

# Arrested or in prison in Hong Kong

This guide provides information about being arrested in Hong Kong and what conditions are like in prison there.

## Contacting the British Consulate

The British consulate in Hong Kong can offer help but won't be able to get you out of prison or get you special treatment because you're British. Find out [what help the embassy or consulate can offer](#).

## British Consulate General Hong Kong

1 Supreme Court Road  
Admiralty  
Hong Kong  
Telephone: +852 2901 3000

# Finding a lawyer and translator

## Find a lawyer in Hong Kong

You should carefully consider getting a local lawyer in Hong Kong. Discuss all costs with them in advance.

[Prisoners Abroad](#) has information on appointing a lawyer and legal aid (not specific to Hong Kong).

## Private lawyers

Check the [list of local English-speaking lawyers](#) if you want to appoint your own private lawyer. Ask the British consulate if you need a paper copy.

Private lawyers in Hong Kong usually ask for a deposit for their estimated legal fees before taking on a case. This could include court fees, outcome and nature of the case.

## Legal aid

Legal aid is generally not available for cases in a Magistrates' Courts, except for committal proceedings. Committal proceedings determine whether there is sufficient evidence for a criminal case to be transferred to the High Court for trial.

You can try applying for legal aid if your case is for Committal Proceedings at Magistrates' Court or your case(s) are at the District Court, High Court, or Court of Final Appeal. Applications are subject to a means test, and processing may take up to 6 weeks. Urgent cases may be expedited through the Superintendent at your place of detention or the following:

Legal Aid Department Headquarters

24/F–27/F, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong

Tel: +852 2867 3171

Email: [ladinfo@lad.gov.hk](mailto:ladinfo@lad.gov.hk)

For non-committal, you may get assistance from the free government Duty Lawyer Scheme on the day of your court appearance. The scheme provides legal representation to eligible defendants facing criminal charges. Court Liaison Offices, located within each Magistrates' Court, handle applications for this service. To apply, visit the Court Liaison Office at the Magistrates' Court where your case is being heard. If you are in custody, the office will contact you automatically before your first appearance.

Alternatively, you may represent yourself. However, it is recommended you seek legal advice beforehand. Free consultations are available through the Free Legal Advice Scheme,

operated by the Duty Lawyer Service, with sessions held at various District Offices across Hong Kong.

The Free Legal Advice Scheme by the Duty Lawyer Service:

Tel-Law Hotline: +852 2521 3333 / +852 2522 8018

Website: <http://www.dutylawyer.org.hk/en/free/free.asp>

## Court-appointed lawyers

There is a Court Liaison Office in every Magistrates Court, and you can apply for a Duty Lawyer for your first court appearance without any means testing. However, if you wish to have legal representation for any subsequent appearance, you must contact the Court Liaison Office to do the means test. After passing the means test there is a one-off fixed handling charge of HK\$640 for the service. The Administration Office of the Duty Lawyer Service is at Suites 808-9 Harcourt House, 39 Gloucester Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong. Telephone: +852 2526 5969.

More information on the Duty Lawyer Service Scheme can be found here:

<http://www.dutylawyer.org.hk/en/duty/duty.asp>

## Find a translator or interpreter in Hong Kong

In addition to Cantonese, English is the official language in Hong Kong. Judges and lawyers are proficient in using English to conduct proceedings. However, if you need an English-speaking translator or interpreter, the following link provides a list:

Search for an [English-speaking translator or interpreter](#) in Hong Kong. Ask the British consulate if you need a paper copy.

# What happens when you're arrested in Hong Kong

You may be arrested and taken to a local police / immigration / customs / ICAC office for one of the following reasons:

- existing arrest warrant against you.
- sufficient grounds to issue an arrest warrant.
- caught in the act of committing a crime.
- Authorities believe you may attempt to leave the country to evade justice.
- Your identity cannot be confirmed.

The police will inform you in English:

- That you are under arrest.
- The reason for your arrest.

Do not sign any documents unless you understand them - you must be given an interpreter if you ask for one.

## Your rights

You are entitled to:

- Seek legal assistance. If you choose to seek legal assistance, a private lawyer must be appointed, as legal aid is not available at this stage.
- Tell someone you have been arrested and be given reasonable opportunities to communicate with a relative or friend by phone.
- Receive copies of written record under caution.
- Communicate and notify the Consulate, if you are foreign national.
- Provision of food and drink.
- Seek medical attention if you feel unwell.
- Request for bail. If the charge is serious - see below.

## How long you can be held for

- Law enforcement agencies have the right to detain you for up to 48 hours before any formal charges are made.
- This period can be extended to 72 hours if a warrant for arrest and detention in respect of deportation has been applied for.
- If it is a minor offence, you may be released without charge or given bail.
- If the offence is serious, bail would normally be refused, and you would be brought before a Magistrate' Court and further detained at one of the remand centres in Hong Kong pending further investigation and trial.

## Personal belongings

While in custody, your personal belongings will be held. These items will be returned to you upon your release. However, any items considered evidence may be retained for further investigation.

## Going to court

All matters appear initially in the Magistrates' Courts. Serious indictable offences are referred to either the District Court or the Court of First Instance. Information on the Magistrates court proceedings can be found at:

[https://www.judiciary.hk/en/court\\_services\\_facilities/mag.html](https://www.judiciary.hk/en/court_services_facilities/mag.html)

## Being put on remand

You may be put on remand if you're strongly suspected of committing a serious offence. This means you'll be held in a detention centre while criminal investigation and trial to finish.

Sentenced prisoners and those on remand are usually held separately. For more information about correctional facilities in Hong Kong, please visit:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/pub/pub\\_hkfs/pub\\_hkfs.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/pub/pub_hkfs/pub_hkfs.html)

## How long you can be on remand for

Depending on charge and complexity of the case, it may take approx. 6 months for a trial to be scheduled in a Magistrates' Court. If you plead not guilty, delays of up to 12 months are common in the District Court and the Court of First Instance of the High Court.

## Bail

For serious offences, bail is generally refused. For minor offences, bail may be granted either by the officer in charge of the case or the Magistrates' Court. The authorities may withhold your passport as a part of the bail condition.

Bail amount depends on the nature and seriousness of the offence, financial circumstances of the accused, and risk of the accused fleeing-jurisdiction.

Bail may be denied if the accused has no strong ties to Hong Kong, or no permanent local address. Failure to comply with bail conditions may result in a warrant issued for arrest.

The consulate cannot transfer bail funds for you.

## Arriving at prison

Upon admission, all prisoners will be searched and processed. You will be interviewed by senior prison officers and examined by a Medical Officer. This is an important opportunity to raise any issues that require immediate attention.

All prison Superintendents speak English, and wherever possible, English-speaking staff will be assigned to assist you. An Induction Programme will be provided to help you adjust to life in the institution

Your next-of-kin will not be told you're in prison unless you give your permission.

## Personal belongings

Your personal belongings, including private clothing not considered evidence, will be itemised, recorded, and securely stored at the prison. Basic toiletries and prison-issued uniform will be provided.

## Your prison cell

- Sentenced prisoners and those on remand are housed separately.
- Single cells are uncommon; inmates typically share dormitory-style accommodations.
- Beds consist of plastic or wooden bunks with metal frames and no mattresses.
- Necessities such as clothing, bedding, towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and soap are provided.
- Cells and dormitories are not air-conditioned, but electric fans are installed in the corridors.
- For security and safety reasons, toilets and showers are semi-open.
- Inmates are required to maintain a high standard of cleanliness and tidiness in their living areas. Regular inspections are conducted, and failure to comply may result in disciplinary action.

## Contacting the British Consulate

Hong Kong's Correctional Services Department will normally inform the British Consulate if a British national is arrested or transferred to a correctional facility. If you have agreed to consular assistance, we will aim to visit you every 3 months.

If you have an urgent matter to discuss, you can ask the prison authorities to contact the consulate on your behalf.

Hong Kong does not recognise dual nationality. If you have both British and Chinese nationality, the local authorities may treat you as a Chinese citizen, even if you enter Hong Kong on a full "British citizen" passport or hold a British National (Overseas) passport. If this is the case, the British Consulate-General may not be able to offer you consular help.

More information can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationality-in-china>

## Medical check-up

All detainees undergo a physical examination by a Medical Officer.

Contact the British consulate if you need help getting your medical notes from the UK.

## Rights and responsibilities in prison

All new inmates undergo an Induction Programme which officers from various units provide information on treatment programmes, daily routines, institutional facilities, disciplinary rules, and complaint procedures.

Inmates are expected to behave in an orderly and disciplined manner. Misconduct — such as showing disrespect to officers, using abusive language, committing assault, or engaging in fights — is considered serious and may result in disciplinary action.

Inmates are required to work unless excused for medical or other valid reasons. See 'Work and Study' for more details.

Inmates demonstrating good behaviour may receive a one-third remission of their sentence. Punishments for misconduct can include forfeiture of remission, separate confinement, and deduction of earnings.

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## Visits from family or friends

On admission, prisoners are required to declare the identities of any visitors. Subsequent amendments can be made to the list upon approval by the institutional management.

Further information on visiting arrangements can be found at:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/socialvisit/ins\\_vis\\_guide.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/socialvisit/ins_vis_guide.html)

## Arranging visits

Prison visit arrangements are made online through the Correctional Services Department (CSD) e-Services Platform. To register, visitors must first be declared as approved visitors. Once registered, users can book visits up to seven days in advance.

Details for first time account registration can be found at:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/online\\_service/eservicesplatform.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/online_service/eservicesplatform.html)

All institutions have specified visiting hours. Information on individual institutions can be found at: [https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/facility/facility\\_ind/ins\\_ind.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/facility/facility_ind/ins_ind.html)

## Remand prisoners

Remand prisoners can be visited once daily. Each visit shall not exceed 15 minutes and no more than two visitors, including infants/children, shall be allowed at one time.

## Sentenced prisoners

Sentenced prisoners can be visited twice a month. Each visit shall not exceed 30 minutes and no more than three visitors, including infants/children, shall be allowed at one time.

## During the visit

First-time visitors to a person in custody must present valid identification for verification and complete a registration slip. This slip must include their name, Hong Kong Identity Card number (valid passport), address, and their relationship to the person in custody. For subsequent visits to the same individual, re-registration is not required unless there are changes to the information previously provided.

On the day of the visit, visitors must report to the registration office. Lockers are available in the registration area for storing personal items. All visitors must report at least 30 minutes before the scheduled appointment.



## What visitors can take with them

Visitors are allowed to take certain items to the detainees upon visit. The list of approved articles for remand and sentenced prisoners are different. Note, items are collected together and issued separately. Information on approved items can be found at:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/socialvisit/socialvisit\\_articles/ins\\_vis\\_guide\\_handin\\_articles.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/socialvisit/socialvisit_articles/ins_vis_guide_handin_articles.html)

Visitors can order the list of approved items online:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/online\\_service/eservicesplatform.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/online_service/eservicesplatform.html)

## Visits from British consulate staff

We normally visit prisoners on a quarterly basis. Prisoners do not need to submit a request, as we proactively reach out to them. However, if we are informed of an urgent need - such as health or welfare concerns - and we have the necessary resources, we may arrange an earlier visit.

Prisoners are informed of scheduled visits by phone if they or the prison welfare officer contact us. Each prisoner is visited individually every quarter by their assigned consular case officer.

Prisoners can stay in touch primarily by letter, which is encouraged by the prison. Phone calls may be possible if permitted, but they are not routinely available to all inmates and are generally approved only under specific circumstances.

You are welcome to write to us at any time about any concerns. If the matter is urgent, it may be quicker to ask the prison authorities to contact us on your behalf.

## Money

The British Consulate does not provide financial assistance to prisoners.

In Hong Kong, inmates are not permitted to possess personal monetary funds.

It is generally mandatory for prisoners to engage in work. Wages earned can be used to purchase approved items from the prison.

## How to make a complaint about mistreatment

The British Consulate can [help if you have been mistreated or abused](#) and takes all complaints seriously. Tell us first if you decide to make a complaint. No action will be taken without your permission.

A person in custody can raise complaints through the following channels:

- Any staff member, including senior officers at the institution.

- Senior officers from the Correctional Services Department (CSD) Headquarters, including the Commissioner, during institutional visits.
- The Complaints Investigation Unit (CIU) of the CSD.
- Visiting Justices of the Peace (JPs), who conduct regular visits to correctional institutions.
- Members of the Legislative Council.
- The Office of The Ombudsman.
- The Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Other relevant government bureaux or departments.

Information on complaints procedures can be found at:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/info/info\\_complaint/other\\_complaint.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/info/info_complaint/other_complaint.html)

If you are uncomfortable reporting a complaint directly to the authorities, you may contact the Consulate by phone or in writing to share your concerns. Please note that phone calls may be monitored, and outgoing mail may be opened.

## Your investigation and trial in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), established following the handover of sovereignty from the United Kingdom to China in 1997.

The Sino-British Joint Declaration, the treaty signed between the UK and China, outlines Hong Kong's autonomy and guarantees its independent judicial power. Like the UK, Hong Kong operates under a common law legal system.

The Judiciary of the Hong Kong SAR is responsible for the administration of justice and hears all criminal prosecutions and civil disputes, including those involving the government.

Hong Kong's Basic Law serves as its constitutional document and guarantees a range of rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech, the press, association, and assembly. It also enshrines key legal principles such as the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence.

The National Security Law, enacted in 2020, and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, introduced in 2024, include specific provisions for individuals accused of national security offences. These laws are broad in scope and can carry penalties of up to life imprisonment. They apply to individuals and organisations, regardless of nationality or residency, and cover activities conducted both within and outside Hong Kong.

The British Consulate cannot interfere with the Hong Kong judicial system. It cannot ask for your case to be judged more quickly just because you are British or ask the authorities to waive any penalties.

## Choice of court

The courts of justice in Hong Kong are structured as follows:

- Court of Final Appeal
- High Court, which includes:
  - Court of Appeal
  - Court of First Instance
  - Competition Tribunal
- District Court, which includes the Family Court
- Lands Tribunal
- Magistrates' Courts, which include the Juvenile Court
- Coroner's Court
- Labour Tribunal
- Small Claims Tribunal
- Obscene Articles Tribunal

Further information on HKSAR Court Services can be found here:

<https://www.judiciary.hk/en/publications/judfactsheet.html>

[https://www.judiciary.hk/doc/en/publications/judfactsheet\\_202410.pdf](https://www.judiciary.hk/doc/en/publications/judfactsheet_202410.pdf)

## Completion of investigations

Information on the investigation and prosecution process in Hong Kong can be found on the Department of Justice's official website:

[https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/publications/prosecution\\_ch3.html](https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/publications/prosecution_ch3.html)

This section outlines how investigations are conducted, the role of prosecutors, and the criteria used to determine whether a case proceeds to prosecution.

## Start of your trial

Magistrates' Courts and District Court

- A Magistrate (in the Magistrates' Courts) or a District Judge (in the District Court) presides over the trial and acts as the finder of both law and fact.

High Court

- In the Court of First Instance of the High Court, trials for serious criminal offences are conducted before a judge and a jury.

- A jury typically consists of 7 jurors, or 9 in special cases, who determine the facts and deliver a verdict.
- The judge provides directions on the law and oversees the proceedings.

#### Trial Procedure

- Opening speech by the prosecution
- Testimony of prosecution witnesses
- Conclusion of the prosecution's case
- Submissions and ruling on procedural matters, such as the admissibility of cautioned statements (if applicable)
- Submissions and ruling on "no case to answer", if raised by the defence
- Testimony of defence witnesses, if the defence chooses to present evidence
- Closing submissions by both sides
- Verdict (by judge or jury, depending on the court)
- Mitigation and sentencing, if the accused is found guilty

## Sentences

Sentences depend on the seriousness of the offence. You should seek legal advice from your lawyer regarding possible outcomes. There is no death penalty or corporal punishment in Hong Kong; imprisonment is the most severe penalty available.

### Sentencing Options

Judges and Magistrates may impose a range of sentences, including:

- Bind-over Order
- Fine
- Probation Order
- Community Service Order
- Suspended Sentence (a term of imprisonment that is suspended)
- Imprisonment
- Detention in various correctional institutions (e.g. Training Centres, Rehabilitation Centres)
- Hospital Order
- Other penalties specific to certain offences (e.g. disqualification from driving)

### Sentencing Powers by Court Level

#### Magistrates' Courts

- Sentence determined by a Magistrate
- Maximum penalty:
  - 2 years' imprisonment (or 3 years for multiple indictable offences tried together)
  - Fine up to HK\$100,000

#### District Court

- Sentence determined by a District Judge

- Maximum penalty:
  - 7 years' imprisonment

#### High Court (Court of First Instance)

- Sentence determined by a High Court Judge
- No statutory limit on imprisonment term (e.g. life imprisonment may be imposed)

#### Deportation to a Third Country

If the UK was not your place of residence prior to imprisonment, an application may be made for deportation to a third country. The Hong Kong Immigration Department will liaise with the relevant authorities to determine your immigration status in that country.

## Making an appeal

It is important that you consult your lawyer or seek Legal Aid and consider carefully whether you have proper grounds before you decide whether to lodge an appeal. It must be noted that an appeal may lead to an increased sentence or order loss of time already served.

## When you can appeal

#### Appealing a Magistrate's Decision

- You may apply to the Magistrate for a review of the decision within 14 days of the determination.
- If the Magistrate dismisses the review, you may appeal to the Court of First Instance (High Court) within 14 days of the dismissal.
- Alternatively, you may directly appeal to the Court of First Instance without first seeking a review, by lodging a notice of appeal within 14 days of the original decision.

#### Appealing a Decision by a District Court or the Court of First Instance

- An application for leave to appeal must be lodged with the Court of Appeal within 28 days from the date of conviction or sentence.
- If the application is not filed within this period, you may apply for leave to appeal out of time.
- The Court of Appeal may grant, or refuse leave to appeal either on paper or after a hearing.
- If leave is granted, the appeal will be heard by a panel of two or three Justices of Appeal, who may dismiss or allow the appeal.

#### Appealing to the Court of Final Appeal

The Court of Final Appeal may, at its discretion, hear appeals in criminal matters from:

- Any final decision of the Court of Appeal.
- Any final decision of the Court of First Instance, provided it is not a jury verdict (e.g. a judge's ruling on an appeal from a Magistrate's decision).

To appeal to the Court of Final Appeal, leave to appeal is required. Leave will only be granted if:

- The case involves a point of law of great and general importance, or
- The applicant can demonstrate substantial and grave injustice.

## What happens when you appeal

Information on Court of Appeal can be found here:

[https://www.judiciary.hk/en/court\\_services\\_facilities/hc.html#2](https://www.judiciary.hk/en/court_services_facilities/hc.html#2)

## Prison conditions in Hong Kong

### **Correctional Facilities in Hong Kong**

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) manages 29 correctional facilities, which include:

- 24 correctional institutions (ranging from minimum to maximum security)
- 3 half-way houses
- 2 custodial wards in public hospitals

These facilities serve various functions, including:

- Prisons (minimum, medium, and maximum security)
- Detention centres for immigration detainees
- Training, rehabilitation, and drug addiction treatment centres
- A psychiatric centre

Information on types of correctional facilities can be found here:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/facility/facility\\_type/ins\\_ins.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/facility/facility_type/ins_ins.html)

### **Correctional Programmes**

The CSD operates a wide range of programmes under two main categories:

- Prison Management
- Rehabilitation of Offenders

These programmes are tailored for both adult and young persons in custody.

Information on the type of programmes can be found here:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/facility/facility\\_mgt/ins\\_pen.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/facility/facility_mgt/ins_pen.html)

### **Concerns and Calls for Reform**

In its 2019 report, the Society for Community Organisation (SoCO) called for prison reforms, highlighting:

- Overcrowding at the Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre
- Poor hygiene conditions in some facilities
- Fear of retaliation, which discourages inmates from filing complaints

While some institutions face challenges, most prisons are reported to be reasonably maintained.

## Letters and packages

### Letters

Inmates are allowed to send and receive letters. When sending letters, please ensure the inmate's Prisoner Identification Number is clearly written on the address label. Each letter must not exceed four A4 pages and must not contain threats, offensive language, or any inappropriate content. All correspondence may be opened and inspected by correctional staff for security reasons.

### Postage

Inmates are responsible for the cost of postage. However, each inmate is entitled to one free letter per week, which includes an envelope, writing paper, and postage.

### Parcels and Approved Items

Parcels are not permitted. However, certain approved items may be brought in during visits. The list of approved items is subject to regular updates and can be accessed via the CSD's official website:

Information on lists of articles allowed can be found here:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/socialvisit/socialvisit\\_articles/ins\\_vis\\_guide\\_handin\\_articles.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/english/socialvisit/socialvisit_articles/ins_vis_guide_handin_articles.html)

## Telephone calls

Mobile phones are strictly prohibited in all correctional institutions in Hong Kong.

Phone calls are not a routine privilege for all inmates. They are generally permitted only under specific circumstances, such as:

- Contacting legal representatives
- Communicating with Consulates (for foreign nationals)
- Exceptional family emergencies

Foreign nationals may be allowed to make one ten-minute international phone call each month, if their families reside overseas and are unable to visit. These calls are considered a privilege, not a right, and are subject to approval by institutional management.

To make an international call, inmates typically need to obtain an international phone card also known as IDD (International Direct Dialling). The type of phone card and the process for obtaining one may vary by facility. Institutional staff will provide guidance on how to proceed. If you encounter any difficulties, you can contact the Consulate for assistance.

## Video calls

Video calls are available to inmates whose family members or friends are unable to visit in person due to:

- Old age
- Pregnancy

- Disability

These calls are considered a substitute for in-person visits only under exceptional circumstances and require approval from institutional management. The fact that a prisoner's family or friends are overseas, on its own, is not sufficient grounds for approval.

## Medical and dental treatment

Your basic medical needs must be met while you're detained in Hong Kong.

Every correctional institution is equipped with a hospital or sick bay, where medical services are provided by Medical Officers seconded from the Department of Health (DH) and correctional staff with professional nursing qualifications.

Prisoners who require specialist treatment, intensive care, or surgery will be referred to public hospitals. Please note that waiting times are the same as for members of the public, and some procedures may involve lengthy waiting periods.

In addition, medical specialists from the Hospital Authority and the Department of Health regularly visit correctional institutions to provide specialist consultations and treatment.

## Treatment for a new illness or condition

If you feel unwell you can report your condition to correctional staff, who will then arrange for you to be seen by a Medical Officer.

Those in need for specialist treatment are referred to visiting specialists or public hospitals for follow-up. If a medical emergency, inmates would be taken to Emergency and Accident Unit at a public hospital.

## Existing conditions

Upon admission to a correctional facility, every prisoner undergoes a comprehensive medical examination. This helps identify any existing health conditions and ongoing monitoring treatment required.

Contact the consulate if you need help getting your medical notes from the UK. With your permission, we can also make the prison authorities aware of any medical or dental problems you might have.

You might be transferred to a hospital with a police guard if your condition can't be treated in prison.



## Drug and alcohol addiction

The Correctional Services Department, along with other government agencies, offers a range of drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes. These initiatives are part of a broader effort to support rehabilitation and facilitate reintegration into society.

Prisoners with drug addiction issues are sent to Drug Rehabilitation Centres for treatment.

Drug trafficking within Hong Kong prisons is rare due to stringent monitoring measures. However, if inmates are found in possession of illegal drugs, they are subject to prosecution and may receive an additional sentence.

## Mental health care

As part of the initial medical examination, prisoners are screened for self-harm risks and other mental health concerns upon admission.

Prisoners can report mental health issues to the following personnel:

- Correctional officers
- Medical staff
- Clinical psychologists assigned to the facility

Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre is the only correctional psychiatric institution in Hong Kong. It accommodates inmates who require specialised psychiatric care, including those with severe mental illnesses.

## Emergency trips outside prison

Prisoners in Hong Kong can be allowed to leave prison temporarily under specific emergency circumstances, but this is strictly regulated and only permitted under exceptional conditions.

Temporary leave may be granted for:

- Medical emergencies requiring treatment outside the prison
- Court appearances
- Compassionate reasons, such as attending a close relative's funeral or visiting a critically ill family member

The Commissioner of Correctional Services or a delegated officer makes the final decision. If approved, the prisoner is escorted by correctional officers during the leave.

## Food and diet

Inmates have access to clean, hygienic drinking water and are provided with three daily meals—breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Each meal is designed to meet nutritional and caloric requirements, and the menus are reviewed by qualified dietitians and endorsed by the Department of Health. The meals vary depending on the inmate's assigned dietary scale (see more below).

Inmates may use their earned wages to purchase additional food items from the prison commissary, subject to institutional rules.

## Special diets

The Correctional Service Department offers four main dietary scales, to meet the nutritional, cultural, and religious requirements of persons in custody:

Dietary Scale 1 – Standard diet with rice as the staple food (commonly served to local Chinese inmates).

Dietary Scale 2 – Diet with curry and chapatti as staples (typically for South Asian inmates).

Dietary Scale 3 – Diet with potatoes and bread as staples (often for Western inmates).

Dietary Scale 4 – Vegan diet, suitable for those with religious or ethical dietary restrictions.

In addition, supplementary diets may be provided on medical grounds, based on the advice of institutional medical officers.

Inmates can request a change in their diet under certain conditions: Religious beliefs; Health Conditions; Specific dietary requirements (e.g. vegetarian, allergies). A formal request must be submitted. Requests are then reviewed by medical staff, prison administrators and if applicable a faith leader.

## Prison shop

Hong Kong prisons do have prison shops, commonly referred to as canteens, where inmates can purchase approved items using funds from their personal prison accounts.

The selection is limited and strictly regulated. Common items include:

- Toiletries (soap, toothpaste, shampoo)
- Snacks and non-perishable food
- Stationery
- Basic clothing items
- Cigarettes (in some facilities, though this is being phased out)

Inmates typically fill out an order form on a weekly basis. Items are delivered to them in their cells or designated areas.

## Showers and hygiene

Inmates are generally allowed to shower daily, though the exact frequency may vary depending on the facility and the inmate's classification — such as security level, health condition, or disciplinary status.

Basic hygiene items are provided and typically include:

- Soap
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Toilet paper
- Shampoo or combined body wash
- Razor (provided under supervision, if applicable)

## Work and study

All convicted prisoners in Hong Kong are required to work unless excused for medical or other valid reasons. Work is organised through the Correctional Services Industries (CSI), which operates nearly 150 industrial workshops across the prison system.

Inmates participate in a variety of trades, including:

- Laundry
- Garment making
- Carpentry
- Printing and bookbinding
- Domestic services and maintenance

Inmates typically work 6 hours per day, 5 days a week, and are paid in accordance with international standards. A mandatory 10% of earnings is saved, while the remainder can be used to purchase items from the prison canteen.

Hong Kong correctional facilities offer a range of educational programmes to support inmate rehabilitation and reintegration.

Information on work and education/vocational training can be found at:

[https://www.csd.gov.hk/tc\\_chi/facility/facility\\_mgt/ins\\_pen.html](https://www.csd.gov.hk/tc_chi/facility/facility_mgt/ins_pen.html)

## Books, languages, activities and study

### **Housing:**

- Foreign inmates are not automatically housed together. Placement depends on factors like security level, age, health, and offence type.

### **Communication Restrictions:**

- All communication — whether with other inmates or outsiders — is monitored and subject to approval by prison authorities.

### **Inmate-to-Inmate Contact:**

- Direct contact between inmates in different units or facilities is generally not allowed.
- Communication is restricted to prevent collusion, gang activity, or security risks.
- Inmates in the same unit may interact during work, meals, or recreation, under supervision.

**Cross-Facility Communication:**

- Writing to inmates in other prisons is typically prohibited, unless exceptional approval is granted.
- Foreign inmates in Hong Kong are not automatically housed together.

**Phone Access**

- Inmates do not have direct access to phones.
- They may request to make a call, which must be approved by prison authorities and is closely monitored.

**Writing Materials**

- Inmates are provided with writing materials and are allowed to send and receive letters.
- All correspondence is screened for security reasons.

**Internet Access**

- Inmates do not have unrestricted internet access.

**Television Access**

- Inmates do not have personal TVs, but shared televisions may be available in common areas. Some English-language programming may be available.
- Access is regulated and varies by facility and inmate privileges.

**Library Access**

- Most prisons have a library, including books in English and Chinese.
- The collection is generally well-stocked, and inmates may request additional reading materials.
- Books, magazines, and newspapers from outside may be allowed, but are subject to content restrictions (e.g., no violent, sexual, or radical political content).

**Cultural and Social Activities**

Prisons offer cultural, recreational, and religious activities, including:

- Sports
- Music
- Art
- Religious services

Participation is encouraged and may be viewed positively by prison authorities, potentially influencing an inmate's record and rehabilitation assessment.

[Prisoners Abroad](#) might be able to send some reading material, language textbooks and dictionaries.

**Courses and study**

Hong Kong correctional facilities offer a range of educational programmes to support inmate rehabilitation and reintegration.

- Young inmates (under 21) can attend half-day academic and vocational training courses.
- Adult inmates may volunteer for continuing education and, if eligible, enrol in vocational training to earn accredited qualifications.

Most courses are delivered in Cantonese, the dominant local language. However, English-language materials and instruction may be provided when needed, particularly for:

- Foreign inmates
- Distance learning programmes (e.g., through Hong Kong Metropolitan University)
- Vocational qualifications with English-language curricula or exams

## Exercise

### Outdoor Exercise

- Inmates are entitled to regular outdoor exercise, though the exact duration may vary by facility.

### Exercise Facilities

Most prisons have basic facilities such as:

- Basketball courts
- Open yards for walking or jogging
- Simple gym equipment (e.g., pull-up bars, weights)

### Organised Activities

- Structured physical activities are often part of rehabilitation, especially for young offenders.
- Participation is encouraged and may positively impact an inmate's rehabilitation record.

## Clothing

Inmates are provided with prison-issued uniforms designed for practicality, hygiene, and security. Uniforms may vary slightly by institution but generally include:

- Shirts (short or long-sleeved depending on season)
- Trousers
- Undergarments
- Jackets or sweaters in colder weather
- Footwear: Basic shoes or sandals are issued
- Workwear: Inmates assigned to industrial, or workshop duties are provided with:
  - Work clothes
  - Gloves
  - Caps
  - Masks (especially in hygienic or specialised environments)

## Religion

Inmates in Hong Kong are allowed to participate in religious services of their choice and may receive visits from priests, ministers, or spiritual advisors, typically arranged through approved religious organisations.

Prisons are not permanently staffed by religious ministers, chaplains, however, volunteers from recognised faiths (e.g., Christian, Buddhist, Muslim) regularly visit to offer spiritual support and conduct services.

Religious books and materials, including Bibles and texts in English and other languages, are available through the prison library or provided by religious groups.

## Mobile phones

Mobile phones are strictly prohibited. Possession of unauthorised items, including phones, is a disciplinary offence.

Inmates caught with such items may face:

- Loss of privileges (e.g., visits, canteen access)
- Solitary confinement
- Sentence extension (in serious cases)
- Criminal charges, possibly leading to a new prison term

## Transferring to another prison

### Transferring to a prison in the UK

You may be able to apply to transfer to a prison in the UK as a Prisoner Transfer Agreement exists between the UK and Hong Kong. To be eligible, you must:

- Be a British citizen or have close family ties to the UK (usually through permanent residence)
- Not be awaiting trial
- Have completed or waived all appeals
- Have at least 24 months of your sentence remaining
- Have no outstanding fines or non-custodial penalties
- The offence must also be a crime in the part of the UK you wish to transfer to (England, Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland).

Transfers are not guaranteed. Each case is assessed individually, and either the Hong Kong or UK authorities may refuse the request — especially if you haven't lived in the UK recently or lack close family there.

To apply, inform your Prison Superintendent. The prison will forward your request to the Hong Kong Security Bureau. The process can take at least ~~48~~ 24 months; however, this can be extended due to unforeseen circumstances. Inmates are normally informed of the transfer at the last minute.

### Transferring to a prison in Hong Kong

Transfers between prisons in Hong Kong are only considered for exceptional or compassionate reasons, though the Correctional Services Department may also transfer inmates on administrative grounds (such as security, rehabilitation needs, or overcrowding).

## Early release

All prisoners may receive a one-third reduction of their sentence for good behaviour while in custody.

Prisoners who are Hong Kong permanent residents may also be eligible to apply for early release under supervision, provided they meet specific criteria under the Prisoners (Release under Supervision) Ordinance. This includes serving a minimum portion of their sentence and being subject to supervision until the full sentence expiry.

Information on early release schemes can be found at:

[https://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/links/rusb/early\\_scheme.html](https://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/links/rusb/early_scheme.html)

## Clemency or pardon

As outlined in Article 48(12) of the Basic Law, Hong Kong's Chief Executive may grant a pardon, reduce the sentence, or remit part of the punishment.

Who Can Apply:

- The prisoner themselves
- A legal representative
- A family member or an authorised person

What to Include in the Application:

- Full name and identification details of the prisoner
- Details of the conviction and sentence
- Grounds for clemency (e.g., humanitarian reasons, rehabilitation, health conditions)
- Supporting documents (e.g., medical reports, letters of support)

Review Process:

- The application is reviewed by relevant departments, including the Department of Justice and Correctional Services Department.
- Recommendations are made to the Chief Executive, who has the final decision-making power.



## Release and deportation

You can contact the British Consulate if you need help when you know you are about to be released.

## Deportation

Under the Immigration Ordinance (Cap. 115), the Director of Immigration may issue a removal or deportation order for non-permanent residents who have committed serious offences.

Deportation typically occurs immediately after release from prison. If deportation cannot be arranged immediately (e.g., due to travel document issues), the individual may be held in immigration detention until removal is possible.

In some cases, individuals may appeal a deportation order, but this depends on the nature of the offence and immigration status.

Permanent residents cannot be deported or removed from Hong Kong.

## Flights to the UK

The Immigration Department typically arranges and covers the cost of deportation flights for individuals who are subject to removal or deportation orders.

This includes foreign prisoners who have completed their sentence and are not permitted to remain in Hong Kong.

## Getting a passport

Make sure your British passport is still in date. Contact the British Consulate before you're released if you need an emergency passport for your journey home.

Note: The Immigration Department do not normally cover the cost of a travel document.

## Useful legal terms

The Hong Kong useful legal terms can be found at <https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/glossary/en>. It is a useful reference tool for locating bilingual legal terms and expressions used in the Hong Kong legislation.