The Edge of Victoria Harbour:
Shau Kei Wan + Sam Ka Tsuen, Villages in the City’s Shadow

This @ 4.5-5 hour pathway is as far off the beaten track as it gets—and it’s a glorious afternoon on both sides of the cleanest and most pleasant part of Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbour. The far eastern end of Hong Kong island used to have the best fishing on the island, and here you can still feel a bit of the old seafaring ways in Shau Kei Wan, an urban “village” with one of the best street food markets in the city. It’s super local (it provides food for the neighborhood, and also for many of the outlying islanders), super laid back, and great for photographers because so few foreigners come this way.
From Shau Kei Wan, we walk along the harbourfront where little fishing and ferries huddle together. Then we take a small old ferry across to the fascinating Sam Ka Tseun, an 80 year old Hakka stone cutters village. It will amaze you how far away you can feel from the urban shuffle of Hong Kong, only 20 minutes from the center.

The basic plan:
2pm: we meet in Central, Hong Kong, and take the express bus or the MTR to Shau Kei Wan

2:20-4pm we explore Shau Kei Wan's large and busy wet market, one of the best in Hong Kong! A short walk takes us down the busy Shau Kei Wan main street, past many interesting shops. There's a great old fashioned local bakery along the way, and another shop where we might stop for some "Tong Seui", a traditional Hong Kong treat--a sweet dessert soup. We continue to the local Tin Hau temple, which has stood for more than 100 years on this site. Across the street, we'll stop for noodles and snacks at On Kee, famous throughout Hong Kong for its handmade, fresh fish ball and fish cake noodle soup.

4- 4:30pm We stroll a few minutes out to the waterfront, one of the most interesting sections of Victoria Harbour's shoreline. This is the narrowest point of the harbour, called "Lei Yue Mun", which means the Gate where the Fish come in. (That's why this part of Hong Kong was important for naval defence as well as the fishing trade). We walk from Shau Kei Wan along the waterfront to the neighboring community of Sai Wan Ho, passing the Aldrich Bay typhoon shelter. This is a lovely scene, and it's not that different from classic harbour scenes of old Hong Kong---ragtag fishing boats and taxi sampans, huddled together, with the sea and the mountains of Kowloon in the distance.

4:45 At Sai Wan Ho we hop the Coral Seas Ferry bound for Lei Yue Mun. This is a little, 30 passenger ferry, my favorite ferry in Hong Kong. The ride across is about ten minutes.

5-6pm We disembark, walk around another boat-filled typhoon shelter, and enter the village of Lei Yue Mun. This is a famous place where Hong Kong people come to eat fresh live seafood that they pick themselves from big tanks filled with every imaginable ocean creature. It's become a bit touristy, though, and the restaurants are overpriced and not always up to standard, so we won't linger here—we'll just enjoy the lively scene, gape at the enormous live carps and geoduck and giant King Crabs squiggling around in hundreds of tanks.

At the back of Lei Yue Mun is our real destination--the 80 year old village of Sam Ka Tseun. This is a typical Hong Kong waterfront fishing village, little changed in decades. It's amazing to find such a place only a few minutes from skyscrapers and rapid transit. (That's the beauty of Hong Kong!) It's a sleepy, evocative, place that takes you into a timeless Hong Kong lifestyle. Fishermen linger in the squares, you can hear the distinctive “Clack Clack Clack” of mahjongg players, smell the incense burning in the household altars.

You never know what you might find in Sam Ka Tsuen. One afternoon, we found the village taken over by a film production crew, who chose the location to make a movie about Hong Kong
life 70 years ago (they didn’t have to change much!) One evening, we came upon an outdoor Cantonese opera performance in progress and we were able to slip “backstage”.

At the end of the narrow, twisting village road, huge volcanic boulders stand in the path, and in the sea. Beyond them, lapped by the waves of Victoria Harbour, is a lovely little Tin Hau temple that guards the sailors and fishermen who ply the narrow Lei Yue Mun passage.

We end our tour by walking back to the head of Lei Yue Mun, where taxis, minibusses, the ferry, or the MTR await to take you back to your home or hotel.

OR

We head back over to Hong Kong island to enjoy a beer at one of Hong Kong’s best kept “secret” bars--that hangs, literally, over the harbour.

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