

Wong Tai Sin

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Islands District
Kowloon City
Kwun Tong
Sai Kung
Southern District
Tuen Mun
Wan Chai
Wong Tai Sin
Yau Tsim Mong
Yuen Long



LUXE By LUXE City Guides; images by Calvin Sit

Temples and Towers

Wong Tai Sin, Hong Kong's only landlocked district, is home to an intriguing mix of temples and towers, colour and calm, a heady mix that's quintessentially Hong Kong.

A more serene side of Chinese religion can be found at Chi Lin Nunnery and Nan Lian Garden, where the large Tang-style Buddhist complex and garden offers a tranquil place to escape the city and learn about Chinese culture.

Some surprising alternative attractions have also emerged — thanks to a little help from social media. While Wong Tai Sin's 22 public housing estates are a vital part of Hong Kong's social history, few would have predicted that one of them would become celebrated as the city's most "Instagrammable" destination.

Built in the 1960s, Choi Hung Estate was the largest public housing development of its kind at the time, originally housing over 43,000 residents. In recent years, a new wave of photographers has fallen in love with its rainbow-coloured facade and nostalgia-tinged basketball courts, sharing their images with the world and breathing fresh life into one of Hong Kong's oldest examples of public housing.

Highlights

- Burn incense at Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple and wish for good fortunes for the year ahead.
See what fate has in-store with a reading at Wong Tai Sin Fortune-Telling and Oblation Arcade.
Soak up the serenity of traditional Chinese landscaping and water features at Nan Lian Garden.
Find inner zen at the calming Lotus Pond Garden and Hall of Celestial Kings at Chi Lin Nunnery.
Snap photos at the rainbow-coloured Choi Hung Estate, one of the oldest of its kind in Hong Kong.
Head up the hills at Lion Rock Country Park for sweeping cityscape views.

Insider's Favourites



Tsz Wan Court

Tsz Wan Court (Tsz Wan Kok Temple) might not be the best-known temple, but it's one of the most fascinating. In addition to the familiar statues of Asian celestial beings, you'll find hallways lined with colourful murals illustrating the Taoist "18 levels of hell" — the stages it is believed your soul passes through after death to atone for your sins during life.

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Insider's Experiences



Wong Tai Sin: Zen in the City

Suitable for culture, family, relaxation

If you're seeking good fortune, religious guidance, a break from the busy city, or all three, then Wong Tai Sin District is the place to be. In one afternoon, you can experience the peace and tranquility of Chi Lin Nunnery and Nan Lian Garden, and then immerse yourself in the colourful traditions of Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple.

Hidden in plain sight amid Wong Tai Sin's overhead highways and high-rise residential buildings, lies the nunnery and adjacent garden. The easiest way to explore these two destinations is to start with Nan Lian Garden. Located just a few minutes from MTR Diamond Hill Station, walking through its wooden gates transports you to an oasis of calm, with clever sound insulation keeping out the noise of nearby traffic.

Based on the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) Jiangshouju Garden in China's Shanxi Province, Nan Lian Garden showcases traditional Chinese landscaping techniques and aesthetic principles, with winding paths taking you past lush greenery, ornamental rocks, koi-filled ponds and a rushing waterfall. Meanwhile, its classical timber structures are built without a single nail, including the striking red bridges leading to the garden's centrepiece, the magnificent golden Pavilion of Absolute Perfection.

For Yip Ping-kin, a worker at Nan Lian Garden, it's about more than just a moment of peace. "I see more than just rocks and trees; to me, each object is distilled from history and the culture of the ages. The garden is a platform to spread Chinese culture and history. It gives people from the busy city a chance to have a quiet moment," she explains.

Connected to Nan Lian Garden is Chi Lin Nunnery. Established in 1934, this former villa went through several stages of renovation in the 1990s, before finally opening to the public in 2000. More than just a place of worship for Buddhists, it is now home to a school, library, dentist and residences for the elderly.

"Being a nun in the modern day means helping other people," Yip says. "In ancient times, it was all about studying books, learning the ways of Buddhism and its philosophy. Now you can see that they dedicate their mission to helping the needy, sick and old."

The main areas open to the public are the Lotus Pond Garden and Hall of Celestial Kings, which houses a gigantic golden statue of Buddha guarded by four deities at each corner of the hall. The Lotus Pond Garden allows visitors to settle into the calmness before walking into the sacred hall where chants play in the background.

Meanwhile, a contrasting destination for culture, heritage and religion lies just one MTR station away. Embodying the religions of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple is probably the busiest temple in Hong Kong, and has a reputation as the luckiest too. Dedicated to the god of healing Wong Tai Sin, this iconic temple is a feast for the senses, with bright red pillars, bronze zodiac statues, jade-coloured roofs with intricate latticework and dragon adornments, and the scent of incense thick in the air.

"I have been coming here to wish for good luck for at least a decade," says 65-year-old Wong Mei-yu. "I follow the same routine every year — I buy nine incense sticks and a stack of wishing papers from one of the stores outside the temple, and then write my family members' names onto the papers. First I present the incense sticks to Buddha and the gods, then burn the papers to wish for good luck and fortune."

Visitors can also get their fortune told by shaking a bamboo stick out of a box onto the ground. The temple provides free bamboo for this, with each stick inscribed with a number and corresponding Chinese saying.

For help deciphering your fate, head to one of the fortune tellers in the adjacent

Wong Tai Sin Fortune-Telling and Oblation Arcade — they will translate the reading, providing context to your life, for a small fee. Their doors are plastered with photographs of celebrity customers and signs indicating their language abilities. They can also tell your fortune from palm or face reading — ancient arts that Chinese people have relied on for generations to help navigate their future.



Previous: Wong Tai Sin's Housing Estates

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