SMART Home Hunting

Third Edition

The Key to Getting Your Perfect Place in Hong Kong

Daniel W. Lam

SM RT Home Hunting:

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(Third Edition)

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Introduction

Housing in Hong Kong is always in great demand. Looking for a home here can be very stressful if you don't know how to begin and are unaware of the procedures involved. It's the aim of this eBook to provide you with the essential knowledge of home hunting in Hong Kong, yet not to overwhelm you with too many details.

This little book has come to life from my 8 years of hands-on experience working with clients from all over the world to find their homes in different parts of Hong Kong. It will help walk you through your own home searching journey (even before it starts!) in a SMART way. You'll also gain sound advice in selecting and working with a local estate agent. Whether you are new to Hong Kong or have been residing in this vibrant city for some time, you will find the information practical and the tips (highlighted) ready to use.

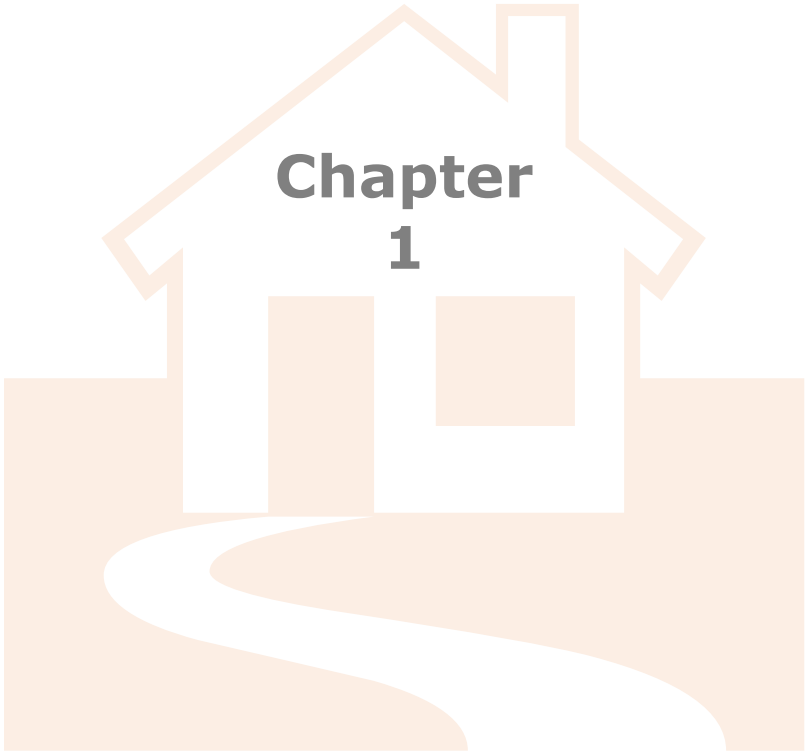
Although this booklet has been written with an emphasis on the know-how of renting a residential property, most parts of it are still relevant if you are looking to purchase one. **TIPS:** Potential homebuyers should be aware of the latest measures regarding the stamp duty rates and loan-to-value ratios for mortgage loans. More details can be found at www.gohome.com.hk/mortgage/government-measure/en/.

I hope you will enjoy your home searching journey in Hong Kong as much as I've enjoyed writing this book. May God bless you and help you find the perfect place very soon!

Daniel W. Lam

www.HomeinHK.com

P.S. A big thanks to my wonderful friend and neighbour, David R. Henry, for editing and livening up this book. His quick-witted mind and keen eye have greatly helped in putting this together. It's been a real pleasure working with him!



Chapter 1

“If you set goals and go after them with all the determination you can muster, your gifts will take you places that will amaze you.”

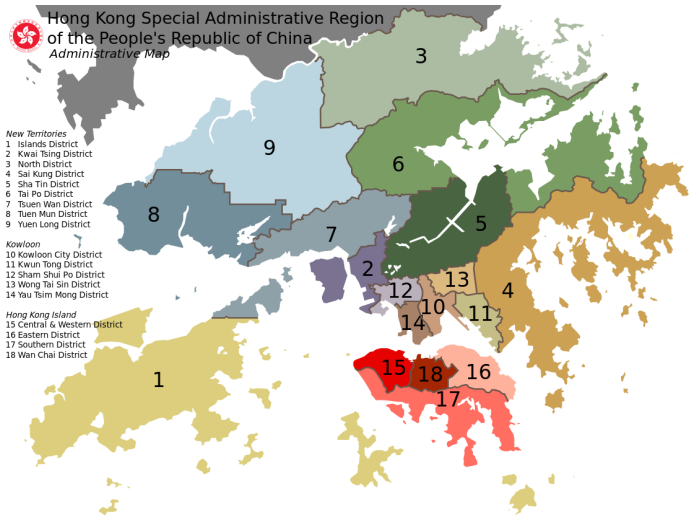
—Les Brown

Be *Specific* in Writing down All Your Requirements

Thinking through and visualising what you need – or want – is the first step in finding your perfect home in Hong Kong. **TIP:** To get a better picture of your desired place for living, you should write down all the things that are important to you. It will be helpful to list your *must-haves* and *nice-to-haves*. Also, prioritising your preferences can save you from getting headaches at the time of choosing a property. Now, let's go through the main criteria one by one.

Location

Hong Kong, a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China, consists of three areas – Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories, which include more than 250 outlying islands. The city is subdivided into *18 administrative districts* as shown in the map below:



By User: Moddlyg - File: Map of Hong Kong 18 Districts zh.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0
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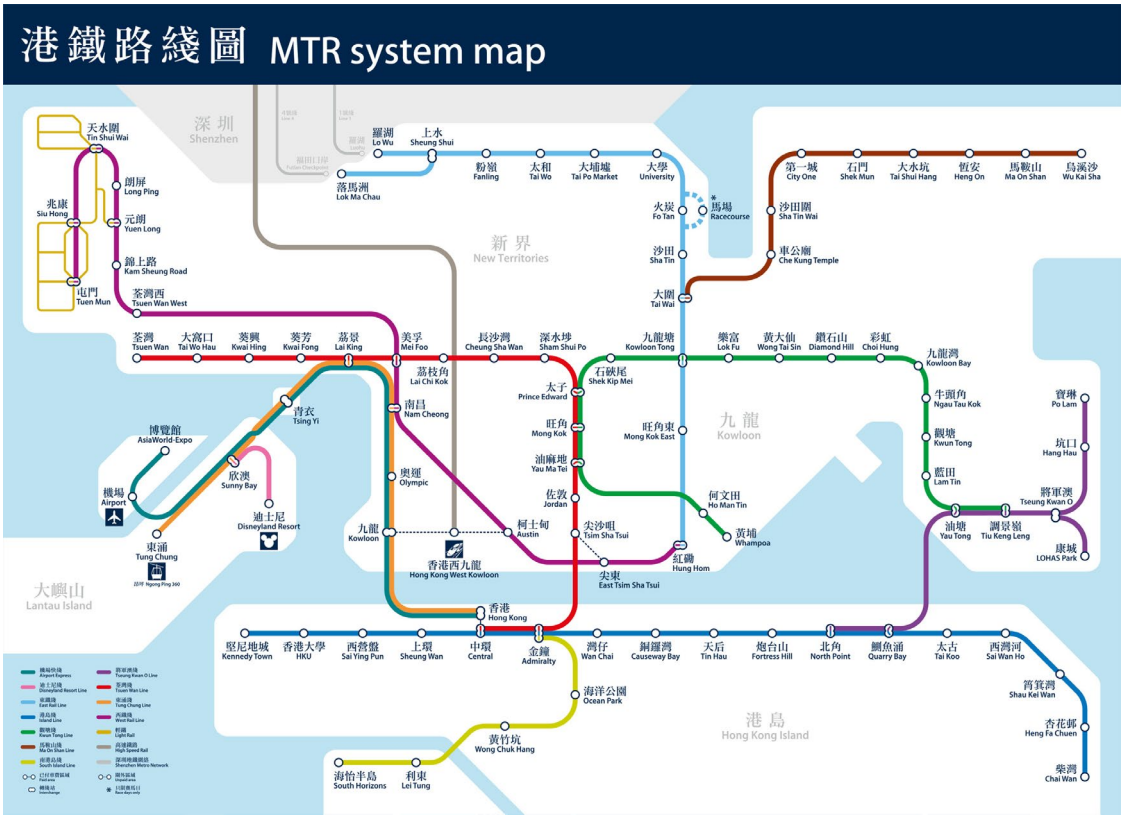
1. Islands, 2. Kwai Tsing, 3. North, 4. Sai Kung, 5. Sha Tin, 6. Tai Po, 7. Tsuen Wan, 8. Tuen Mun, 9. Yuen Long, 10. Kowloon City, 11. Kwun Tong, 12. Sham Shui Po, 13. Wong Tai Sin, 14. Yau Tsim Mong, 15. Central & Western, 16. Eastern, 17. Southern, 18. Wan Chai

Want to learn more? Visit https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Districts_of_Hong_Kong.

Most people prefer to live near their workplace or child's school. How about you? Generally speaking, the closer a place is to a main business district, such as Central, Wan Chai, Causeway Bay or Tsim Sha Tsui, the more pricey it will be. **TIP:** Living somewhere a little further away is a good way to save money on accommodation.

Given that Hong Kong is just a small city and most areas are well-connected with efficient transportation systems, you may get to work in an hour or less if your home is not far from the Mass Transit Railway (MTR), buses, minibuses, or ferries.



Most populated areas are accessible by the MTR (Image source: The MTR's website)

TIP: When choosing a home location, you should also consider whether it suits your lifestyle or not. Do you need a car to get around? Are there any good restaurants, coffee shops, supermarkets or grocery stores nearby? Where would you like to hang out? How long does it take to visit your relatives or friends? Is it easy to get to parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, beaches, hiking trails, shopping malls, cinemas, etc.?

What other concerns do you have?

TIP: If you're not familiar with the districts, a good way to start is to ask your friends and colleagues in the city, and your estate agent as well, about suggestions for living locations. It may be helpful to spend time visiting different neighbourhoods and get a feel for them before actually viewing properties.

Most communities have a good-sized supermarket close by

Number of Rooms

How many people will be living in the place? How many bedrooms and bathrooms do you need? Will you consider an open-plan studio apartment (flat) if you are living on your own? Some people prefer an open kitchen to a closed one. How about you? Do you need an extra maid's room or storage room?

Property Area

You may come across the terms *saleable area* (SA) and *gross floor area* (GFA) when the size of a property is mentioned. Saleable area refers to a property's area that can be used, while gross floor area also includes a share of the common areas, bay windows and facilities. To foster a fairer property market, starting from January 2013, estate agents have been statutorily required to provide the saleable area of a second-hand residential property to their clients in all promotional materials.

According to the Rating and Valuation Department, "saleable area" is defined as:

> "The floor area exclusively allocated to a residential unit including balconies, verandahs, utility platforms and other similar features but excluding common areas such as stairs, lift shafts, pipe ducts, lobbies and communal toilets. It is measured to the exterior face of the external walls and walls onto common parts or the centre of party walls. Bay windows, flat roofs, top roofs, stairhoods, cocklofts, gardens, terraces, yards, air-conditioning plant rooms, air-conditioning platforms, planters/flower boxes and car parking spaces are excluded."

In Hong Kong, we usually use square feet as the unit for measuring property size. For your reference, one square metre equals 10.764 square feet – to be exact.

Let me give you an idea of the size of a *decent* property, in saleable area, here. For a studio or one-bedroom flat, it's about 200 to 400 ft². A place smaller than 200 ft² has no room to even swing a cat. A two-bedroom flat is between 400 and 600 ft² while a three-bedroom one ranges from 600 to 800 ft². You may, of course, find more spacious homes on the luxury market.

TIP: If you are taller than six feet or 1.8 metres and need a bed longer than that, you should tell your estate agent right from the start. You know, many bedrooms in Hong Kong are smaller than what you can imagine. Some of them can only fit a bed no bigger than 4 feet by 6 feet.

Types of Property

With an area of just 1,106 square kilometres, Hong Kong is home to over seven million people. Owing to the shortage of land supply for residential development, most people live in *apartments* or *flats* in high-rise buildings. It's not uncommon to find residential sky-scrapers that are higher than 40 to 50 storeys.

High-rise buildings on Hong Kong Island

Houses and *villas* are scarce and therefore very expensive, especially those in upmarket locations like the Peak and Southern district. **TIP:** Cheaper ones, however, can be found in suburban areas like Sai Kung and North district. Some of them come with a garden or a swimming pool, or both.

TIP: If you're on a tight budget but don't want to compromise on living space, you may consider a *village house apartment*, which is usually 700 ft². A typical village house has three individual apartments into three floors – the ground floor, first floor, and second floor. The second floor, which is the top floor, usually comes with a rooftop. Some village houses have internal staircases connecting all the floors.

Most village houses are situated in the suburbs

TIP: "*Tong Lau*"（唐樓）, an old-fashioned walk-up building, offers another type of budget accommodation. The places there are cheaper because they usually lack proper security and building management services. Poorer lighting and sanitary conditions in the communal areas may also be a concern for some people.

TIP: If your stay in Hong Kong is less than a year, you may consider getting a hotel-style *serviced apartment*. Although a serviced apartment is usually more expensive than a privately owned flat, its staying period is more flexible and the amount of deposit is smaller. Furthermore, you can save money by not having to buy furniture.

View

Having the right view can make or break your stay in Hong Kong. What kind of view are you after – sea, mountain, garden, city or simply open? It's not much fun looking out your window at an old brick wall, right? **TIP:** If you're not picky about the view, however, you might find a cheaper place.

Picking the right view matters, huh?

Floor Level

People like to live on a high or low floor due to different reasons. Usually, a higher floor unit offers a better view as you can see more and farther from higher ground. A lower floor unit has a more restricted view, but it might be just as enjoyable if it's facing a garden or a swimming pool. **TIP:** Whether living high or low, you are advised to also check for *natural light*, *noise level* and *air circulation* before making a decision.

Direction

Many people don't give enough thought about direction when choosing an apartment. I wonder how important it is to you. Do you know which direction we Chinese consider the best? South, southeast or southwest! **TIP:** A home facing south avoids getting direct sunlight in the early morning and the late afternoon. It's cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.

A house facing north doesn't have direct sunlight coming in at all. It can be bitterly cold, mind you, when the northeast monsoon blows hard in winter. If your bedroom is facing east, you can expect a wake-up call from the rising sun early in the morning. An unblocked place facing the west will give you plenty of sunshine in the afternoon. If you can stand the summer heat, you may enjoy the beautiful sunset as well.

"Absolutely stunning!" How else would you describe this sunset view? (Photo: Elizabeth Williams)

Outdoor Space

Would you like to have an open space for chilling out without leaving your home? A breeze of fresh air can give you a soothing touch, especially after a hard day at work. In Hong Kong, some apartments in modern buildings come with balconies, though they are usually not very big.

Terraces, rooftops and gardens, however, are not as common. Some bigger estates have communal garden floors or areas and outdoor children's playgrounds.

TIP: Of course, you will have more property options if you are not keen on getting an outdoor space.

Having a private garden in HK is a rare luxury

Furniture

Some people don't want to bother with buying new furniture, especially when they are newly relocated to Hong Kong and are not sure how long they will stay in the city. However, most apartments available on the market are either unfurnished or only partially furnished. And most of the time, even if a place is furnished, you may find the furniture too old or not to your taste. **TIP:** After all, buying new furniture is easy here – just make an order and have it delivered to your home. You can also find cheaper second-hand offers on the Internet.

Parking Space

Due to the scarcity of land, parking spaces are very limited here and therefore they are costly. In fact, it may even be difficult to get one. **TIP:** Unless you can find a place that comes with a parking slot or you're willing to pay a lot (several thousand HK dollars a month), you'd better go with the flow – use public transportation. In Hong Kong, you don't really need a car to get around if you live in a convenient location.

Amenities

Living in Hong Kong can be very stressful owing to its fast-paced and demanding work environment. What would you like to do in your leisure time? What kind of amenities or clubhouse facilities do you want to have access to?

Gyms, swimming pools, reading areas and sauna rooms are some common facilities you can find in contemporary buildings. Some sizable estates also have tennis courts, sports stadiums, function rooms, barbecue places, to name just a few.

Depending on the policy of each estate, you may either use the amenities for free or at a reasonable charge.

Every day could be a holiday if your clubhouse has a resort-style swimming pool

A Case in Point:

My client Jackie told me one of her main concerns was to get a place with a big indoor swimming pool in the clubhouse. She said she had joint problems so she needs to swim regularly, summer and winter. **TIP:** To find a place that suits your lifestyle, you should share your specific needs with your agent.

Children's Playgrounds

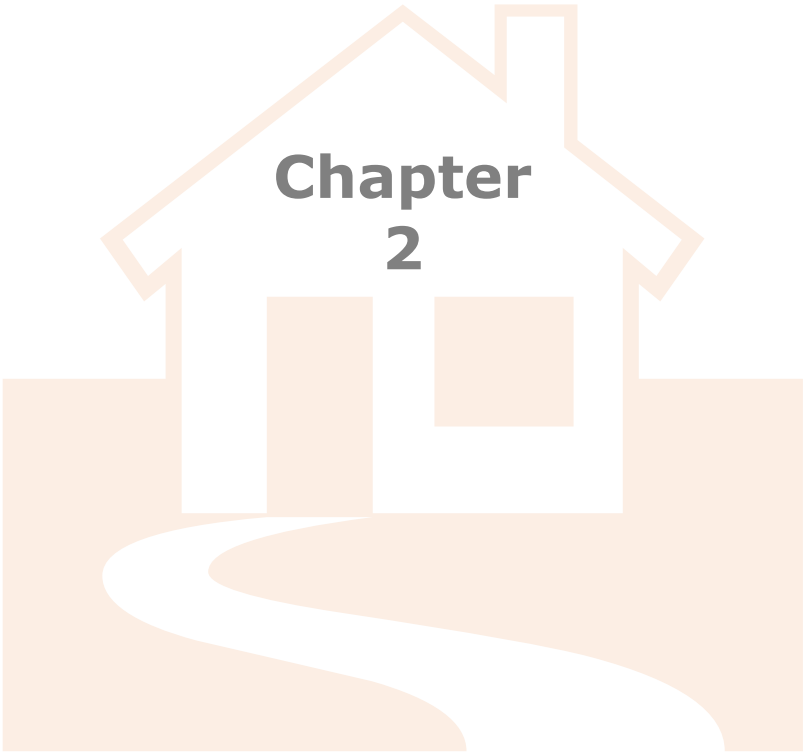
TIP: If you have kids, you probably want to find a place where they can play, exercise and socialise. Playgrounds are quite common in Hong Kong, but not every estate or building has play areas nearby for children. Some small estates only have indoor playgrounds, while the bigger estates usually have outdoor ones as well. By the way, some swimming pools also have play areas for small kids.

Outdoor play is important to children's development

Keeping Pets

Not every estate or building allows its residents to keep pets in the apartments. **TIP:** Be upfront with your agent if you have any pets. Even if the estate is pet-friendly, some landlords may say no to pets as they don't want them to smell up or make a mess of their places.

Some buildings are pet-friendly and some are not



Chapter 2

“You will find that everything in life exacts a price, and you will have to decide whether the price is worth the prize.”

—Sam Nunn

Be *Mindful* of Counting All the Expenses

Ongoing Expenses

The *rent* is the biggest chunk of your ongoing expenses in getting a home. **TIP:** As a rule of thumb, you're advised not to spend more than half of your monthly income on the rent. You should take into account your daily expenses – food, transportation, clothing, entertainment, and the like. What's more, it would add to your monthly expenditure if you need to hire a domestic helper. It makes sense to save up some money every month as a contingency fund and for future uses, right?

TIP: You may easily learn about home prices in different districts by conducting an online property search at www.squarefoot.com.hk/en or www.gohome.com.hk/en. One thing to bear in mind though: Since properties come and go very quickly in Hong Kong, the units might have already gone at the time you view them there. **TIP:** If you want to find out the recent transaction prices of the properties in a particular building, estate or on a certain street, www.centadata.com/ephome.aspx is the place to go.

The rent is usually inclusive of government rent, rates and management fees, but you need to bear the costs of using the utilities like *water*, *electricity* and *gas* (deposits are required for opening all these accounts). You will usually be asked to pay for the deposits and consumption when you receive the first bills.

These utility charges, especially water and gas, are very cheap compared with those of Western countries. You would, of course, receive a bigger electricity bill if you use the air conditioner more often in summer.

Additionally, if you need *broadband Internet* access and *Wi-Fi* services at home, you may sign up for a plan with a local Internet service provider. You may also apply for a fixed telephone line if you want to get one.

Do you need more than the basics?

One-off Expenses

- Security deposit: two months' rent (you will get it back at the end of tenancy)
- Stamp duty: usually about 3% of the monthly rent
- Agent commission: half a month's rent

  (The three fees mentioned above should be paid upon signing the formal *Tenancy Agreement*. You can find more details on page 17.)

- Buying furniture and other household items, or the removal of them
- Renovation, professional cleaning, and pest control before moving in (if needed)
- Changing the main door lock for better security (optional)
- Home insurance (optional)
- A car or any other things you may need

By now you should have a better idea of what your home in Hong Kong is like, how much you need to pay for that, and all the expenses involved.

It makes good sense to keep all your expenses in perspective

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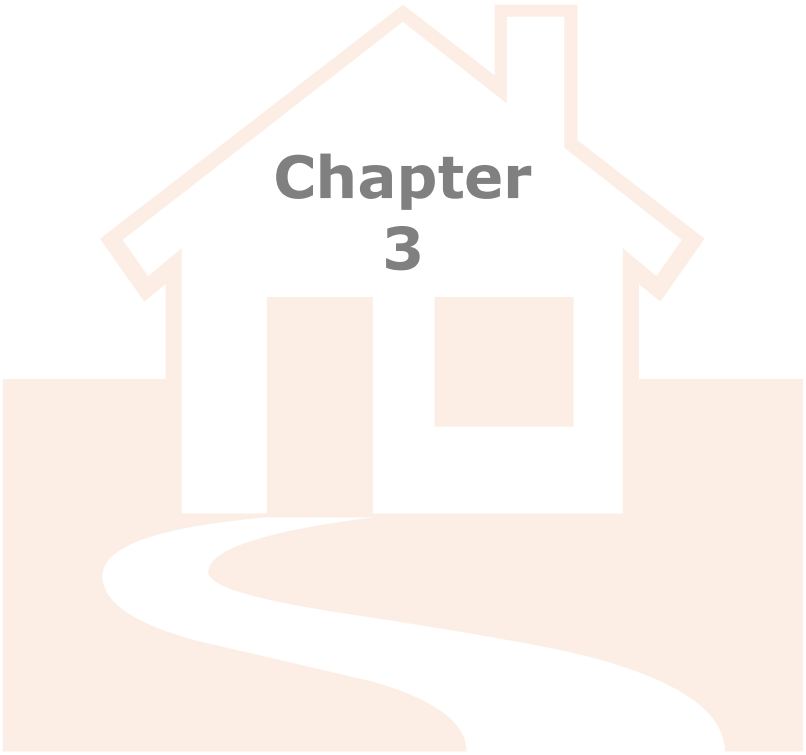
http://www.thebluediamondgallery.com/wooden-tile/e/expenses.html



Chapter 3

“As the water shapes itself to the vessel that contains it, so a wise man adapts himself to circumstances.”

—Confucius

Be *Adaptable* and Willing to Change If Necessary

TIP: Adaptability is the key to finding a suitable home in Hong Kong. Writing down all your requirements on paper is essential, but you should not set them in stone.

Visualising a place with a panoramic sea view, a huge garden, and new and stylish furniture is nice, but the reality is: unless you are very rich, you will probably only get your dream home in a dream.

Perfect apartments are rare on the market. If there were any, they would be gone quickly. **TIP:** If you can't find a home that ticks all the boxes, stick to the *must-haves* and compromise on the *nice-to-haves*. It's better to get a place which is eighty per cent okay than pursuing something that doesn't exist day after day.

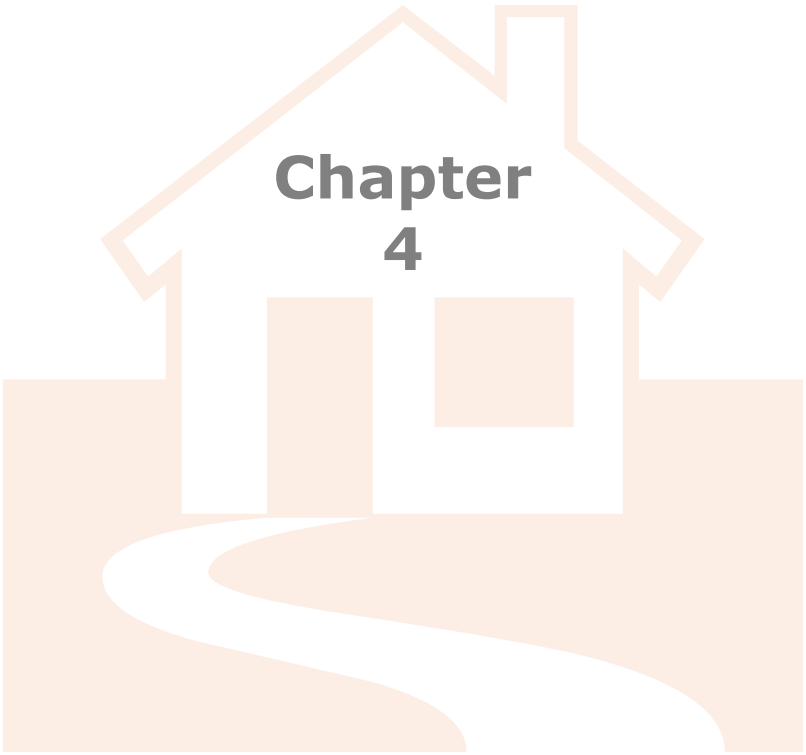
TIP: A good way to increase the likelihood of finding a right place is to widen the search area. Being open to suggestions from your friends and estate agent can expand your horizons. A perfect home may be just waiting for you somewhere you've never thought of. Why not give it a go?

TIP: Sometimes you may need to stretch your budget to get what you really want. So please bear in mind, again, be adaptable and flexible!

A Case in Point:

Cathy, a lady from the UK, was looking for a place for her son and herself in Sheung Wan. Initially, she set her mind on getting a furnished flat as she planned to leave in a year or so. To her disappointment, the furnished places that came along were not up to her expectation.

After some time of searching and viewing, she finally found a pleasant and good-conditioned unit which she liked. It also had a second bedroom big enough for her tall son. Although the flat was unfurnished, Cathy gladly took it as she considered it the best choice on the market at that time.



Chapter 4

“Success is where preparation and opportunity meet.”

—Bobby Unser

Be *Ready* When Viewing Properties

Many people have missed their dream homes simply because they were not well-prepared. To secure a property, you need to enter into a *Provisional Tenancy Agreement* with the landlord, and three things are required to do that:

1. Your *HKID* or *passport* for identity proof

2. Your *employment letter or contract* for work and income proof (your name card might also be helpful)

3. *Money* – usually one month's initial deposit (cheque or cash)

TIP: You are advised to bring along the documents and your chequebook whenever you go to view a property. If you don't have a chequebook, you should bring your ATM card so you can have access to cash. For safety reasons, I don't recommend that you carry a lot of cash around, unless you are good at Kung Fu. A word of caution: Transferring money to the landlord's bank account is not recommended before the paperwork is done.

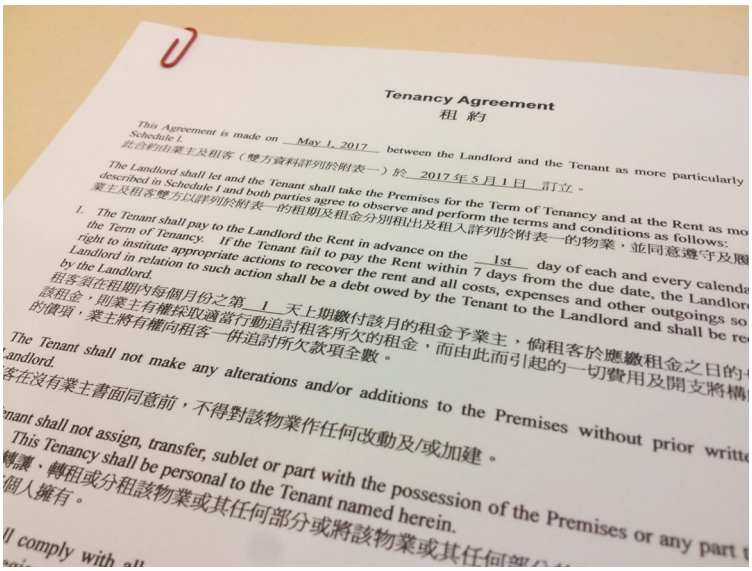
TIP: If you find your perfect home and are ready to go for it, you will then be able to acquire it before someone else. Remember this: A nice place at a reasonable price usually doesn't stay long on the market.

Before getting the keys, you have to sign a formal *Tenancy Agreement*. At that time, you'll need to pay:

1. The *balance of the two months' security deposit* (i.e. one more month) plus *one month's rent in advance* to the landlord.

2. A small *stamp duty*, which is usually about 3% of the monthly rent, to the Hong Kong Government.

3. An *agent commission* of half a month's rent.


Tenancy Agreement
租約

This Agreement is made on May 1, 2017 between the Landlord and the Tenant as more particularly Schedule 1.
此合約由業主及租客（雙方資料詳列於附表一）於 2017 年 5 月 1 日訂立。

The Landlord shall let and the Tenant shall take the Premises for the Term of Tenancy and at the Rent as mo described in Schedule 1 and both parties agree to observe and perform the terms and conditions as follows:
業主及租客雙方以詳列於附表一的租期及租金分別租出及租入詳列於附表一的物業，並同意遵守及履

1. The Tenant shall pay to the Landlord the Rent in advance on the 1st day of each and every calenda the Term of Tenancy. If the Tenant fail to pay the Rent within 7 days from the due date, the Landlor right to institute appropriate actions to recover the rent and all costs, expenses and other outgoings so Landlord in relation to such action shall be a debt owed by the Tenant to the Landlord and shall be re by the Landlord.
租客須在租期內每個月份之第 1 天上期繳付該月的租金予業主，倘租客於應繳租金之日的 該租金，則業主有權採取適當行動追討租客所欠的租金，而由此而引起的一切費用及開支將構 的債項，業主將有權向租客一併追討所欠款項全數。

The Tenant shall not make any alterations and/or additions to the Premises without prior writte Landlord.
客在沒有業主書面同意前，不得對該物業作任何改動及/或加建。

nant shall not assign, transfer, sublet or part with the possession of the Premises or any part t This Tenancy shall be personal to the Tenant named herein.
轉讓、轉租或分租該物業或其任何部分或將該物業或其任何

l comply with all

You should read the tenancy agreement very carefully before signing

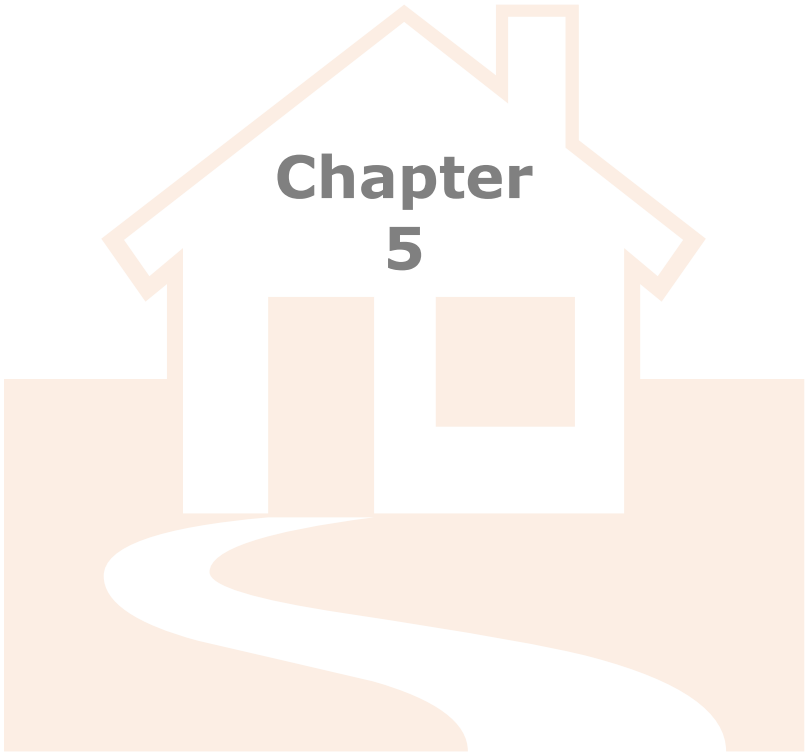
In addition to the important things mentioned above, you should also pay attention to a few matters when you visit and inspect properties:

- **TIP:** Wear *comfortable clothes* and *shoes*. Slippers and high heels should be avoided as you may have to walk around for up to a few hours. If you visit a place where the landlord or the existing tenant is still living there, you might be asked to take off your shoes at the main door first.

- **TIP:** Don't begin a viewing tour with an empty stomach. You need a great deal of energy to walk around, think, and compare property options. **TIP:** It's always good to bring some *water* and a *hat* along, especially on a hot sunny day.

- What else should you bring? **TIP:** An *umbrella* helps on a rainy or scorching summer day. A small *compass* is good for telling direction while a *measuring tape* is useful for determining room and bed sizes. You'll also need a *notebook* for jotting down property information and a *camera* or *smartphone* for taking pictures (or videos).

Getting a home in Hong Kong could be quick and easy if you are ready. Don't view apartments empty-handed so you won't go home heavy-hearted. It's possible to find a place, do the paperwork, and even get the keys – all in the same day!



Chapter 5

“Strategy requires thought, tactics require observation.”

—Max Euwe

Be *Tactical* in Negotiating with the Landlord

An old Chinese saying goes, "To know one's own strength and the enemy's is the sure way to victory." You might regard the landlord as your "enemy" in the negotiation process. Why? It's all about *money*!

The landlord will try to get as much rent from you as possible and you'll try to pay as little as you can. To win the game and get what you want, you should ask several questions:

1. What is the current market value of the property?

Usually, the landlords in Hong Kong will intentionally put up an *asking price* higher than the property's market value. **TIP:** Knowing the recent transaction prices of similar properties will help you make a wise and strategic offer.

TIP: I always suggest my clients make an offer a little bit lower than the market price. If the landlord is desperate enough or considers you a perfect tenant, he or she might accept a lower rent. If not, you still have some room to negotiate for a reasonable price.

TIP: The room for negotiation is usually around 3 to 5 per cent, though some landlords adopt a fixed price policy.

TIP: Having a second option (and even better with a third one) can help ease your mind and get an edge over the landlord in the negotiation process. If Plan A doesn't work out well, you may still put Plan B or C into action.

2. How long has the property been on the market?

TIP: If it's already been vacant for a long time, let's say over a month, the landlord is more willing to negotiate and accept a lower offer. If a property has been on the market for just a few days, then there may not be much room for negotiation.

3. How soon can I start the lease?

TIP: The sooner you can start the lease, the bigger your bargaining power will be. Right timing is critical in getting a place. The best time to view properties is *one to three weeks* before you want to move in. Unless you are looking for something very special or rare, you should not commence your home search more than 4 weeks before you need a place. Most landlords will not wait that long for a tenant to start paying the rent, especially from May to August when the demand for housing is very strong.

TIP: If you can start the lease soon enough, say in one or two weeks, you may also ask for a *rent-free period*. Let's assume today is August 15. If you find a place you like in the next few days and want to start the lease on September 1, you may ask the landlord to give you the keys earlier, say on August 25, if the place is ready by then. If the landlord is willing, you will get 7 days rent-free. Isn't that cool?

4. Besides making an offer, what kind of requests can or should I make?

Properties are like people; they are seldom perfect. Most flaws and defects in a place, however, can be fixed in one way or the other. If you are paying the landlord a reasonable rent, it makes sense for you to expect a place in reasonably good condition.

TIP: You may ask the landlord to do certain things for you when you make an offer. The landlord probably won't give you a hot tub, but he or she might:

- Repair or replace things or appliances that are broken or in poor shape.
- Paint the walls if they are dirty.
- Polish the floor if it's scratchy.
- Remove or provide you with some furniture.
- Install curtain rails and curtains (or blinds).
- Clean the place and appliances, etc.

TIP: You are advised to ask for the air conditioners to be serviced as their inner coils may get very dirty over time

If you ask, you may receive. If you don't ask, you probably won't get what you want. **TIP:** So do make your requests known to the landlord – better in writing and be specific.

5. How can I get a good bargain?

Stand in the landlord's shoes and try out one or more of these commonly used tactics:

- **TIP:** Offer the landlord a whole year's or half a year's rent up front (you may actually be asked to do so if you can't, or don't want to, disclose your employment contract or financial status). The landlord may give you a small discount for a large sum of advanced payment. As a trade-off, however, you have to bear the risk of losing your money in a worst-case scenario, e.g. repossession of the property by the bank or mortgagee; the place is made uninhabitable due to fire, flood, or typhoon; or any other unfavourable circumstance.

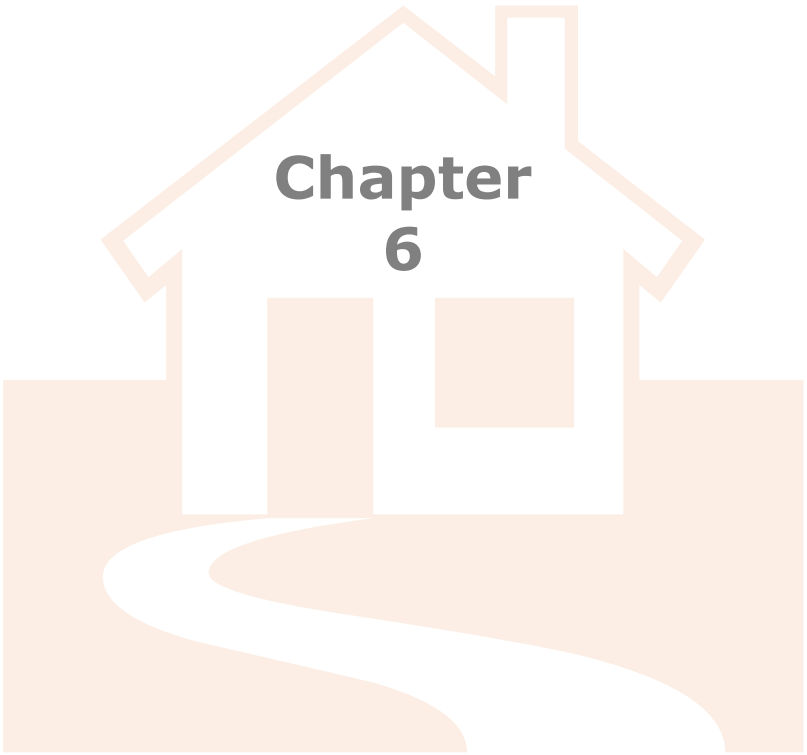
- **TIP:** Start the lease at a time fitting the landlord's schedule or as soon as possible (as discussed earlier) if the place is ready to be taken over.

- **TIP:** Try not to be too fussy and make too many requests. Some landlords are very busy so they would rather accept a lower rent or give you a longer rent-free period than have to handle a great deal of repair and renovation work.

- **TIP:** It may help if you have a reference letter from your previous landlord or a certificate from a trusted organisation verifying that you were punctual on rent payment, free of neighbours' complaints, and blameless when handing over the property.

Now, let's put all the home hunting tips mentioned so far in a nutshell – be SMART:

- Specific
- Mindful
- Adaptable
- Ready
- Tactical



Chapter 6

“I’m courageous enough to know I can accomplish great things. I’m humble enough to know when to ask for help.”

—Katrina Mayer

How to Select and Work with a Local Estate Agent

When it comes to hunting for your perfect home, a reliable estate agent is your best buddy. *A Guide to Tenancy*, published by the Estate Agents Authority (EAA), states:

> "Licensed estate agents have professional knowledge in property transactions and are regulated by the EAA. Members of the public may consider appointing them for better protection. If one chooses not to appoint a licensed estate agent but to seek or list a property by oneself or via an online platform, he/she should be extra careful and seek professional advice when necessary."

It's not difficult to find an estate agent in Hong Kong as there are more than 40,000 licensed ones (some are no longer active), but how can you partner with an agent who can help you most? Let's consider the following points:

1. **TIP:** First of all, you should find an agent who can *communicate* with you effectively and efficiently. Although all licensed agents are required to complete a certain level of education, not all of them have a reasonably good command of English, not to mention other foreign languages. You may try to write or talk to a few selected agents and see if you are comfortable working with them.

   TIP: It will also be helpful if your agent can speak fluent Cantonese as most landlords here are local people. Appointing an agent who is competent in both languages will be your first smart move.

   By the way, you can ascertain whether the person concerned is licensed and whether any action has been taken by the EAA against the person in the past two years at www.eaa.org.hk/en-us/licence-search.

2. **TIP:** You may choose to work with an agent or agents who specialise in the district(s) where you are looking for a home. These agents (if they are experienced) know the district, landlords and their properties well. Please be reminded that these "district-based" agents usually represent and act for both the landlord and the tenant. Consequently, there might be a conflict of interest.

3. Appointing an agent who has an extensive network in different districts is also a good choice. **TIP:** Representing and acting only for you in most cases, a "one-stop" agent will be more likely to look out for your best interests in the whole process. Having the freedom to team up with many other district-based agents, he or she may give you more property options as well.

4. **TIP:** Tell your agent your *budget range* (mentioning your absolute maximum helps) and what exactly you are looking for. Do you want a place in a quiet area or close to the MTR or buses? Would you prefer a modern western kitchen to an old-fashioned Chinese one? Do you like a bathtub more than a shower stall? What are the first few things on your priority list?

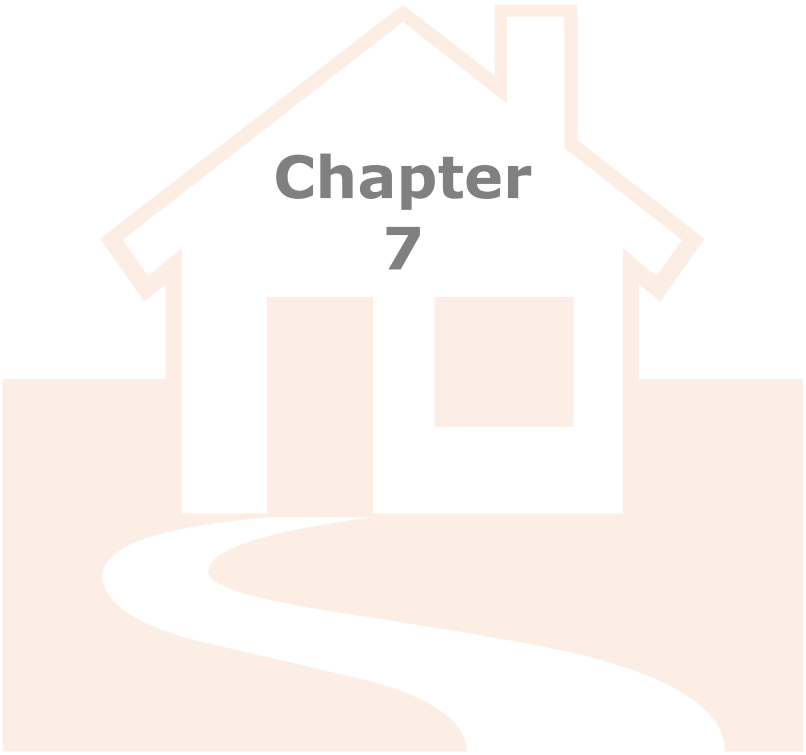
5. **TIP:** It would be sensible to ask your agent to send you some *property information* and *pictures* (if available) before visiting the sites. You may then filter out those properties you are not interested in. This would help your agent understand more about your preferences and save you time on looking at unsuitable places.

6. **TIP:** Be *on time* when you meet your agent for viewing properties. If you're running late or need to reschedule a viewing tour (please try NOT to do that though), tell him or her so as early as possible. Since appointments might have been made with some landlords or existing tenants, your agent could then inform them of any changes if necessary.

   TIP: By the way, it may be to your advantage if you can arrange to view properties on a weekday rather than the weekend or a public holiday to avoid competition from other home seekers. Your agent might be less busy then as well.

7. **TIP:** Last but not least, remember to be *polite* and *friendly* to your agent and your agent will probably treat you the same and work harder for you. Your relationship with an agent doesn't end when a deal is clinched. Your agent may help you take up the utilities, act as a mediator between you and the landlord, and give you professional advice if problems arise. A little kindness goes a long way!

My final words: Go SMART, get a home you love, explore the city, make some good friends, and have lots of fun! ☺☺☺



Chapter 7

“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

—Stephen Covey

Bonus: Being a Good Tenant

As soon as you've reached an agreement with the landlord, you should try your best to develop a win-win and long-term relationship with him or her. Life would be much easier if your landlord were cooperative when troubles come.

TIP: So do follow the "Golden Rule of Tenancy": Treat your landlord the way you want to be treated. Here are a few pieces of friendly advice:

1. **TIP:** Always pay the rent and your utility bills on time. If you fail to do the former, you could be sued and kicked out; ignoring the latter for a prolonged period could risk cutting off power and water supplies. You don't want to come home and experience complete darkness or only be able to take a dry shower, do you? Maintaining a sound credit profile, whether it's documented or not, is of the utmost importance.

   TIP: If for some reason you are not able to settle the rent due, you should inform your landlord (better in advance) and suggest a plan, perhaps including an interest offer as a form of compensation, to recover it. A kind landlord might accept a delayed payment, but this drastic measure should only be taken as a last resort. Please understand that your landlord may need the money to pay his or her own rent, mortgage repayment, and bills. By the way, the security deposit should not be used to offset the rent.

   TIP: A good way to avoid unintentional delay of monthly rent payment is to set up a standing instruction at your bank (it's free if you do it online). It would also give your landlord greater peace of mind. **TIP:** Similarly, you may apply for autopay of bills to save time and trouble – and maybe late charges as well!

2. **TIP:** Keep the place clean and all furnishings and appliances provided in good condition as if they were your own. Your landlord has the right to deduct money from your security deposit for the sake of reinstatement. In such a case, you may only get the leftover deposit back after the repair work is finished.

3. Within a short time after moving in, have a good check of everything – doors, windows, floor, walls, drains, pipes, cables, appliances, and so on. **TIP:** Make a list of all the things you would like your landlord to attend to instead of bothering him or her time after time. Keep a proper record of, and inform your landlord about, pre-existing defects if necessary.

4. **TIP:** Be nice and communicative with your landlord. When you want your landlord to do something for you, whether it's fixing a broken air conditioner or issuing a rental receipt, please ask for help in a polite manner and allow enough time for things to get done.

5. **TIP:** Try not to inconvenience your landlord too much with trivial matters like replacing a burnt out light bulb or doing simple repair work. It helps to be handy about your own place!

If your landlord finds you likeable, you are more likely to get a good deal when you want to renew or extend your tenancy. Most landlords would love to keep a good tenant and avoid a constant nuisance. It's as simple as that.

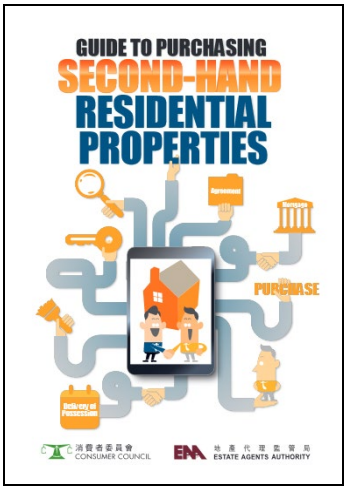
A Case in Point:

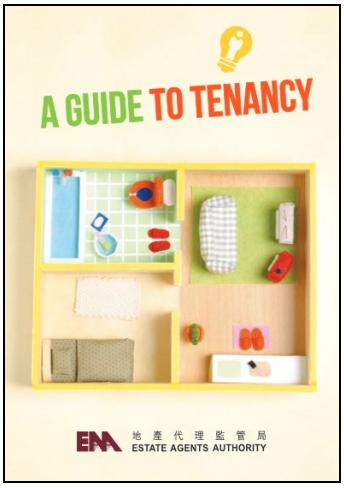
Steve, a native English teacher, has been renting a place in Kowloon for over three years. When his landlady Anna visited him and inspected her property one day, she saw a clean, tidy and well-kept apartment.

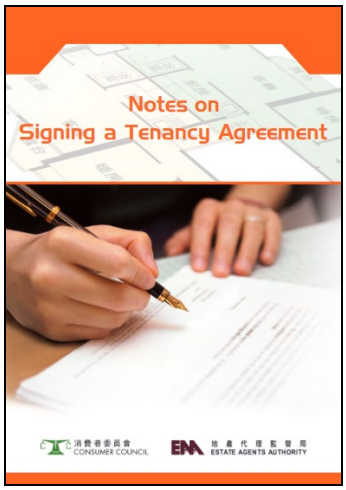
However, she noticed the sofa she provided for him was completely worn out and one of the air conditioners was making too much noise. Without even waiting for my client to ask, she promptly offered to buy him a new sofa and a new air conditioner. She also helped him fix a couple of broken things in the apartment.

Anna told me that since Steve had always been punctual in paying the rent and never caused her any trouble, she was more than happy to make him feel more comfortable. Steve loves the place and Anna would like to keep a good tenant like him.

Related Resources







These booklets, published by the Estate Agents Authority, can be downloaded at www.HomeinHK.com/more-ebooks

About the Author

Daniel W. Lam, born and raised in Hong Kong, founded **Home in Hong Kong** in 2015 with the aim of helping people make informed decisions in the process of buying or renting a property in the city. Prior to that, he worked with Centaline Property Agency Limited and Century 21 Surveyors Limited.

The company name was changed to **Home in Hong Kong Limited** in 2019.

Embracing an integrity-first work ethic and being proficient in both Chinese and English, Daniel and his associates have served clients from many parts of the world. Some testimonials can be found at www.HomeinHK.com/our-agents.

Daniel enjoys reading, writing, swimming, playing table tennis, watching inspirational films, and laughing out loud. He and his wife June have found their perfect home in Park Island, Ma Wan.

Your feedback can make a difference!

Do you find the information and tips in this book useful? Got any good advice or experiences to share? Have suggestions for improvement? Daniel would love to hear and learn from you. Please write to him at daniel@HomeinHK.com.

As a token of his appreciation, Daniel would like to offer you a nice reward if your input or suggestion is adopted. Thank you for your support in making this book better and more useful to other readers and home seekers.