Although it is commonly said that Hong Kong was transformed from a small fishing village into an international financial city within a time span of about 150 years, Hong Kong had, as a matter of fact, quite a number of fishing villages before 1842 when it was officially ceded to Britain. Whether it had one or more than one fishing village, this aspect of its ancient past is hardly preserved today. If there is one place in today’s Hong Kong that may claim to have combined that long tradition of fishing with its present modernity, then it must be Aberdeen. Interestingly enough, the name “Hong Kong” was originally used in the early 19th century by British merchants and soldiers whose ships called at the southern part of Hong Kong Island to refer to the fishing village later renamed Aberdeen after Lord Aberdeen, then Foreign Secretary of Britain.

Aberdeen at a glance

On the southwest coast of Hong Kong Island, Aberdeen has long been a home port for a permanent boat population and an ideal port of call for visiting craft because of the existence of Ap Lei Chau to its south as a natural shelter against wild waves. With records of human habitation dating back to the 13th century, Aberdeen has been one of the major fishing ports in Hong Kong for hundreds of years, and is also one of the oldest villages in Hong Kong.

When the Second World War ended in 1945, Aberdeen remained a typical traditional fishing port with a majority of its population living on fishing boats. Later on when housing estates began to emerge since the 1960s, its population grew rapidly as people were drawn to the district from urban areas, and many fishermen also began to settle on land and take up jobs at factories built in Aberdeen and Wong Chuk Hang by savvy businessmen to exploit cheaper land costs there.

Given the long history of fishing at Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau, small wonder many temples were built by fishermen over the centuries so that they could pray to sea gods or goddesses for safe return and bountiful catches. Although there are not a
few famous temples such as the Tin Hau Temple, Tam Kung Temple and Tai Wong Ye Temple, when it comes to the oldest one, the Hung Shing Temple must be mentioned. It was built on a piece of land with good feng shui at Ap Lei Chau in 1773, by fishermen from Shunde, in Guangdong province, who believed that the marine god Hung Shing must have protected them, otherwise they could not have braved the rough seas to have fished at this part of Hong Kong, a place so remote from their home port.

Tourism development

With an aura of a typical fishing port at which countless fishing boats berth, lovely scenery and appetising seafood, Aberdeen has, quite naturally, been a magnet for local residents and foreign tourists for many years. Following in the successful footsteps of the first genuine floating restaurant, which opened its doors in 1948, a dozen or so floating restaurants sprouted up in Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter in their prime days in the 1950s. Although most of them failed to survive the ups and downs ever since, the one that does survive, the Jumbo Floating Restaurant, has always been a famous Aberdeen landmark fairly attractive to tourists.

Since most of past development of Hong Kong has been concentrated along the coasts of Victoria Harbour, Aberdeen, on Hong Kong Island’s southern shore, can still see the coexistence of local customs and western religions, ancient monuments and high-rise buildings, traditional fishing activities and modern industries, all in one place. In fact, many traditional festivals and religious ceremonies have been held by local people at Aberdeen for centuries. In a word, this is the place where a good combination of new and old, east and west can be found, even today.

A long fishing history and unique characteristics, as described above, are what has drawn overseas tourists and local residents to Aberdeen in the past. Its past glamour, however, began to dim and tourist numbers to decline steadily from the 1990s onwards. In 1991, 35% of tourists paid a visit to Aberdeen to taste seafood, sightsee or whatever, during their stay in Hong Kong; in 2000, only 16% of them did so; and in 2006, it was not even in the top 10 rankings of the most visited places in Hong Kong. Whereas a drop in tourists may be pitiful, it is hardly surprising, for attractions there are few (the floating restaurants and sampan harbour tours may be the only two popular ones with tourists), information about
Fisherman’s wharf

The idea of building a fisherman’s wharf at Aberdeen was first floated by the Government in 1998 in an attempt to revitalise the place and make it appealing to tourists again. In 2001, a preliminary study report to achieve that purpose was released by the Planning Department, with consultation being conducted immediately afterwards. The consultation exercise was later put on hold when the Government decided that reinvigoration of the area would be postponed until Ocean Park completed its long-term redevelopment review. By the time the theme park’s redevelopment plan was released in 2005, the Aberdeen project had already been taken up by the Tourism Commission. An initial concept plan developed by the Commission was announced for public consultation in the same year, and a consultancy was commissioned to study the now officially named Aberdeen Tourism Project. Completed in 2007, the concept plan was announced in May 2007.
Under the concept plan, Aberdeen will be given an identity in the brand of "Hong Kong’s traditional harbour" in order to have its heritage, culture and identity captured at once. A total of seven zones will be developed, each of which will showcase its own character and functions (see Figure 1).

A zone: Fishing/Fish Market Zone (the history of Aberdeen as a fishing port; lives and activities of fishermen; buying/selling and loading/unloading of fish at Aberdeen Wholesale Fish Market)

B zone: Aberdeen Fisherman’s Wharf — Dining and Entertainment Hub (an alfresco dining street; a festival plaza; fishing boat exhibitions; dragon boat viewing areas; a sampan pick-up/drop-off point)

C zone: Marina/Shipyard/Typhoon Shelter Zone (viewing areas; a mega-yacht mooring and servicing/sale centre)

D zone: Maritime Zone (proposed Ocean Park extension; a boarding point of boat trips/water transport)

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整個計劃用以測試市場反應的主要項目。B區包含好幾個主要的組成部份，例如以美食為主題的建築群，並將取名為「香港仔漁人碼頭」，以凸顯這個區域的特色；可以舉行聲光表演的節慶廣場；龍舟比賽觀賞處；足以成為地標的獨特雕塑；旅遊車停放處；旅客資訊中心等。

**舢舨遊與廟宇行**

由於有不少景點在香港仔和鴨脷洲兩岸，傳統的舢舨大可用來接載遊客往返區內各處，這樣既可使水上交通更為便利，也會令遊客有難忘的體驗。遊客只要上了舢舨，就可以由西面的石排灣起，經過深灣與布廠灣，直到南面的大樹灣，欣賞沿途的風光；也可以在香港仔和鴨脷洲兩岸的不同地點上下船，吃喝購物，訪古探勝。

香港仔一帶有很多值得一遊的史跡與宗教勝地，比如說廟宇(像上文提過的洪聖廟)、天主教與基督教教堂(像香港仔的聖伯多祿堂)、殖民地時期的建築(像舊香港仔警署)、當地的歷史陳跡(像黃竹坑的史前石刻)等等。正經設計一些史跡與廟宇的步行路線，使遊客得以遊歷各處名勝。遊客手握深入的背景資料，就可以遊覽香港仔的史跡文化，邊細心觀賞了。

上述的概念設計夠不夠吸引？由香港仔居民和市民大眾的反應看來，似乎大家都認為相當不錯。一般都相信日後當七個區域全部建成後，不僅外地的遊客會慕名前來觀光，甚至連香港人也會多了一個假日消閒的好去處。

**Zone E:** Exhibition and Dining Zone (dragon boat heritage exhibitions; a Chinese-style seafood dining street)

**Zone F:** Leisure Zone (leisure and cultural space at Ap Lei Chau Waterfront Park; a flea market; a souvenir street)

**Zone G:** Lifestyle Zone (a hub of retail outlets selling a wide varieties of fashionable products)

Although there are as many as seven zones in the concept plan, it is Zone B that is proposed as a principal activity node, and Aberdeen Fisherman's Wharf (see Figure 2) will form the major phase of the whole project to test the market. Major components within the zone consist of a food and beverage development, named "Aberdeen Fisherman's Wharf" to give it a distinct identity; a festival plaza, including a possible venue for sound and light shows; dragon boat viewing areas; a distinctive sculpture to create a landmark; parking areas for tour coaches; and an information and resource centre.

**Sampan tours and temple walks**

Given a rather large number of attractions lying along the coasts of Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau, traditional sampans may be used to both enhance marine connectivity within the area and boost tourists’ experience. Tourists may board a sampan on a sightseeing trip from Shek Pai Wan in the west, all the way through Sham Wan and Po Chong Wan, to Tai Shue Wan in the south; or choose to get off and on at different landing points along the coasts to dine, shop or visit various attractions.

Specific heritage and temple walks may be devised in order for tourists to explore the many heritage and religious attractions in the area, which include Chinese temples (e.g. the Hung Shing Temple, as mentioned above), Catholic and Christian churches (e.g. St Peter’s Church at Aberdeen), colonial architecture (e.g. former Aberdeen Police Station) and local historic features (e.g. prehistoric rock carvings at Wong Chuk Hang). With sufficient background information, tourists may be able to discover and appreciate the heritage and culture of Aberdeen.

Is the above concept plan attractive? Responses from Aberdeen residents and the general public seem to be rather positive. It is generally believed that when the seven zones are all completed in the future, not only will foreign visitors be attracted to Aberdeen by its brand, Hong Kong people will also be delighted to have one more charming place for their holidays.