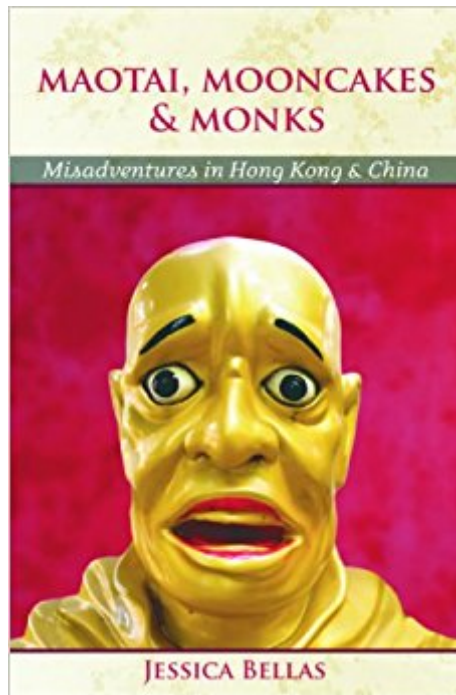




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# Maotai, Mooncakes & Monks: Misadventures In Hong Kong & China



## Synopsis

Jessica Bellas records the most humorous moments of her first thirty months living as an expatriate in Hong Kong, from the media circus resulting from the dramatic rescue of her dog by the Hong Kong Fire Services Department to out-drinking Communist party officials in China to dodging confetti cannons. She also examines more poignant issues such as discrimination, racism and culture shock. *Maotai, Mooncakes & Monks* is a memoir, culture shock guide, travelogue, political commentary and adventure rolled into one. Foreword by Nury Vittachi - founding editor of the Asia Literary Review (see below) Foreword A Broad Abroad by Nury Vittachi Ditch the expert guides. Sometimes the most telling pieces of word-painting are those done by new arrivals. While there are numerous specialist books telling us everything we might want to know about Hong Kong (and plenty of facts we don't really need to know), this is a worthy example of the opposite. It records the thoughts of a cheerfully open-minded visitor who arrives knowing almost nothing about the place and learns to adjust to life in Hong Kong on the job. The result is a fresh, candid view of a community that turns out to be a more refreshing read than the views of the usual over-learned insiders. Jessica Bellas, who admits to being a loud, wide-eyed American with the personality of a junkyard dog, arrived in the glittering city on the southern coast of mainland China in 2006. Like most visitors, she was entranced by the energy of the buzzing, dynamic, lively society - and baffled by many of its conventions. She also spent time in Hong Kong-related factories across the border in Mainland China, and gradually came to understand the complex relationship between these David and Goliath cousins. From menus that offer fatty intestines to T-shirts emblazoned with Baby Drink Beer, nothing misses her pen. And her adoptive community soon learned about her, too, as the Chinese tabloid press discovered her and her neighbors for some gleeful write-ups about the wackiness of foreigners. But she is saved from the sins of political incorrectness and triviality by her unmistakable affection for her community, the sincerity of her efforts to understand her neighbors and her willingness to get into trouble to learn about her new friends. Soon after her arrival, Jessica started writing a series of emails to tell her friends and family on the other side of the world what life here was like. The list of people who became hooked on her dispatches grew to several hundred and it became obvious that the writings should be preserved in a book. But while Jessica makes no claim to be any sort of expert on Chinese culture, her access to information was bolstered by one remarkable skill she had that won her enormous respect from officials, factory bosses and academics alike: she could out-drink most of the men at social occasions, even when the drink being served was the infamously powerful Maotai rice liquor. So I hope you'll enjoy the insights to our community that this welcome visitor offers. What better way to invite you to begin than with the

word Gambei - cheers! Nury Vittachi Hong Kong, 2009

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

CitySeen: Experience with the local press helped US writer find her voice Annemarie Evans

Updated on Apr 21, 2009 American academic Jessica Bellas had been in Hong Kong just 29 days when her mongrel dog ('She's a mutt called Jade') slipped down a retaining wall on a rainy day in Mid-Levels. She was too far down for an increasingly panicked Bellas to retrieve her. So she rang the police. Who brought the firebrigade. Within minutes three Chinese-language papers and their reporters had turned up. 'I couldn't believe it. This would never happen where I come from in Pittsburgh, or anywhere in America. This much media attention for a dog?' said a surprised Bellas. She uttered her thoughts to a policeman, and it went out on his radio pinned to his chest. So within minutes Cable Television were also there to witness and film the big rescue. 'It became quite a media circus.' Bellas, whose work over the past three years has taken her all over China, began writing weekly e-mails to friends and relatives on her experiences of life in Hong Kong and on the mainland. Her misadventures gradually became a collection of 57 vignettes that show her own growing understanding of where she is living, and her love of the city. 'I'd like to think that I'm a good observer with a sense of humour,' says Bellas, and that the value of the book is that the observations have stayed fresh from when she wrote them from her first week onwards. 'I was learning on the job, and it's culturally sensitive.' Mao Tai, Mooncakes and Monks: Misadventures in Hong Kong and China, will be published on May 4. Bellas, 38, the former chairwoman of Hong Kong's Democrats Abroad group, received advice from local writer Nury Vittachi, who also wrote the foreword. 'I wrote a little bit every day and there was a weekly deadline for each story that I

e-mailed, so the bulk of my material was written over a long period,' she said. While Bellas has some ideas for a second book, she's taking a break first and some healthy walks with a mutt called Jade. But just on the flat. Additional reporting by Clara Mak. --South China Morning Post

Expat's e-mail diary of her misadventures turned into book CITYSEEN Andrew Sun South China Morning Post Jun 17, 2009 Although we are essentially hacks here at CitySeen, it's nice to know we have helped inspire others in higher literary pursuits. Three years ago, recently landed American Jessica Bellas wrote in to enter a little competition on these pages. More than just winning tickets to see a Madonna movie, the experience led her to start an e-mail diary of her new life in Hong Kong, sent to friends and family back in Pittsburgh. Her witty, honest and affectionate vignettes of local culture shock have now been turned into a book called Maotai, Mooncakes & Monks: Misadventures in Hong Kong & China. 'It's a compilation of about 30 months of edited e-mails,' Bellas explained. 'When I started this process I had no intention of a book. I just always enjoyed writing and doing it forced me to be a more active observer.' Unlike the typical colonial windbags who chronicle their Hong Kong lifestyles solely from The Peak and SoHo pubs, Bellas' anecdotes see her diving into local life from learning to ride minibuses to drinking with mainland comrades in pursuit of a master's degree in international affairs. 'It's broadened my world view. America is very American-centric. Plus, I've always been an A-type personality doing 100 things at once, so integrating here was easy. Actually, I have reverse culture shock when I go back home.' Bellas will be talking about and signing her book at Prince's Building's Bookazine store tonight at 6.30pm. --South China Morning Post

--South China Morning Post

Jessica Bellas interview We speak with the author of Maotai, Mooncakes & Monks: Misadventures in Hong Kong & China, a collection of humorous observations about her first 30 months living in Hong Kong. What is Maotai, Mooncakes & Monks about? It is a collection of 57 vignettes about living and working as an expatriate in Hong Kong and China; detailing culture clashes with my colleagues and neighbors, dodging confetti cannons in China, out-drinking Communist Party officials, surviving The Great Wall Half Marathon, and meeting various celebrities. The book is a memoir, culture shock guide, travelogue, political commentary, and adventure rolled into one. Describe your writing process. I began writing weekly e-mails to my friends and family back in United States about my experiences abroad. For my first 100 weeks in Hong Kong, I emailed the story every Friday by noon. This self-imposed deadline was never compromised. I continued sending stories to my email listserve after the first 100 weeks, but these were on an as inspired basis. After I had been living in Hong Kong for approximately one year, I enrolled in Nury Vittachi's Professional Writers Masterclass. I was very encouraged by Vittachi's initial feedback that I had 'a good eye for pointing out the absurdity in situations.' Vittachi agreed to

serve as a mentor during the book's development and ultimately wrote the foreword for the book. Why did you write it? I have always loved to write. I discovered that the written word could stir quite a controversy while working as the editor on my high school newspaper. Although I seriously considered becoming a professional writer, I quickly observed that most writers do not earn enough to finance world travel or any of my other expensive hobbies. I ultimately pursued an engineering career. Over the years, I must admit that I have thought about ways to move towards jobs with less engineering and more writing. I have even been encouraged to pursue writing as a career by various work colleagues who have observed my flair for drama and my propensity to record it all. Like many wannabe writers, I never made the time to actually sit down and do it. I vowed to myself that I would make writing one of my top priorities when I moved to Hong Kong in early 2006. What do you hope readers take away from the book? I hope that people can laugh and learn at the same time when reading my book. It would be great if Hongkongers gained a fresh perspective on their city from reading the experiences of a foreigner. For expats who are already living in Hong Kong, I hope that it would be an entertaining read and might possibly help them adjust to their new surroundings. For readers living in another region, I hope that the book could provide a better understanding of Chinese culture or perhaps even inspire someone to move abroad. Most importantly, I hope that it inspires others to write their own book. It seems that just about everyone talks about their desire to write a book but few people actually do it. I am living proof that it can be done by just clearing a couple of hours on your calendar every week to focus on writing. What's the next project? I am getting ready to launch a focused and intense campaign to be invited to appear on the Oprah Winfrey show. I know that Oprah will love my book! Simon Ostheimer Maotai, Mooncakes & Monks is published by Tamco Publishing --TimeOut Hong Kong

Jessica Bellas has been a status-quo challenging rabble-rouser since her first kicks in the womb. She discovered that the written word could stir quite a controversy while working as the editor on her high school newspaper. Although she seriously considered becoming a professional writer, she ultimately decided to pursue a more financially lucrative profession. Through the years, Jessica became fed up with the neo-conservative environment pervasive in the United States so she decided to flee her homeland for a society that was more progressive, balanced and mellow. After months of careful deliberation and research, she boarded a plane for Hong Kong in early 2006. She immediately started an email list-serve to share her experiences and observations of Hong Kong with her friends back in the United States. Her love of writing was rekindled. After receiving encouragement from her friends to compile her email dispatches into a book, she finally stopped

dreaming about writing a book and actually did it. Jessica works as an engineer and project manager during the day to earn enough money to fund and write about her adventures. One day soon, she hopes to be financially secure enough to stir the proverbial pot on a full-time basis.

For a quirky, delightful and insightful read about Hong Kong, this book is a must. An American woman with an open mind and an open heart works in Hong Kong and takes the reader on adventures that make the mundane hilarious and informative. From learning to ride the bus to attacking monkeys (that is, monkeys who attack the writer), Jessica Bellas had me laughing out loud by myself, at home. My animals were worried. Then there are the serious and tragic chapters about lives in the shadows of one of our world's greatest cities. Perhaps best of all is the honesty and clarity with which Ms. Bellas wields her proverbial pen. This, I'm certain, is the first of many more books to come. I look forward to them all.

Written by an author who knows her subject well, Ms. Bellas provides an insight into life in Hong Kong. If I were heading there, this would be a must-read on my list of books to prepare myself for the trip. The book is written with a lot of humor, but her love for the area she got to know so well shines through. If you want to understand Hong Kong and China before heading there, this is a great place to start.

Jessica Bellas' first published book is a MUST HAVE for the current ex-pat or future traveler to Hong Kong. Her adventures range from exploring an ancient monastery to drinking with government officials. These vignettes are a quick read, full of wit and humor. This is definitely a book you will find hard to put down.

Jessica Bellas' first published book is one of the best travel logs I have read. She has a gift for combining humor and cultural insight into numerous vignettes describing life in Hong Kong. Any Americans contemplating travel to Hong Kong should put this on their "must read" list.

As a tourist to Hong Kong for four days, it was OK. Traveling vicariously with Jessica Bellas, my 'trip' was an education and a great deal of fun! Rich Wahlberg

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