

13 June 2013

Urban Adventures



Daisann McLane set up Little Adventures in Hong Kong, offering bespoke tours to visitors and locals alike

When Daisann McLane set up Little Adventures in Hong Kong in 2009, the New Yorker wanted to help others discover the Hong Kong she knew and loved. With a bespoke approach, multilingual guides and such fun programmes as “Wonton-a-Thon,” an introduction to Hong Kong street and snack foods, the company has seen business double each year and is on track to repeat that in 2013.

“I never refer to our programmes as tours because they’re not,” Ms McLane said. “What we do is really an experiential, in-the-field seminar in Hong Kong, tailored to your special interests. Cultural anthropology was my focus in graduate school, and what I’ve done is to try to blend fieldwork and fun.”

Before setting up Little Adventures in Hong Kong, Ms McLane hadn’t considered herself an entrepreneur. But when the travel writer decided she wanted to live in Hong Kong, friends advised her to set up a business.

“In Hong Kong, there is so much entrepreneurial spirit in the air you can practically inhale it,” Ms McLane said. “It amazed me how easy it was to start my company. Even though I thought I knew what made Hong Kong tick economically, I had no idea there was a whole sector of business here devoted to helping people start their business.”

The business idea came from Ms McLane’s experiences as a Cantonese speaker – she fell in love with the language back in her native New York – and the 15 years she spent as a travel writer. Friends of friends would call when they arrived in Hong Kong for help to explore little-seen parts of the city, including old Hakka villages in the New Territories or 1960s public housing flats.

It got her thinking that there might be a business in it. “I could help more people learn about Hong Kong – not from the typical tourism angle, but from a culinary, cultural, social and political perspective.”

Preserving Hong Kong

With a policy of no more than three guests per programme, Ms McLane said that she holds fast to her rule to avoid the tour group “vibe.” Restricting the number of guests per programme also helps to ensure her clients can truly experience the neighbourhood, without disturbing residents.

Preserving Hong Kong



Expert hosts of Little Adventure Hong Kong specialise in different aspects of Hong Kong culture

“Our commitment to intimate group sizes gives us a smaller footprint in the neighbourhoods we cherish,” Ms McLane said. “Hong Kong people are the reason we adore Hong Kong. We want to tread lightly and considerately through the homes of our neighbours.”

One of the reasons Ms McLane started Little Adventures in Hong Kong is because of the changes happening to such areas as Central, Sheung Wan and Sai Ying Pun. Ms McLane, who wrote an award-winning article on Hong Kong preservation for National Geographic Traveler, said promoting these areas also helps work being done by Central and Sheung Wan supporters to preserve their small business and heritage.

“I hope that in some small way, this awareness-building among the international community might help support the immensely important local Hong Kong movements for cultural and heritage preservation that have emerged in the last few years,” Ms McLane said. “I think it’s fabulous how young Hong Kong kids have been re-discovering and reviving local culture. When I walk down Gough Street and see the long line of hip kids waiting to get into the dai pai dong, Sik Heung Yuen, I feel so happy.”

Expatriate Orientation

Besides customised tour visits, Little Adventures in Hong Kong also organises orientation programmes for expatriates and executives. While many relocation services provide services for wealthy expatriate families, including finding private schools and hiring domestic helpers, Little Adventures in Hong Kong shows expats different neighbourhoods, the best places to eat, drink and shop, and explains Hong Kong history in a way that relates to what their clients are experiencing.

“That type of expat is becoming less and less the norm in Hong Kong,” Ms McLane said. “Nowadays, you’ve got younger foreigners coming alone or in couples without kids, on comfortable but not crazy high-end budgets. I think what we’re doing is like a new wave Hong Kong relocation – not merely the how-to but the why-to. The corporate HR departments like us because, for a very modest cost, we can help their newly arrived personnel feel at home, and very happy to be in Hong Kong.”



Visitors get a glimpse of local life from a wet market in Shau Kei Wan



A sampling of some of the local fare on offer at a Hong Kong-style café