

New Kowloon Walled City

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A journalist for News21 journeys to the New Kowloon Walled City, Hong Kong.

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Looming over the low-rise slums and shops of eastern Kowloon, the NKWC was a thriving metropolis, much like the south western portion of the northern territories, but the NKWC was different, standing near the site of the original Kowloon Walled City. This new settlement was Hong Kongs answer to their growing immigration issues, with nowhere to house tens of thousands of refugees fleeing from the countless war torn regions, both nearby, and around the world, Hong Kong decided to mark off a small section of east Kowloon, an area that was generally undeveloped and inhabited by the poorest of poor, an area the city would like to sweep under the carpet, but instead they used it as a dumping ground for the people flooding into the archipelago.

The people arrived at the allotted area, which was just 400 x 600 meters, and immediately they started to build up, with space so limited, they had no choice but to build high, the previous Walled City was limited by the approach to Kai Tak Airport, but the NKWC had no such limitations, being located partially on the site of the old airport. During the first few years, deaths due to building collapses were common, but slowly the city grew larger and more structurally sound. The population in 2062 was four thousand, but by 2070, it was up to eighteen thousand, primarily due to refugees arriving. The NKWC, whilst created by the Hong Kong Government, was self ruling. Their power was initially supplied by solar panels on the roofs and sides of the buildings, but in later years the residents acquired enough resources and money to buy an old US built thorium reactor, which was able to supply all the power needed for the nearly twenty thousand inhabitants.

By 2091 it was dominating the Kowloon skyline, and had forever changed the look of Hong Kong. The tallest building within the NKWC was just over 300 meters tall, and the city now has an estimated forty-two thousand inhabitants, this is just a guess though, as Hong Kong hasn't been able to conduct an accurate census since 2075. Much like the previous Walled City, the NKWC has become a haven for crime, filled with opium dens, mahjong palaces, bars and gentlemen's clubs, all run in some way by the Triads. Having learned their lesson from history, the local police force has given up on keeping the law in the city, instead letting the Triads, and their enforcers, dealing with those breaking the laws in NKWC. It was during 2089 that the police made their last excursion into the Walled City. Hong Kong realized that with the massive population of the city, they were missing out on a great increase in tax revenue, and thus, sent a team of tax collectors, escorted by the Hong Kong Police Force. They were driven back before the collectors even managed to get past the outer perimeter. Triads and local government officials met, and in talks that lasted just minutes, the government agreed never to send their officials or police into the city again, just as the Triads that lived within the city agreed never to go into Hong Kong.

Earlier this year our News21 reporter Adam Sayers travelled to Hong Kong to visit the NKWC.

Having flown Virgin Spaceways from London to Hong Kong, I arrived at 1100 local time, I passed through the terminal amazingly quickly, and was soon aboard the Airport Express towards Central Hong Kong. This was my first time in the city, having previously covered stories in Shanghai and Beijing, I found it interesting to see how much more modern and advanced Hong Kong seemed to be, almost as gleaming as Tokyo, yet as technologically advanced as Mumbai. The express train was fast and quiet, like most Asian trains, it rode on magnets, within half an hour I was on the opposite side of the Tsing Ma bridge, and almost within sight of the city, I could almost make out the NKWC, and before I could begin picking out details, the train was deep within the docklands, shortly after that, I was plunged into the darkness of the cross-bay tunnel. Soon I'd be in Central, and from there could catch the ancient Star Ferry to Kowloon. The first day I was scheduled to travel to the NKWC, and get a feel for the city, it'd be tomorrow that I'd get my chance to go inside.

Riding the massive escalators up out of the MTR station at Central, I was surrounded by the immense

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skyscrapers of Hong Kong, and right on the edge of the harbor was the Star Ferry Terminal, standing in roughly the same location for over two hundred years, the ferry has provided a much needed way of getting from one side of Victoria Harbor to the other, at an amazingly low price. All of the ferries are made of wood, some of them over a hundred and fifty years old, though most have been rebuilt countless times, and nowadays run on hydrogen engines instead of the old diesel-electric. Getting aboard a boat, and especially such an old boat, was a very strange experience, most cities that once had ferries have adopted new hydrogen composite ferries, but Hong Kong still has a connection to the past with these. The journey from Central to Kowloon was short, just over fifteen minutes from getting aboard, to getting off at the other side.

From the terminal at Kowloon, the NKWC was clearly visible, thereâs simply no mistaking the shape of it, just a huge multicolored mass on the horizon, looming over the rest of Kowloon. I checked into my hotel near the terminal, and then got an underground directly to NKWC. I wasnât sure what to expect when I got there, I knew it was a thriving city within a city, and Iâd seen and read countless pages of information on it, but nothing couldâve prepared me for actually seeing the city up close. Stepping out of the MTR station, it was just a sheer wall of color, it was as though a giant knife had just cut along the side of it, not a single sign or satellite dish jutted out more than five feet, and the vivid blues of the solar panels mixed with the vibrant reds and greens of the signs, advertising everything from services within the city, to signs proclaiming opinions of people living in the area. Some were electronic, most were not, but the overall effect was hugely impressive. 300 meters of color. Walking around the outside of the city, I encountered people of every color, speaking more languages than I could count. Unlike the original Walled City, this was a hugely diverse area, though very few people seemed willing to talk to an outsider like me. Realizing I wasnât going to learn much more about the city from the locals around the outside, I headed back to my hotel to get in touch with my contact here in Hong Kong. Heâd be going with me the next day, acting as a translator, and hopefully making the locals more willing to talk to me.

Waking up at 0700 the next morning, I had a quick breakfast at the hotel before heading towards the NKWC to meet up with Wan, my translator and guide for the day. Wan had grown up in the city, and now worked as a translator for the local government. His English was perfect, with no trace of Chinese accent whatsoever. It was amazing considering he grew up in the NKWC.

We went for a drink before entering the city, Wan wanted to brief me on some of the more important local customs, and things that would be frowned upon, both by the locals, and the Triads. After covering basic Chinese customs, which I had already been well versed in, we covered things unique to the city, their sense of personal space was far less than what weâre used to, as they live in such a tight space. Crime has zero tolerance, and itâs customary for new people, even visitors, to give a donation to the Triad leaders. Thankfully Wan already had a small envelope filled with local currency, which I would be able to give them as a gift. We would only be in the city for a few hours, as both News21 and Wan thought itâd be best to keep our distance from the city at night. Having been briefed, it was time to cross into the NKWC.

The border main gate into the city was far less impressive than I expected, being nothing more than a small double door next to a wall covered in solar sheets, directly inside the door was a desk and an armed guard. Wan immediately started explaining that he was born in the city, and I was a tourist working for an international news organization, he handed both of our passports over, and waited for the border guard to make his mind up. The time seemed to pass very slowly, the room was small, cramped, and smelled of cigarettes and stale water. I honestly canât say how long it took him to make the decision, but eventually he handed the passports to Wan and allowed us to pass through.

Within the main chamber beyond the guard room, it was just a hive of people, whilst Cantonese was the official language of the city, there were people from every nation on Earth, so I was hearing more languages than could be counted. Some were trying to sell us food and wares, others were standing on corners advertising their shops and bars and dens. Journeying deeper into the NKWC, Wan led me towards the government buildings, where weâd meet with the Triads. Waiting in the small room outside the main

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office, we were told that theyâd be with us shortly, however nearly an hour later, there still wasnât anyone to meet us. We were told that they had decided that they had no interest in talking to anyone from News21. Wan advised us to leave the donation with the desk, and head towards the upper levels, so we could look out at Hong Kong. The hallways were surprisingly quiet, Wan told me that most people head to work early in the morning, and donât go anywhere else until work is over.

Arriving at the roof top levels, we had to weave between rows of greenhouses and small gardens to get towards the edge, some 300 meters below us was the pavement, and the view from the top was amazing, higher than most buildings in Kowloon. We werenât able to take in the view for too long, as soon a Triad arrived, and told Wan that weâd have to leave, as residents found the presence of a journalist to be uncomfortable. So less than 24 hours in Hong Kong, and we were forced to leave the NKWC. I was scheduled to stay for another two days, but bid farewell to Wan, and headed back to the airport. I couldnât stay in Hong Kong, as I was constantly reminded of the place I couldnât go to, with the NKWC constantly looming on the horizon.

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