselves.

Hadid herself had a major disappointment in Hong Kong when her radical 1983 design for a club on the Peak — the winner of an architectural competition — remained unbuilt. This is, at least in part, a small (well, 36-storey), posthumous compensation. [Website](#); [Directions](#)