

Lantau Island Commentary

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1. Introduction to Lantau Island

Lantau Island is located at the southwestern part of Hong Kong. With an area of 147km², Lantau Island is 84% larger than Hong Kong Island and is the largest off-shore island in Hong Kong SAR.

The name 'Lantau' is probably originated of its appearances of extensive weathered mountain top. 'Lan-Tau' (爛頭) in Chinese means well-weathered heads.

The naming of Lantau Island changes over time. In Song Dynasty (10th – 13th Century), Lantau Island and Hong Kong Island together were called 'Tai Kai Shan' (大奚山). In Ming Dynasty (14th to 17th Century), 'Tai Kai Shan' was dedicated to Lantau Island only. Not until the era of Qing Dynasty (1821-1850) that Lantau became official name of the island.

Lantau Island is a hilly island. Lantau Peak (鳳凰山) is the highest mountain on Lantau, at 934m this is also the second highest mountain in Hong Kong. Other high hills over 700m plus include the Sunset Peak (大東山 870m, the third highest mountain in Hong Kong), Nei Lak Shan (彌勒山 750m) and Yi Tung Shan (二東山 740m).

Hikers can challenge the various peaks on Lantau such as the Lantau Peak (鳳凰山), Sunset Peak (大東山) and Yi Tung Shan (二東山). Experiencing the magical moment of sun rise magic on Lantau Peak is one of the favorite activities for hikers. Vegetation and other wildlife are well preserved on the island. Government has planted many trees in the disturbed areas of the island. These trees protected the soils from further erosion.

Lantau Island was an important frontline for coastal defense in the region. During the Qing Dynasty, the emperors had established forts at Fan Lau, Shek Sze Shan (石獅山) and Tung Chung. Lantau and Tuen Mun were responsible for the defense of the western side of Hong Kong water.

Lantau Island was one of the earliest places inhabited by human beings in the region. Archeologists had excavated artifacts and fishing tools at Shek Pik (石壁), Tung Wan (東灣),

Man Kok Tsui (萬角咀) and Chek Lap Kok (赤鱘角). These findings show that the area had human settlement as early as the Neolithic Age (around 10,000 years ago). The famous Rock Craving at Shek Pik and the Stone Circle at Fan Lau (分流) were remnants from the same era.

Coastal areas on Lantau had attracted many early settlers. According to historical records, there were 47 villages on Lantau. Some of the largest and most famous villages include Mui Wo (梅窩), Tung Chung (東涌) and Tai O (大澳). The villagers along the coastal areas mostly made their living by fishing or producing salt from sea water. Agriculture was the major practice for villagers living on hill side where they grew tea and various fruits. Although many of the fishermen and farmers have moved out from Lantau and the salt pans on Lantau are now abandoned, there are still areas on Lantau where traditional fishing villages remain.

There are numerous temples on Lantau Island. Tin Hau Temples (天后廟) and Kwan Tai Temples (關帝廟) are two of the most numerous temples along the coastal areas on Lantau. Visitors can visit these temples and get a glimpse on the traditional Taoism culture in Hong Kong. Other famous temples are the Yeung Hau Temples (楊候廟). These temples were established in memorial of the famous general Yeung Leung Chek (楊亮節) in Southern Song Dynasty (南宋) 1127-1279 AD. Yeung Hau Temples can be found at Tai O and Tung Chung. Other religious places such as the Tian Tan Buddha (天壇大佛, largest of its kind in the world), Po Lin Monastery (寶蓮寺) and Luohan Monastery (羅漢寺) are all famous attractions for visitors.

Tsing Ma Bridge (青馬大橋) and Kap Shui Mun Bridge (汲水門大橋) have linked up Lantau and Kowloon in 1997, as a result of the development of the Hong Kong International Airport at Chek Lap Kok. New town developments have changed Tung Chung into modern settlements, and this is now the most populated area on Lantau Island. Apart from the new town development, highways, the development of Hong Kong Disneyland, preservation of historical monuments and the establishment of Ngo Ping 360 (昂坪 360) have made Lantau Island a popular island for visitors.

Lantau's Discovery Bay brings developments in Yi Pak Wan (二白灣), which has become a place where expatriates aggregate. Discovery Bay is a residential area located at Mui Wo. There are around 16,000 residents originated from more than 30 countries and regions. Community life in Discovery Bay is concentrated on the Discovery Bay Plaza, a commercial hub containing a bus terminus, ferry pier, an open piazza, and a range of shops including a supermarket and specialty stores. Food and goods sold in the markets and shops show the multi-cultural specialties of this place. Visitors to Discovery Bay will experience foreign living style.

2. Country Parks on Lantau Island

Conservation work in Hong Kong had a great leap during the 1970s, when country parks were designated in many areas in the territories. These country parks not only serve as recreational hotspots for Hong Kong residents and visitors, they are also important reserves for Hong Kong's fauna and flora, as well as preserving natural landscape for the territory. There are now 24 Country Parks in Hong Kong, covering around 40% of land areas in the territory. Over the years Country Parks have developed from recreational parks into multi-functional outdoor classroom and nature museums.

Over 50% of Lantau Island is designated as country parks. The southern part is Lantau South Country Park (南大嶼郊野公園) while the northern part is Lantau North Country Park (北大嶼郊野公園). Hiking trails link different parts of these country parks and public facilities such as rain shelters, public toilets, signage and maps are available at many locations within the parks.

Lantau South Country Park is the largest among the 24 country parks in Hong Kong. Designated in 1978 it has a total area of 56.4km². This country park covers Shui Hau Peninsular (水口半島), Chi Ma Wan Peninsular (芝麻灣半島), Shap Long (十壟), Nam Shan (南山), southern slope of Sunset Peak (大東山), Yi O (二澳), Fan Lau (分流), Man Cheung Po Waterfall (萬丈布), Ling Wui Shan (靈會山) and Shek Pik (石壁).

Lantau North Country Park is also designated in 1978, with an area of 22km². This country park includes Sunset Peak, Yi Tung Shan (二東山), Lin Fa Shan (蓮花山), northern slope of

Lantau Peak (鳳凰山), as well as the area of Nei Lak Shan (彌勒山) and Ngo Ping (昂坪).

The 70km Lantau Trail (鳳凰徑) goes between the northern and southern parts of the island. It is one of the four long-range hiking trails in Hong Kong. There are also official camp sites along the trail where hikers and backpackers can enjoy the beautiful scenes at different locations.

Shrubland and woodland are major vegetated habitats in the country parks of Lantau. These habitats preserve many important and rare native species, including wild orchids (蘭花), rhododendrons (杜鵑), Pitcher Plant (豬籠草) and teas (茶樹).

There are also natural streams in the hill sides and they are important habitats utilized by fish, amphibians, reptiles, aquatic insects as well as aquatic plants. Apart from the ecological importance, these natural streams offer beautiful scenery.

3. Southern Lantau

Major tourist attractions on Southern Lantau are Mui Wo (梅窩), Silver Mine Waterfall (銀礦飛瀑), Silver Mine Cave (銀礦洞), Pui O (貝澳), Cheung Sha (長沙), Shek Pik Reservoir (石壁水塘).

3.1 Mui Wo

Mui Wo is located at the southeastern part of Lantau. ‘Mui’ in Chinese means plum blossom. The landscape of Mui Wo has five outlets which resemble the five petals of plum blossom, which gave it the name. Local villagers called this place Mui Wo Valley.

Mui Wo was the only transportation hub for Lantau, with bus terminal and ferry pier built. Before the construction of Lantau Link and the Tung Chung Line of MTR in late 1990s, visitors and residents had to rely on public ferries to get in and out of Mui Wo. Nowadays, Tung Chung has replaced Mui Wo as the main transport artery on Lantau.

There are many interesting spots at Mui Wo, including the sandy beach, waterfall as well as the mine cave. Moreover, local restaurants, hotels and inns are ready to serve tourists from all

over the places.

Silver Mine Bay is the main sandy beach by the Mui Wo Pier which is also a hot spot for both visitors and residents. The name came from the Silver Mine nearby.

3.2 Silver Mine Waterfall

Silver Mine Waterfall is located at the valley of northwestern Mui Wo. The waterfall can be divided into three sections. The ‘Pearl Fall’ (珍珠瀑) is the section with the widest spread of water. ‘Main Dam’ (主壩瀑) is the narrow section of the waterfall while the ‘Main Fall’ (主瀑) has the greatest vertical fall of all.

The Silver Mine Waterfall used to be hidden among the dense vegetation and only experienced hikers were able to go near it. Thanks to the establishment of Waterfall Park, the walking trail and a Chinese-style pagoda, accessibility has boosted popularity of the waterfall.

3.3 Silver Mine Cave

The Silver Mine Cave is a century-old mine cave near Tseng Tau New Village (井頭新村) of Mui Wo. The mine was first discovered in 1862, and subsequently large-scale mining began in 1886. The mine mainly produced lead and silver (hence its name ‘Silver Mine’). In 1896 mining stopped as the mine depleted.

The mine at Mui Wo was probably the second of its kind in Guangdong Province, and the refinery plant was the first one in Guangdong using modern mining method.

Four entrances lead to the Silver Mine Cave. Over the years landslides had blocked two of the entrances, and subsequently the government officially closed the remaining two entrances for safety reason. Although there is no way visitors can get in the cave, they can still retrospect the importance of the mine in the history of Lantau’s economic development.

3.4 Pui O

Pui O is a well-developed residential area of southern Lantau. The region is a mosaic of

several villages such as Lo Wai, San Tsuen, Lo Uk and Ham Tin.

This is the oldest village in Hong Kong dating back to 7,000-10,000 years ago. Human settlement at Pui O could be dated back to the Neolithic Age (7,000-10,000 years ago), according to the unearthed artifacts in the area. Agriculture was the main source of income of Pui O inhabitants. However, the construction of Shek Pik Reservoir from 1950s to 1960s had diverted the water supply away from Pui O. Irrigational water was greatly reduced. Many farmers eventually abandoned their land.

Pui O beach is one of the famous sandy beaches in Hong Kong. It is managed by the Leisure and Cultural Service Department, Hong Kong SAR Government. Public shower and toilet facilities are built for beach goers. Moreover, there are many holiday inns and local stores which are ready to serve visitors.

Pui O beach is a good place to enjoy sunset scenery on Lantau. Visitors can sit back and relax after a long day of sightseeing or hiking. There are also many holiday houses and bungalows at Pui O for overnight stay.

Behind the Pui O beach is a large patch of marsh which is home to many water plants, birds, dragonflies as well as the famous feral cattles and buffalos on Lantau. Cattles and buffalos were once important parts in agriculture which farmers would use them to plough the field for rice cultivation. When the farmers abandoned the farmland in the late 1970s, the cattles and buffalos were set free. They are now roaming freely in the marsh and the abandoned field nearby. Feral cattles and buffalos are essential part of the healthy wetland ecosystem of Pui O marsh. The animals graze on the plants growing in the marsh and the grassland surrounding it. This regular grazing activity helps to keep the plant growth under control. Their droppings are natural fertilizers for the other wetland plants. Without the grazers, the marsh will eventually be overgrown by grasses and dried up.

Feral cattles and buffalos are the largest land animals found in Hong Kong. Visitors will be amazed by the natural beauty of these large herbivores at Pui O.

3.5 Cheung Sha

The 3km long beach at Cheung Sha is the longest natural beach in Hong Kong. The extensive beach not only offers a wonderful site for swimmers and surfers, the area is also a hot spot for water skiing, beach volleyball, canoeing as well as paragliding. Beach side restaurants here are usually crowded with weekenders to this part of Lantau.

3.6 Shek Pik Reservoir

Hong Kong has no natural lake, and reservoir act as large freshwater body for wildlife in Hong Kong. Many freshwater fish inhabit reservoirs. Some of these fish are washed down from the upstream areas, and some others were introduced and released.

The fringes of reservoir are much shallower than the middle part. The shallow water allows sunlight to penetrate to the bottom of the reservoir, where extensive water plants flourish. These areas are also important living and foraging habitats for other wildlife living around the reservoir.

In order to protect the soil around the reservoirs, government had planted many trees on the adjacent slopes, as well as the vicinities of the reservoirs. In addition, most of the original woodlands and shrublands near the reservoirs are designated as protected areas or green belts. All these vegetated areas, streams and natural landscapes are important home for local wildlife.

Shek Pik Reservoir is located inside the Lantau South Country Park. It is the third largest reservoir in terms of capacity (after the High Island Reservoir 萬宜水庫 in Sai Kung and Plover Cove Reservoir 船灣淡水湖 in Tai Po). Shek Pik Reservoir was built in the 1950s, and supplies water to Lantau Island and Hong Kong Island. In the 1950s, with the increase in population in Hong Kong after the Second World War, water shortage became a major concern. Hence the Hong Kong Government decided to construct a reservoir at Shek Pik area. Construction work started in 1957 and the reservoir was completed in 1963. Inhabits at Shek Pik had moved out during the construction work and many of the village houses are now submerged under the reservoir.

3.7 Shek Pik Rock Craving

Ancient rock carvings are found in eight different locations in Hong Kong. At about 300m from the coastline of Shek Pik Beach lies the Shek Pik Rock Carving. This carving was discovered in 1938 and like many other rock carvings in Hong Kong, the design of Shek Pik Rock Carving shows geometric patterns composed of spiral squares and circles which closely resemble those on Bronze Age artifacts. It is believed that this carving is carved by early inhabitants of this area in the local Bronze Age some 3,000 years ago. The carving is now a declared monument in Hong Kong.

Apart from the Shek Pik Rock Carving, there is another carving further up the valley; at 350m above sea level. The rock carving, (later called "the upper Shek Pik Rock Carving" to distinguish it from the one found on the Shek Pik Beach) was found on a steep slope in Shek Pik in 1962.

The rock carvings indicate that this area had human activity as early as 3,000 years ago. It also indicates that Shek Pik area might be an important resting place for early fishermen in the region who might stopover on fishing expedition.

4. Northern Lantau

4.1 Tai O

Tai O is located at the western part of Lantau Island, southeast of the Pearl River estuary, with Macau at the opposite side of the sea. Tai O was one of the places on Lantau with the earliest human settlement. The fishing villages here can be dated back to over 1,600 years ago, where fishing and salt production once flourished. The traditional living style of fishing village is still well-preserved today.

Tai O region is divided into Tai O Island and Lantau outcrop by a creek. Cable ferry was the only mean for villagers to travel between these two areas across the creek. A cable ferry was a boat propelled across the creek by means of cables connected to both shores. Tai O's cable ferry was in use for 86 years, before being replaced by a bridge linking the two sides across the channel in September 1996.

Stilt huts are built along both sides of the creek in Tai O. The stilt huts stay out of water by

the supporting columns inserted into the water underneath. Early design of stilt huts resembled floating boats. The huts were made of palm leaves, wooden boards and stone columns. Nowadays villagers replaced the stone columns with large wooden columns, and palm leaves with zinc foils. Although the materials for stilt huts have changed, the boat-shape design remains more or less the same until today. Stilt huts inhabitants will dock their boats by the huts. Stilt huts are also places where villagers carry out their daily chores.

4.2 Fire and stilt hut restoration

On 2nd July 2000, a big fire had burnt down some one-fifth of the stilt huts at Tai O, at the area of Sha Tsai Min (沙仔面棚) and Sam Chung (三涌). Some of the residents have moved to temporary settlement arranged by the government. After the fire the residents had paid extra attention to the material they used to build the stilt huts. Nowadays the newly restored stilt huts, together with those immune from the fire, are covered with metal foil to reduce the susceptibility of the huts to fire.

4.3 Salt Production on Lantau Island

The production of salt on Lantau Island started from the Song Dynasty (as early as 10th Century), and salt production at Tai O could be dated back to Qing Dynasty (1711-1799AD). Salt production was an important source of income for Tai O inhabitants. During the prime time of salt production, some two-third of Tai O region was salt pans. Tai O salt pans used sand filtration method to extract the salt in sea water. Sea water was pumped into the salt pans and left to evaporate. Salt crystal would form around the sand grains and produced very fine-grained salt. This season operation usually began after the Mid-Autumn Festival, and ended around March of Lunar Calendar, before the rainy season began. Since the 1970s Hong Kong has imported salt from other areas and local salt production industry has diminished and the salt pans are abandoned.

Tai O is a well-sheltered bay due to its geographical location. This makes Tai O a favourable place for fishermen settlement and sea food trade. The 1940s and 1950s were the prime time for fishery development at Tai O. At that time the fishermen mainly fish in the nearby water, harvesting Yellow Croaker (黃花魚), White Herring (鱸白), Dog shark (鮫魚) and Jackfish (“「魚倉」”魚). Using mechanical fishing vessels had greatly increased the catch and the

income of fishermen in 1950s. However, fish stock gradually depleted in the 1960s and 1970s. Fishermen had to fish in deeper water in the outer sea. Today many of the fishermen have changed their jobs and are running sea food restaurants, selling souvenirs as well as running boat charter business at Tai O.

4.4 Tung Chung Bay and Wetland

Tung Chung Bay is a typical estuarine wetland in Hong Kong. Tidal regime, wave actions, river discharge as well as human activities have shaped special features of the bay. The area has different habitats along the shore. The eastern part of the estuary is a mosaic of boulder shore and mudflat, while the western part of the shore is dense growth of mangroves. Behind the mangrove at Tung Chung, other coastal plants such as mangrove associates, reeds and the special mangrove fern also flourish. The area is also a suitable habitat for other smaller wetland creatures. The wetland of Tung Chung is a suitable place for visitors to learn more about the wetland ecosystem of south China.

Wetland is an area of land whose soil is saturated with moisture either permanently or seasonally. Such areas may also be covered partially or completely by shallow pools of water, including those with water level 6m or below during low tide. Wetlands include swamps, marshes, and bogs, among others. The water found in wetlands can be saltwater, freshwater or brackish. Wetlands have also been described as ecotones, providing a transition between dry land and water bodies.

Only specialized creatures can stand for the special physical characters of wetland. Therefore wetland creatures are very much different from the close relatives of the other habitats. Lantau Island has a rich array of coastal wetlands. Sandy beaches, sand pans and intertidal mudflats can be found along estuaries and areas with less wave actions. Mangroves, fiddler crabs and mudskippers are some of the special creatures living in these habitats. On the other hand, boulder shores and rocky shores are distributed along exposed shores with stronger wave actions. Rocky oysters and gastropods are commonly found in these exposed shores.

4.5 Tung Chung New Town

Tung Chung is one of the areas on Lantau with the longest history of human settlement. In the 1990s, the Hong Kong Airport Core Programme had given Tung Chung a face-lift. Tung Chung New Town is the ninth new town in Hong Kong. It is also the first established on an

off-shore island. About 100,000 residents are now living in Tung Chung New Town. By 2011, the new town will expand to 830ha in area, with an expected population of 320,000.

4.6 Ngong Ping 360

Ngong Ping 360 is formed by the Ngong Ping Cable Car and the Ngong Ping Village. This is a new tourist attraction in Hong Kong. Since September 2006 the Cable Car links Tung Chung New Town with Ngong Ping. The whole ride takes about 25 minutes and passengers can have magnificent views over the mountains and coastal areas of Lantau.

Ngong Ping (about 460 above sea level) is a plateau surrounded by mountains with hill streams and dense woodland. These are also the habitats for wildlife. Visitors can take a walk along the 1.5 km Ngong Ping Fun Walk (昂坪奇趣徑) to enjoy the beautiful nature around the plateau, and to learn more about the nature wonders of Hong Kong. There are major scenic spots along the trail where visitors can see the Tea Plantation, Shek Pik Reservoir, Secondary Woodland, Ancient Trail and the Lantau Peak.

4.7 Ngong Ping Cable Car

Ngong Ping Cable Car is a 5.7 km cable car linking Tung Chung New Town and Ngong Ping. In this 25-minute ride, visitors can enjoy the best views on Tung Chung Bay (東涌灣), South China Sea (南中國海), North Lantau Country Park (北大嶼郊野公園), Tian Tan Buddha Statue (天壇大佛), Hong Kong International Airport (香港國際機場) as well as a 360° view of Ngong Ping Plateau (昂坪平原).

4.8 Ngong Ping Village

Ngong Ping Village is located next to the Cable Car Station on the hill top. There are many shops, tea cafe as well as restaurants to serve the visitors. Apart from shopping and sight-seeing, visitors can also enjoy the featured exhibition/shows at Ngong Ping Village.

Walking with Buddha

One of the featured exhibitions is 'Walking with Buddha' (與佛同行). It is an immersive, multimedia attraction allowing visitors to follow the life of Siddhartha Gautama (喬達摩佛陀, 或稱釋迦牟尼佛) - the man who became Buddha - and his path to enlightenment. Walking

with Buddha physically takes the visitors on an immersive journey through Siddhartha's life. From the opulence of Siddhartha's Palace to the harshness of the Forest, visitors will feel as if they are truly 'walking with Buddha'. Travelling through the various stages of Siddhartha's life, visitors will witness his transition from being a Prince at Court to reaching supreme awareness and becoming Buddha.

Monkey's Tale Theater

Another attraction at Ngong Ping Village is the 'Monkey's Tale Theater' (靈猴影院). The theatre presents a charming and comical show inspired by the famous 'Buddhist Jataka stories' (佛本生故事). Set in a magical courtyard under the branches of a majestic Bodhi Tree, this story will engage and inspire guests of all ages. Once the show starts, computer generated animation, combined with special effects and surround sound, will engage visitors' senses and immerse them in the 'monkey's tale'.

4.9 Ngong Ping Nature Centre

Ngong Ping Nature Centre (昂坪自然中心) is operated by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. It provides information about the biodiversity and natural landscape of Lantau, and promotes public awareness in environmental and ecological conservation. This is the first Visitor Centre in Lantau's country parks. The Centre also arranges regular guided walk around the Ngong Ping area for visitors. Visitors can join the tour for free.

4.10 Ngong Ping Fun Walk

The Ngong Ping Fun Walk (昂坪奇趣徑) is a 1.5km trail that runs along six attractions: Misty Lantau (鳳凰縹緲), Ancient Gateway (法門古道), Tree Walk Exploration (樹徑考趣), Sunrise on Lantau (鳳凰觀日), Scenery of Lakes (昂坪湖光) and Tea Walk (曲徑茶香). Along the trail there are signage boards introducing the beautiful scenery of Lantau as well as the historical monuments on Lantau. Misty Lantau is a scenery spot where visitors can admire the beauty of Lantau Peak when the mist is cleared, or to enjoy the subtle beauty of the peak in mist on cloudy or misty days. Ancient Gateway marks the location of a gateway leading to an ancient trail between Ngong Ping to Tung Chung. This is a trail favoured by many hikers. Tree Walk Exploration is a section of the Fun Walk that runs into a secondary

woodland of Ngong Ping. Visitors can learn about some of the native plants in Hong Kong, and take a closer look at the rich diversity of plants and animals along the trail. Lantau Peak is one of the most favourable places in Hong Kong to admire the sun rise. As the Lantau Peak in Chinese is literally called 'Phoenix Mountain' (鳳凰山), there are two large phoenix sculptures standing on the sides of the gateway to symbolize the starting point of this uphill hiking track, where 'Sunrise on Lantau' is located. Beside 'Sunrise on Lantau' is the 'Scenery of Lakes' where visitors can look at the Shek Pik Reservoir and the sea behind that from above. Tea Walk is the section where tea trees planted in Ngong Ping area still stand, showing the historical tea plantation of Lantau Island.

4.11 Ngong Ping Piazza

Covering an area of about 1.5 hectares, the Ngong Ping Piazza has a strong Buddhist character and blends in with the religious ambience of Ngong Ping. The Piazza links up the various tourist attractions in Ngong Ping, including Po Lin Monastery, the Giant Buddha, Ngong Ping 360 cable car, Ngong Ping Village and Wisdom Path. It enables visitors to explore Ngong Ping, which is a popular tourist spot characterised by its religious setting and beautiful natural scenery, in a coherent manner.

The Ngong Ping Piazza has four components, namely a new Pai Lau, Bodhi Path, Di Tan and a Chinese landscaped garden.

New Pai Lau (新牌樓)

Set at the entrance of the Piazza, the new Pai Lau is built along the Northern architectural style of the Qing Dynasty consistent with that of the Po Lin Monastery.

Bodhi Path (菩提路)

The Bodhi Path is a central walkway leading from the new Pai Lau to Di Tan. Lined on both sides of the path are statues of the "Twelve Divine Generals" as well as 40 lotus-shaped lanterns. The "Twelve Divine Generals" are regarded as protectors in Buddhism, and each is responsible for guarding a two-hour section of the day. In addition, they represent the twelve Chinese zodiac signs, as denoted by the different zodiac signs on their crowns.

Di Tan (地壇)

Di Tan is the open space facing the Po Lin Monastery and the Giant Buddha, where religious ceremonies are occasionally held.

Chinese Landscaped Garden (中式亭園)

The architectural design of the Chinese landscaped garden complements that of the Po Lin Monastery. The serene garden provides the perfect foil for the majestic Giant Buddha

4.12 Po Lin Monastery

Po Lin Monastery was known as the “Big Thatched Hut” in the early days more than a century ago. In 1906, three Buddhist monks of the Ch’an School, Venerables Da Yue, Dun Xiu and Yue Ming traveled from Jiangsu Province of China to Lantau Island to set up a site for practice. Since then, many members of the Sangha from all directions were attracted to the place, marking the gradual rise of the Ch’an (Zen) School of Buddhism in Hong Kong. In 1924, the “Big Thatched Hut” was renamed Po Lin Monastery and Venerable Ji Xiu became the first Abbot. Since then, Po Lin Monastery has developed into a world renowned monastery and is now led by the seventh Abbot, Venerable Chi Wai.

Po Lin Monastery has always supported China’s policy of “development through education”. Since 1996, we have contributed towards the building of over 280 schools under Project Hope in Mainland China. Construction of the Grand Hall of Ten Thousand Buddhas commenced in November 2007 and will house the Hall of Ten Thousand Buddhas, Scripture Library, Abbot’s Chamber, Dhama Hall and a permanent Ordination Platform. When completed, this monumental building will be a central place for holding religious and cultural events. The new Grand Hall will have an exhibition venue of over 3,000 square meters for displaying ancient Chinese and precious Buddhist relics. The purpose of setting up the exhibition venue is to preserve relics of historical importance and to showcase Chinese and Buddhist cultural heritage locally and overseas.

4.13 The Big Buddha

Tian Tan Buddha, also known the Big Buddha, is the biggest sitting Buddha statue built outdoor. Completed in 1993, located at Ngong Ping, Lantau Island, Hong Kong. The statue is

located near Po Lin Monastery on Mount Muk Yue and symbolizes the harmonious relationship between man and nature, people and religion. It is a major centre of Buddhism in Hong Kong and also a popular tourist attraction.

The statue is named Tian Tan Buddha because its base is a model of the Altar of Heaven or Earthly Mount of Tian Tan, the temple of Heaven in Beijing. It is one of the five large Buddha statues in China. The Buddha statue sits on a lotus throne on top of a three platform altar. It is surrounded by six smaller bronze statues known as “The Offering of the Six Devas” and are posed offering flowers, incense, lamp, ointment, fruit and music to the Buddha. These offerings symbolize charity, morality, patience, zeal, meditation, and wisdom, all of which are necessary to enter into nirvana.

The Buddha is 34 metres (112 ft) tall, weighs 250 metric tons (280 short tons). It reputedly can even be seen from as far away as Macau on a clear day. Visitors have to climb 240 steps in order to reach the Buddha, though the site also features a small winding road to the Buddha for vehicles to accommodate the handicapped.

The Tian Tan Buddha appears serene and dignified. His right hand is raised, representing the removal of affliction. The Buddha’s left hand rests on his lap in a gesture of giving dhana. The Buddha faces North, which is unique among the great Buddha statues, as all others face South.

There are 3 floors beneath the Buddha statue: The Hall of Universe, The Hall of Benevolent Merit and The Hall of Remembrance. One of the most renowned features inside is a relic of Gautama Buddha, consisting of some of his alleged cremated remains. Only visitors who purchase an offering for the Buddha are allowed to see the relic, in order to leave the offering there. There is a huge carved bell inscribed with images of Buddhas in the show room. It was designed to ring every seven minutes, 108 times a day, symbolizing the release of 108 kinds of human vexations.

The Tian Tan Buddha was constructed beginning in 1990 and was finished on 29 December 1993, the day of the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist religion. The statue was formed out of 202 separate pieces of bronze. In addition to the exterior

components, there is a strong steel framework inside the statue to support the heavy load. When the statue was completed, monks from around the world were invited to the opening ceremony.

4.12 Tung Chung Fort

Tung Chung is located at the coastal area of eastern Pearl River Delta. This is also a major pathway to and from South China, and hence it plays an important role on the coastal defense. In 1832 (Qing Dynasty), Tung Chung Fort (東涌炮台), with six large cannons, was constructed by the Qing government in order to strengthen the arm force along the coastal areas. In 1898 when the New Territories was leased to Britain, the Fort was evacuated by the Qing authorities, then occupied, first as a police station, and then by Wa Ying College, the Rural Committee Office and the Public Primary School of Tung Chung. It is now used as a school and the office of Tung Chung Rural Committee. The fort was designated a 'declared monument' in August 1979. The fort and the exhibits are opened to publics from 10:00am to 5:00pm, and are closed on Tuesdays, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and the first 3 days of the Lunar New Year.

5 Coastal Areas of Lantau

Lantau has a very long coastline where many types of intertidal and coastal habitats can be found. There are also major bays such as Yam O Bay, Tai Pak Wan, Silver Mine Bay, Pui O Bay, Chi Ma Wan, Tong Fuk Temple Bay and Tung Chung Bay. The western part of Lantau is heavily influenced by the freshwater discharge from the Pearl River, while coastal areas of the eastern part are subjected less freshwater effect. Therefore the coastlines on both sides of the island are very different from one another.

The northwestern coastline of Lantau is protected by Tung Chung and Chek Lap Kok from wave actions. Tides and freshwater discharge are the major sources of water of these areas. The sheltered coastlines favour sedimentation, where sand, silt and mud deposit and form mudflats or sand pans. These soft shores are suitable environment for coastal plants such as mangroves. Tung Chung, San Tau, Sham Wat and Tai O are some of the representative soft shores on Lantau Island.

North Lantau Island is also famous for its marine wildlife, which the Chinese White Dolphin

is the most well-known among all. The Chinese White Dolphin utilizes brackish water and therefore frequents the western side of Lantau where the sea water is diluted by the discharge of Pearl River. Researches on the dolphin indicate that this species can be found along the whole Pearl River estuary. North Lantau is also important nursery for fish during the spawning season and is vital for sustaining fisheries in the region.

5.1 Chinese White Dolphin

Among all of the marine creatures recorded in Hong Kong, the Chinese White Dolphin (中華白海豚) is the best known among the locals and the visitors. Adult Chinese White Dolphin (sometimes called the Chinese Pink Dolphin) is famous for its pinkish appearance. New born dolphins are greyish and the grey colour will gradually fade when the dolphin grow up.

Adult Chinese White Dolphin body length can reach about 200 - 350 centimetres and the infant's body length is about one metre. The average weight of an adult is around 150 to 230 kilograms.

Research data show that there are about 1000 Chinese White Dolphin roaming in the whole Pearl River estuary, with about 200 strong frequently encountered in Hong Kong water, mainly near western and southwestern waters off Lantau, as well as near the Lung Kwu Chau and Sha Chau Marine Park (龍鼓洲及沙洲海岸公園).

A Chinese White Dolphin can live up to 40 years. The eldest dolphin lives in Hong Kong and is known to be about 33 years old. Adult dolphins can stay underwater for about two to eight minutes but a calf can only stay underwater for one to three minutes. On average, adult dolphins rarely stay under water for more than four minutes. Since the dolphins will come close to water surface for breathing, it is therefore easy to observe the pinkish bodies frequently surface when a group of foraging dolphins is encountered.

Fish are the favourable food items for the Chinese White Dolphin which they locate using echo-location mechanism. The dolphins are often seen following fishing boat to catch the fish scared by the fishing nets or by the boats.

The Chinese White Dolphin is the emblem (香港回歸吉祥物) for the reunification of Hong Kong with China.

5.2 Finless Porpoise

Visitors going out on a boat trip may also encounter another residential marine mammal in Hong Kong, the Finless Porpoise (江豚). The Finless Porpoise is one of the six porpoise species in the world. It is so named because it lacks a dorsal fin, which is often well developed in other dolphins and porpoises. Adult Finless Porpoises are a uniform light grey colour, while newborn calves are mostly black with grey around the dorsal ridge area, becoming fully grey after 4–6 months. Adult finless porpoises can grow to more than 1.55 m in length and up to 30–45 kg in weight.

Together with the famous Chinese White Dolphin (中華白海豚), the Finless Porpoise often brings surprise and joyful moments to the passengers sailing on ferry or those taking a boat ride in the area.

5.3 River Mouth Habitat

Estuary is the area where the river or stream enters the sea. Some of these areas face less effect from wave action. Suspended particles brought in by tidal inundation will eventually settle and deposit along this area, forming soft shores such as sandy beaches and mudflats. On the contrary, area with strong wave action will have much of the sediment washed out with larger boulders or bed rocks remain in the bay. These rocky shores or boulder shores are called ‘hard shores’.

Soft shores and hard shores are two of the representing shore types in Hong Kong. Organisms living in these two habitats have different adaptive features and specialized physical characteristics or behaviours. Soft shores such as intertidal mudflat are essential habitats for mangroves, fiddler crabs and mudskippers. On the other hands, rock oysters and gastropods are commonly found along rocky shores. Estuary is also important foraging ground for water birds such as egrets, herons and waders. On Lantau Island, Tai Ho, Tung Chung, Tai O, Mui Wo and Sham Wat are some of the most representative estuarine habitats in Hong Kong.

5.4 Mangroves

Mangroves are a special group of plants that grow along the intertidal areas in the tropics and subtropics. This group of plants is diverse but all are adapted to the very specialized and often harsh growing environment. Mangrove plants can exploit their habitat by developing physiological adaptations to overcome the problems of anoxia (shortage of oxygen), high salinity, unstable substratum and frequent tidal inundation. Mangrove plants can withstand high salinity of sea water, which other terrestrial plants cannot tolerate. Therefore mangrove plants can survive periodic submergence by sea water. Some of the mangrove plants have tissues rich in tannic acid which can deter herbivores. This tannic acid also gives the plants their characteristic rustic colour when the saps are exposed to air. In Chinese these plants are literally called ‘the red trees’ due to the colouration of the saps.

There are around 80 species of mangroves in the world (different scholars may have different definitions on mangrove plants, though). They are mainly distributed in the tropics, or along the regions with influx of warm ocean currents. Mangrove plants may or may not relate to one another in terms of taxonomy. They may be from different plant families, some are trees, shrubs, herbs or ferns. All mangrove plants have features that allow them to thrive in the intertidal areas where the soils are often loose, poor in oxygen supply and with influence of sea water.

There are eight species of mangrove in Hong Kong of which six of them can be found on Lantau Island, mainly at Tung Chung, Shui Hau and Tai O. These mangrove species are:

- Kandelia (秋茄)
- Many-petaled Mangrove(木欖)
- River Mangrove (桐花樹)
- Black Mangrove(海欖雌)
- Milky mangrove (海漆)
- White-flowered Black Mangrove (欖李)

Kandelia (*Kandelia obovata* 秋茄) is among the most widely distributed mangrove along the coastal area of Lantau Island. The flowering period of this specie is between May and July when the plants bloom star-shaped white flowers. In Autumn, they usually bear with

cone-like fruits, and their seeds germinate while still attached to the parent tree. Once germinated, the seedling grows and forms a propagule (a seedling ready to go, often called a ‘dropper’), which can produce its own food via photosynthesis. When the dropper is mature after 3-6 months, it drops into mud and grows up as a new plant, or into water where it can then be transported great distances by sea water. The specialized reproduction mechanism of *Kandelia* is a classic example of how plant can adapt its living environment.

Apart from mangrove plants, mangrove associated plants are often found growing at the back shore of mangrove stand. These include:

- Sea Mango (海芒果, a very poisonous plant, not to be mixed up with the Mango!)
- Cuban-Bast (黃槿, with large, yellow flowers and heart-shaped leaves)
- Portia Tree (繖楊, leaves with prominent veins, and pinky flowers)
- Blue Glory Bower (假茉莉)
- Sea-Lavender (寶血草)
- Southern Seepweed (南方鹼蓬)

5.5 Horseshoe Crab

Horseshoe crabs are not true crabs, but a unique group of marine invertebrates distantly related to spiders and scorpions. Fossil records of ancient Horseshoe Crabs show that these marine animals had been living on earth since 455 million years ago. They are often regarded as ‘living fossils’ because their bodies have not changed over millions of years. This indicates that the ‘body plan’ used by the Horseshoe Crab is so successful that these creatures are able to survive in their environment for millions of years without the need to modify the body. Three species of modern Horseshoe Crab can be found in Hong Kong. These interesting creatures prefer sandy or muddy beaches where they forage on mollusks such as clams. On Lantau Island, Tung Chung, Shui Hau and San Tau are three of the places where Horseshoe Crabs can be found.

6. Wildlife on Lantau Island

6.1 Birds

Birds are probably the most well-known wildlife in Hong Kong. Lantau is the largest island

in Hong Kong and has a wide range of habitats, including terrestrial and coastal areas. The diverse habitats are suitable for many different birds which utilize different habitats.

a. Black Kite

Along the coastal areas Black Kite (麻鷹) is commonly seen flying above. This bird is also one of the largest birds seen in Hong Kong. The wide wingspan and the slightly forked tail shape are Black Kite's field marks. Apart from being residential birds in Hong Kong, some Black Kites are winter visitors to the region. Tai O is one of the known places where the wintering flock will aggregate. It is possible to see over 40 individuals soaring above Tai O before they return to their night time roosting site at the woodland behind the Tai O Tin Hau Temple.

b. White-bellied Sea Eagle

The other raptor that may soar over Lantau Island is the White-billed Sea Eagle (白腹海鷗). Among the four species of sea eagle recorded in China, this is the only sea eagle species bred in Hong Kong. It is one of the largest birds of prey in the region and they mainly prey on aquatic animals, especially fish and sea snakes. The bird has very distinctive features. Adult bird has white head, breast and belly, as well as underwing and tail. The upperparts are grey and the black underwing flight feathers contrast with the white coverts. The tail is short and wedge-shaped as in all sea eagles. The White-bellied Sea Eagle can easily be distinguished from other large birds in the sky because the eagle soars on thermals holding their wings in a 'V' shape, unlike other birds which usually hold them horizontally.

c. Terns

Spring to late summer is the time when a good variety of sea birds pass through Hong Kong waters. These sea birds are long distant migrants and some of them will also breed in Hong Kong during the summer time. Terns (燕鷗) are among the most elegant sea birds. They are easily distinguished from other birds by having sharp and pointed beaks, as well as forked tails similar to the shape of swallow tails. They are white or grayish birds with very long and slender wings that help them to fly and glide for long distance at sea. The birds feed on small fish by bomb-diving into water, and snap the fish by the beaks.

Coastal areas of Lantau Island are good places to watch the terns (燕鷗). Whilst it is possible to see these magnificent birds during a hike, it is very easy to encounter groups of foraging terns at sea because they are fond of following fishing boats in search of the leaf-over. Spring and summer are the best seasons to watch these elegant terns as they migrate through Hong Kong water, or breed on off-shore islands in the area.

d. Migratory Birds

Lantau Island is also known as stop-over for migratory birds during spring and autumn passage periods. Large, white birds are often easier to observe. Migratory birds such as Cattle Egret (牛背鷺), Little Egret (小白鷺) and Great Egret (大白鷺) will roost and feed along coastal areas of Lantau during these periods, when hundreds of birds may be seen at one time. These birds have long and pointed beaks with snow-white body plumages in autumn and winter, and are easily distinguishable from the other coastal birds. The Great Egret is the largest among the three, while the Little Egret and Cattle Egret having similar body sizes. The Great and Little Egrets feed by the sea and prey on small fish. Their presence indicates a healthy ecosystem which tells that food supply along the coastal area and wetland is adequate. On the other hand, the Cattle Egret mainly feeds on insects and utilized marshes and open grassland. In spring and summer when the Cattle Egret changes into its breeding plumage, the bird becomes bright orange on the head and chest.

Apart from coastal and marine wildlife, the territorial habitats also attract other migratory birds to stop and feed during their long journey of migration. Visitors may encounter some of the below birds in the field:

- Grey Minivet (灰山椒鳥)
- Silver-backed Needle Tail (灰喉針尾雨燕)
- Brown Shrike (紅尾伯勞)
- Flycatchers (鶇)
- Warblers (鶯)
- Thrushes (鶇) (omnivorous birds which apart from insects and worms, they will also feed on the various fruits produced by local vegetations)
- Chinese Bulbul (白頭鶇) (common residents in Hong Kong)

- Red-whiskered Bulbul (紅耳鶇) (common residents in Hong Kong)
- Japanese White-eye (暗綠繡眼鳥) (common residents in Hong Kong)

Some of these birds can be seen at various parts of Lantau Island, and some of them are important birds which disperse seeds after feeding on the fruits of wild plants. With their help, many of the shrubland and woodland are able to regenerate with natural vegetation.

In spring and summer Oriental Magpie Robin (鶉鴝) will sing their melodic songs during spring time and summer time, when male birds are busy courting the females and to defense their nesting territories.

Some birds are more difficult to spot in the field, and this group of birds is more often heard than seen. Cuckoos (杜鵑) are among the most heard birds on Lantau during spring and summer. Many of the cuckoos in Hong Kong are summer visitors that breed here. Their calls are actually love songs which the males use to seduce the females. One of the special features of the cuckoos is the breeding strategy used by some members. Some cuckoos species are brood parasites which females will lay their eggs in the nests of their hosts. The hosts will continue to incubate the egg(s) of the cuckoos, and will raise the chicks as if they are their own off springs. The most commonly heard and seen cuckoos in Hong Kong are:

- Koel (噪鶇)
- Large Hawk Cuckoo (鷹鶇)
- Indian Cuckoo (四聲杜鵑)
- Plaintive Cuckoo (八聲杜鵑).

6.2 Insect lives on Lantau

a. Butterflies

One of the insect specialties on Lantau is the aggregation of migratory butterflies. Lantau's Fan Lau (分流) is one of the most important wintering ground for the over-wintering crow and tiger butterflies (斑蝶) in the region. From autumn to winter, Fan Lau will be home for tens of thousands of migratory butterflies. These butterflies will aggregate on trees to keep

warmth, and form one of the most spectacle wildlife scenes in Hong Kong. In addition, flowering plants in the area provide invaluable food sources for these butterflies.

In different time of the year, visitors can see different butterflies on Lantau Island. There are more than 240 species of butterflies recorded in Hong Kong. Butterflies are one of the most attractive groups of insect, and swallowtail butterflies (鳳蝶) and nymph butterflies (蛺蝶) are among the most colourful and active members. Some members can often be seen seeking nectars from the blooming flowers. Another common group of butterfly is the whites (粉蝶). Many members of the whites have larval stages feed on farm vegetables. They are therefore more common in farmland areas. Whilst the swallowtails, nymphs and the whites are conspicuous butterflies to see, the blues (灰蝶), skippers (弄蝶) and the browns (眼蝶) offer more challenges to insect-watchers. These butterflies are often smaller in size and duller in colours. Butterfly lovers will be amazed by the diversity of butterflies on the island.

b. Dragonflies and Damselflies

Dragonflies (蜻蜓) and damselflies (豆娘) are also two of the best observed groups of insects in Hong Kong. Spring to autumn is the best time of the year to watch the dragonflies and damselflies in Hong Kong. Since the larval stage of dragonflies and damselflies live an aquatic life, streams, marshes and ponds are the best places to watch the colourful adults. Skimmers (灰蜻) are the most common and colorful of the dragonfly family on Lantau. They have two pairs of large, usually patterned, gossamer wings. The hind pair of wings is slightly larger than the forewings. The two pairs of wings are held flat and extend outward from the body when at rest. The abdomen is long and variously colored.

Damselflies, on the other hand, can be distinguished from dragonflies by the slenderer bodies and widely separated compound eyes. Most damselflies hold their two pairs of wings in a vertical position, which is different from dragonflies that hold them horizontally. Damselflies are often seen along streams and marshes where they perch on vegetation.

Lantau's Keung Shan (羗山) and Wong Lung Stream (黃龍石澗) are two of the places where the Hong Kong endemic dragonfly Small Hooktail (*Melligomphus moluami* 摩灣尾春蜓) and endemic damselfly Short-winged Shadowdamsel (*Protosticta beaumonti* 黃頸原扁螳)

can be found.

c. Cicadas

Apart from the various butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies, visitors to Lantau Island will also be amazed by the calls of the cicadas (蟬). Cicadas are insects with large eyes wide apart on the head and usually transparent, well-veined wings. Cicadas feed on tree saps using their long, sharp mouth parts which penetrate into the stems. Cicadas are best known for their distinctive calls or songs. Indeed, only male cicadas will sing and attract their potential mates. They do it by vibrating two thin membranes on the bellies. There are two species of cicada commonly seen on Lantau Island during the summer. The Spotted Black Cicada (黃點斑蟬) has conspicuous yellow spots on its wings, while the Large Brown Cicada (南蚱蟬) is a much larger species with transparent wings and brownish body.

6.4 Stream wildlife

The hilly topography of Lantau Island and the rich annual rainfall has resulted in well-developed hill stream systems on the Island. These hill streams are home to many interesting aquatic creatures such as the diverse aquatic plants, freshwater fish, amphibians, aquatic reptiles, as well as invertebrates.

a. Fish

Fish are among the most commonly seen freshwater creatures along the streams. There are some 160 species of freshwater fish recorded in Hong Kong, some of them are only to be found in clean and un-disturbed hill streams. Predaceous chub (異鱨), Freshwater minnows (寬鱗鱨), Chinese Barb (五線無鬚「魚巴」) are species that utilize the water body where they feed on fallen insects, organic matters as well as smaller preys. Along the bottom or rock crevices of the streams, Sucker-Belly Loach (麥氏擬腹吸鰍) and Flat-headed loach (平頭嶺鰍) can be found foraging on algae together with shrimps and crabs.

b. Amphibians

Hill streams are essential habitats for many amphibians. There are 24 species of amphibians recorded in Hong Kong, of which eight of them were first discovered in Hong Kong, including the two endemic species (species found nowhere else on earth). Some of these

special amphibians can be seen on Lantau Island, including

- Hong Kong Newt (香港瘰螈)
- Hong Kong Cascade Frog (香港湍蛙)
- Brown Tree Frog (斑腿泛樹蛙)
- Paddy Frog (澤蛙).

Romer's Tree frog

Another wildlife highlight of Lantau Island is Hong Kong's endemic frog Romer's Tree Frog (盧氏小樹蛙). The Frog was named after the late J. D. Romer who first discovered it in Hong Kong (in a cave on Lamma Island) in 1952. With an average snout-vent length of 1.5 - 2.5cm, it is the smallest amphibian recorded in the territory. This is a frog endemic to Hong Kong and natural distributions of these frogs in the whole world are restricted to 4 islands in Hong Kong, including Lantau Island, Po Toi Island, Chek Lap Kok and Lamma Island. Due to their limited global distribution and rareness, the Romer's Tree Frog is a globally endangered species and is protected by Law of Hong Kong, the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance. Although this frog is secretive and elusive, visitors may also encounter this special amphibian when they look carefully into the fallen leaves during the hike.

Short-legged Horned Toad

Another special amphibian species in Hong Kong is the Short-legged Horned Toad (短腳角蟾). This is an uncommon native toad with body size length about 3 to 6 cm. The toad is easily distinguished from the more common Asian Common Toad (黑眶蟾蜍) by having a sharply pointed snout, with triangular marking between the eyes. The most diagnostic feature of the Short-legged Horned Toad are the two projecting, pointed upped eyelids which resemble two 'horns'.

The Short-legged Horned Toad was first discovered in Hong Kong in 1961. Although records from Vietnam and Fujian were reported, there is no recent information about this species out of Hong Kong. Therefore it is believed that Hong Kong (including Lantau Island) is the last stronghold for this elusive amphibian.

6.5 Wildlife on Intertidal areas

The intertidal zones on Lantau Island are home to many specialized creatures such as the mudskippers (彈塗魚) and fiddler crabs (招潮蟹).

a. Fiddler Crabs

Fiddler crabs live along sea beaches and brackish inter-tidal mud flats, lagoons and swamps. The crabs are best known for the males having oversized claw which are used in courtship. Male's smaller claw picks up a chunk of sediment and brings it to the mouth. Female fiddler crabs only have small claws which are used for feeding. The fiddler crabs are frequently seen along the intertidal mudflats of Lantau such as Tai O, Shui Hau and Tung Chung.

b. Mudskippers

Mudskippers have specialized gills which can still breathe when temperately out of water. The tiny holes on the mudflat are important sanctuaries for mudskippers and fiddler crabs. When disturbed or under threats, these animals will quickly retreat to these holes. These fish utilize similar habitat as the fiddler crabs and can be seen foraging on the intertidal mudflats during the low tide period.

7. Vegetation on Lantau Island

Grassland (草坡地), shrubland (灌木叢), secondary woodland (次生林) and Fengshui Woods (風水林) are the most commonly found vegetated habitats on the hillside of Lantau Island.

7.1 Fengshui Wood

Lantau Island has a long history of human settlement. Many of the villages have preserved a large patch of woodland behind the houses for the reason of Fengshui (風水), which the villagers believed would bring a better living condition and wealth to the villages. These woodlands are called 'Fengshui Woods' (風水林). Over 600 species of plants are recorded in different Fengshui Woods in Hong Kong. Many of these Fengshui Woods have grown and preserved for several hundred years, and have become some of the most mature woodlands in Hong Kong. These Fengshui Woods are therefore important habitats for native wildlife. Some plants are more commonly found in a Fengshui Wood. Fruit trees and other large trees are commonly found in Fengshui Wood, including:

- Lychee (荔枝)
- Longan (龍眼)
- Wampee (黃皮)
- Camphor Tree (樟樹)
- Chinese Banyan (細葉榕)
- Candlenut Tree (石栗)
- Sweet Gum (楓香)
- Java Bishopwood (重陽木)
- Incense Tree (土沉香)

The Incense Tree (土沉香) is a Class II protected plant in mainland China. This precious medicinal plant is a source of fragrant wood, formed from the secretion at the wound of the tree under pathological conditions, called ‘Chen Xiang’ (沉香). It is used medicinally and the plant is also used as an ornamental tree. The plant has also been artificially propagated in Hong Kong and other cities of southern China. In the past Hong Kong had exported a large amount of the fragrant wood to nearby areas. The name ‘Hong Kong’, literally means the ‘Fragrant Harbor’, has a close relationship with the Incense Tree.

Plantation scheme by the Agriculture, Fishery and Conservation Department have planted many trees on Lantau Island over the years. The trees planted can be divided into indigenous plants and introduced plants. Indigenous plants include:

- Chestnut oak (裂斗錐栗)
- Ivy Tree (鴨腳木)
- Bunch-like reevesia (梭羅樹)
- Pop-gun seed (土蜜樹)
- Scarlet-Sterculia (假蘋婆)
- Chinese Hackberry (朴樹)
- Fragrant Litsea (山蒼樹)
- Chinese Banyan (細葉榕)

These indigenous trees provide food for local wildlife, as well as offer nesting or resting places.

On the other hand, introduced plants survive on degraded soil and help protect the soil from further erosion. These include:

- Earleaf acacia (耳果相思)
- Taiwan Acacia (台灣相思)
- Brisbane Box (紅膠木)
- Horsetail Tree (木麻黃)

Along villages and secondary woodland on Lantau Island, indigenous trees such as the figs (榕樹) can easily be distinguished from the others. The Chinese Banyan (細葉榕) is the best-known fig in Hong Kong for its wide distribution and the well-grown aerial roots. The aerial roots help the plant to absorb moisture in the air. Once landed, these aerial roots will become trunk which can support the tree. In addition, if the Chinese Banyan seedling germinated on other plant (the host), the development of the aerial roots will slowly entangle the host plant and eventually kill it. The growing space is then opened for the strangler. This phenomenon is called strangling (絞殺) which is a special adaptation for tropic plants with limited growing space in the forests.

Apart from the Chinese Banyan, the Common Red-stem (青果榕) is also widely distributed along wooded area on Lamma. The two species can easily be distinguished by the special fruits (known as 'syconia' 隱頭花果, 無花果) they produce. The former bears smaller, pinkish syconia while the later produces larger, green syconia that turn yellowish when ripe.

Figs are important food sources for local wildlife. Leaves of some figs are the sole food for some butterfly and moth larvae. The seasonal flowering and fruiting patterns of the figs mean that they can act as year-round food source for animals and birds in Hong Kong.

Along the sandy shores of Lantau Island grow some of the beach plants commonly found in south China. These include:

- Beach Naupaka (草海桐)

- Cuban Bast (黃槿)
- Tow-leaves Morning Glory (馬鞍藤)
- Beach Vitex (白背蔓荊)
- Screw Pine (露兜樹)

Beach Naupaka (草海桐) has rounded leaves that are 3–5 inches long, and notched at the tips and are bright green. The leaves are succulent and covered with thick wax that helps preserve water.

Cuban Bast (黃槿) is easy to recognize for it has distinctive heart-shaped leaves. The plant bears flowers almost all year round. The flowers are bright yellow and stand out from the foliage. Morning Glory (馬鞍藤) and Beach Vitex (白背蔓荊) produce purple flowers and are some of the most admirable beach plants on Lamma Island. The Screw Pine (露兜樹) is also commonly found. It produces large orange fruit with size comparable to a pine apple (hence its common name). It has long leaves which bear sharp spines along the edges and the underside.

These plants are tolerant to salty and loose soil. They protect the shore line from wave action and erosion. Moreover, they are also living and foraging habitats for other smaller creatures such as insects and crustaceans.

Grasslands and Shrublands

Grasslands are habitats subjected to regular human disturbances (mainly hill fire). These prevent natural plant succession and only the fast growing plants (mainly grasses) remain in an area. If hill fire and other human disturbance can be avoided, the grassland will eventually develop into shrubland in 10 years or so. Shrublands are dominated by the following plants:

- Rose Myrtle (桃金娘)
- Common Melastoma (野牡丹)
- Bloodred Melastoma (毛蕊).

If the shrubland is protected from hill fire long enough for further vegetation growth, it will

eventually develop into a much denser and multi-layered woodland called Secondary Woodland. Secondary Woodland often has higher diversity of plants and form a much more complex structure within the woodland. Therefore a secondary woodland provides a rich variety of living environment to other plants and animals.

7.2 Sea Grasses

Sea grasses (海草) are flowering plants that grow underwater in coastal and marine environments. Different from algae (海藻) which do not produce flowers, the sea grasses disperse their pollens in sea water when submerged. All the Hong Kong seagrasses share the same characteristic of co-occurring with mangroves in the low to mid-intertidal region of sand and mud flat areas. There are about 60 species of sea grasses in the world, and four of them can be found in Hong Kong:

- Spoon Grass (貝克喜鹽草)
- Oval Halophila (圓葉喜鹽草)
- Widgeon Grass (川蔓藻)
- Dwarf Eel Grass (矮大葉藻)

San Tau (石散頭) is one of the important localities for sea grasses in Hong Kong where Oval Halophila (圓葉喜鹽草) and the Dwarf Eel Grass (矮大葉藻) can be found.

Sea grasses are not only species by themselves, they also form important habitats for marine organisms such as crabs, shrimps, snails as well as the Horseshoe Crab (馬蹄蟹).