

## HONG KONG

DAY 9 – 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2008

We managed to check in at the airport and move into one of the VIP lounges, where the plush chairs were much better than the plastic ones available in the public lounges. However, there was just one toilet available, and after having had the curry I needed to be within running distance!! Fortunately as the night passed, more and more people left, until we were almost the last ones left before our flight was called.

Security at the Indira Gandhi Airport is very tight. As we boarded the officials not only checked our boarding passes against our passports as is usually done, but they also checked to see if there was a security stamp on all our hand luggage – that they had stamped without us knowing. I went through, but Dominic was stopped!

I did not notice for a while, and headed for the plane. When I discovered that he was not with me I returned to the gate, only to see him being lead off by a security guard. I could not even go after him, since I had passed through security. He did not seem too bothered, went through the x-ray machine again, got his baggage stamped, and returned to the gate. At least this time he did not have to queue, and went straight through to the head of the line. Mind you, onlookers would either have thought he was a young child being accompanied by a nanny, or that he was an undesirable being deported from India.

We settled into our seats, and I put eye shades on, hoping to be able to have a few hours sleep before arriving in Hong Kong. Dominic was delighted with the entertainment console and played all night, even eating the meal provided. I had had enough curry!!

I did manage to catch a little sleep throughout the flight, but it seemed that we were landing in Hong Kong long before anticipated. The flight had taken 5 and a half hours.

We landed at the new airport. I remember seeing plenty of movies (usually James Bond), with planes landing at the old airport in Hong Kong, where they would swoop low over the roof-tops of Kowloon before making a sharp turn and dive towards the runway, hoping to stop before they run out of runway and end up in the sea. The new one, built on a man-made island, is most impressive.

This is now part of China, but not quite fully China. It has its own government and laws etc. for the next 40 years or so, following the handing over of the colony by Britain in 1997. Getting through immigration took a long while – but that was mainly because a large number of flights all landed at the same time.

We then collected our luggage and took the Express Train from the airport into Kowloon. A short taxi ride took us to the Langham Place Hotel, which is where we were to stay for the next three nights.

By this time I was extremely tired, and somewhat jet-lagged. Hong Kong is 7 hours ahead of British Time, and though we had to make up 2 and a half hours from Delhi,

the night flight always causes problems. Dominic too, was yawning. You can imagine, then, when we were told that our rooms would not be ready for over an hour. Even after an hour, we were told that there was still a delay. Apparently there had been a problem with the sink. When I suggested that another room might be available, our room was suddenly ready!!

Again, we have a very comfortable room, and as soon as our bags were delivered, we crashed out on the bed. We turned the TV on to catch up on Wimbledon, but were presented with the previous day's matches (which we had already seen). I had planned to go for a short walk around the street markets at night, but both of us fell asleep straightaway and did not wake until nearly 9.00 pm, by which time we needed to get something to eat.

All in all, this had been pretty well a "dies non" – a non day, with nothing much to show!

Our evening meal, however, was a superb sampling of the various Chinese tastes, and we really felt welcome in Hong Kong.

I have received good news from home about our two babies that have been a bit of a worry. Baby Martha Pass is doing well, and so is Baby Mariella Romano, who though born some three weeks ago, was very premature, but has now put on 8 pounds and is ready to go home!

Texting and phone calls now becomes a bit of a problem because of the time difference. It means that the window open to me is from 3.00 pm to 10.00 pm and the window from the UK to me is now 8.00 am to 4.00 pm, otherwise someone is waking someone up!!

DAY 10 – 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2008



Today I feel like Baron Bomburst in "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang", where he jumps around singing "Happy Birthday to me! Happy Birthday to me! Happy Birthday dear Father! Happy Birthday to me!" Yes, today, the Feast of St Thomas, is also my birthday. I had a few texts that arrived in the middle of the night (but I had silenced

the phone and so did not get them until the morning), and Dominic greeted me first thing with a load of cards that he had with him!! Thanks to everyone for your kind birthday wishes!

Tomorrow is Beryl and Harry Griffith's wedding anniversary. I make it their 62<sup>nd</sup>! I wish them well, though I hear that even now Harry is trying to trade Beryl in for a new working model, but looks as though he stuck with her!! Please continue to pray for Beryl as she struggles on!

After a good breakfast we took the underground to the south of the Kowloon peninsula. As you may, or may not know, Hong Kong is actually made up of a large number of islands, with the oldest one named Hong Kong Island. We took one of the famous "Star" ferries – ours was the "Solar Star" across the waters to Hong Kong Island and began our day of exploration. Much of the visit to the lower part of the Island can be done through a series of bridges connecting different buildings, and thereby keeping above the traffic.



Many of the buildings are high skyscrapers, with interesting little alley-ways in between. Eventually we headed for a series of open-air escalators which took us gradually to the mid-part of the settlement. Here we were able to wander round and visit the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, where there is also a series of buildings you would associate with the Church – school, hostel, curial offices, etc. The Cathedral was simple, but a little warm, with no air-conditioning, so it must be very difficult celebrating Mass with full vestments!!



We moved on to visit the Anglican Cathedral, near to Government House. This lead almost naturally to the "Peak Tram", which is really a funicular railway leading right to the top of the Island, with some wonderful views across the area known as Hong Kong. We stayed here for some time, taking various photographs.

By the time we descended it was mid-afternoon, and so to add to the different types of transport, Dominic and I hopped on one of the double-decker trams that still ply along the lower part of Hong Kong Island. These are an experience in themselves, creaking along, trying to negotiate corners in the tracks without the wheels turning, which meant a lot of shuddering from side to side – but it was worth it.



According to my map, the terminus was near to the Macau Ferry Terminal, so we thought that it would be an idea to stay on till then, and walk the short distance back to the Star Ferry. Some 30 minutes later, however, we realised that the map that I was following had finished at the Macau Ferry Terminal, and that by now we had travelled a few miles further on! A quick read of the guide book told me that there were some 20 miles of track still left!

So we got off, paid our \$HK2 – (about 15 pence – or 20 cents) and hopped on another tram going the other way. This time we got off just where we were supposed to!

Our crossing back to Kowloon took longer than the first crossing, since there was quite a bit of traffic on the water, and we had to weave in and out of boats and tugs and other forms of water-transport. I was disappointed not to see any Chinese junks. The one vision I have always had of Hong Kong Harbour was one with countless junks taking up the water, with people living on them, thereby making a living city on the water. Clearly the authorities have tried to clear up this image!!

We got back to our hotel just after 6.30 pm, and after a quick freshen up had our evening meal – the nearest to a birthday meal. Last year I had most of the parish at my 50<sup>th</sup>; this year I had just Dominic! But we had a good meal, and ate far too much.

DAY 11 – 4th July 2008

A Happy Fourth of July to all our American friends!! Happy birthday too to Father John Dermody who is still struggling with his battle against Leukaemia – another on the prayer list!! I'm told that once the chemotherapy has worked they have found a match for the bone marrow transplant – a bit like the story of Joyce Aylward all over again. Please remember Joyce too – she has good days and bad days, and will

continue to do so until they sort out what medication she needs to take to help against the rejection of her bone marrow transplant!

This morning Dominic had breakfast on his own. My stomach was not good, and so I thought that it might be best to give eating a miss!! As soon as he had finished, however, we set off for the Island of Lantau. Up until relatively recently this has been one of the unspoilt parts of Hong Kong, but a few years ago Disney decided to open Disneyland Hong Kong there, and the new airport was also constructed on a man-made island just off Lantau.

We were making for neither destination. Two years ago a different kind of “theme park” was opened at Ngong Ping 360. There are several attractions, but the main reason why I chose this was the cable car ride which takes passengers over the rivers and valleys of the island for 25 minutes, affording some wonderful views.

Almost immediately the new airport came into sight, but seeing it from the air adds to the amazement of just how this island, runways and terminal was built. As a fan of any airport, I was fascinated. I had watched the progress of the building on the Discovery Channel several years ago, not realising that I would be there one day!



We continued inland towards the Tianten Buddha, the largest sitting Buddha in the world. This dominates the (new) theme village showing insights into typical life in a Chinese village. Of course, using the example of Disney, on another part of the island, there are the usual places to eat, to sample, to watch demonstrations of local arts, etc.



However, we decided to climb up to the Buddha – all 268 steps – I counted them in between gasping for breath!! From the top, we could look down and hear the

chanting in the nearby Po Lin Monastery. Both of these have been here for a long time!



I also found it quite unusual that Buddhism was being actively promoted and explained here in what can be claimed as part of China, whereas in Tibet it is being suppressed.

We then visited the monastery, intrigued by the chanting. The monks are strictly vegetarian and will not even allow a ham sandwich onto the site! While we were there it was clear that they were instituting a new member into their community. There were hugs of welcome after the ceremony, which is understandable in any language!



We returned to Kowloon and after a short time to freshen up, we headed to the south of the Peninsula for the nightly “Sound and Light Show” that is put on in the harbour through the innovative lighting up of the various skyscrapers with coloured lights and laser, to the accompaniment of music composed for the occasion. I have to admit that I was not altogether impressed, but not to have seen it would have been missing an opportunity!

One of the advantages, however, was that at the same time various ferries and other boats, but also a cruise liner passed at the same time and added to the light show with the lights on board flashing in time too!



A meal finished off our day, and almost our visit to Hong Kong. Tomorrow we move onto Thailand, the next stop in our round the world tour!