

HONG KONG

# Conquering the Dragon

Sweat beads my forehead, and my legs feel positively rubbery (not so much from the uphill climb as from nerves — I'm an utter coward when it comes to heights). I have just hiked up the Dragon's Back trail in Hong Kong, and I'm about to savor the fruits of my labor. Pushing my fear aside, I take a deep breath, inch closer to the ledge and peer over nervously.

For one golden moment, I stand awestruck, greedily drinking in the

stunning views. The Shek O peninsula stretches out beneath me, long and languid — a lush green expanse punctuated by squat white houses and fringed by a crescent of honey-hued sand. In the distance, cotton-candy clouds melt into the cerulean sea. There's not a neon light in sight, much less any skyscrapers; but this, too, is Hong Kong. Its concrete jungles may be familiar territory, but this is the first time I'm experiencing this raw and rugged side of the city.

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*The one where you get your heart racing*

Vibrant, vivacious Hong Kong is in no way short on thrills. From bustling street markets and shopping malls to a constantly evolving culinary scene, there's always something to do in the pulsating heart of the city. But after multiple visits revolving around these urban diversions, I was craving a different sort of adrenaline rush.

Many visitors may not know that almost three-quarters of Hong Kong is covered by swathes of green and veined with dozens of hiking

trails, from meandering, multi-day expeditions to shorter walks. The Dragon's Back trail on Hong Kong Island is one of the most popular, thanks to its easy accessibility and spectacular views. Plus, it's a relatively manageable hike — the whole trail measures around 8.5km in length, and its highest point, Shek O Peak, stands at a modest 284m. In short, it sounds perfect for a novice like me.

I begin my adventure on Shek O Road near To Tei Wan village, and soon discover that while the going isn't all that difficult, it's no walk in the park

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either. To my dismay, the first leg of the trail feels like one seemingly endless flight of stairs. Fortunately, my pain is short-lived. After 30 minutes of huffing and puffing, the trail opens up and I am amply rewarded with gorgeous views — not just of Shek O and Stanley Peninsula to the west, but also of the distinctive verdant, rolling ridges that give the Dragon's Back its name.

After feasting my eyes on the scenery (and snapping countless photos), I resume my trek. In contrast to the initial climb, the descent feels a lot more uneventful, as the trail soon veers away from the ledge and into a dense thicket. But it is a balmy day and the canopy of trees provides plenty of shade, so I plod along contentedly.

Eventually, I trot down a steep flight of stairs to reach Tai Long Wan, the trail's official end point. This beach,

## How to get on Dragon's Back

Hop on the MTR to Shau Kei Wan Station and take Exit A3. Then, board bus 9 from Shau Kei Wan Bus Terminus and alight at To Tei Wan, Shek O Road. You'll find a sign demarcating the start of the trail. At the end of your hike, take bus 9 from Shek O Village back to Shau Kei Wan Bus Terminus.

whose name means Big Wave Bay, is known for — you guessed it — its large surf breaks. It's a popular hangout among locals, who come here to ride the waves or simply soak up the sun. After a spot of people-watching, I make for a nearby store to refuel with a fresh coconut, and slowly savor the cool, sweet liquid as it slips down my parched throat.

Thus rejuvenated, I decide to venture further along Big Wave Bay Road to Shek O, a charming little fishing village with several open-air seafood restaurants, old-school stores selling all manner of colorful beachwear, and another picturesque beach dotted with sunbathers. Taking my cue from them, I find a shaded spot and make myself comfortable on the sand.

Gazing at the glittering sea, I reflect on my morning's adventure. In spite of my weary back, sore calves and aching feet, I feel strangely invigorated, both in soul and in body. With a little smile, I realize that I might just have developed an addiction to a new kind of thrill — in the future, all I have to do for a shot of adrenaline is to head for the hills.  
*By Delle Chan*



Happy Hong Kong hiker Delle