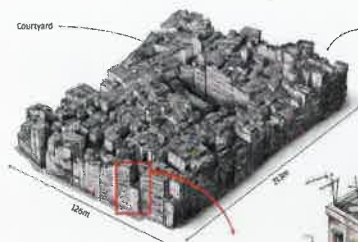


City of anarchy

Kowloon Walled City, located not far from the former Kai Tak Airport, was a remarkable high-rise squatter camp that by the 1960s had 50,000 residents. A historical accident of colonial Hong Kong. It existed in a lawless vacuum until it became an embarrassment for Britain. This month marks the 20th anniversary of its demolition.



500
Buildings built into 27 hectares

Without municipal services, there was no rubbish collection, old television sets, broken furniture, discarded mattresses and other bulky items were hoisted to the roof and abandoned.

30-ft-tall rooftops were used for washing, saving tanks, heating and even playing basketball.



Planes needed to leave 45 degrees of climb at Kai Tak

Buildings were no more than 14 floors high to avoid collisions

There were 77 wells inside the city some 90 metres deep. Electric pumps delivered water to big tanks on rooftops. From there, water was funnelled through narrow pipes to the homes.

HK\$35
monthly room rent

Despite its daunting, squalid appearance and reputation for lawlessness, many of Kowloon Walled City's former residents remember it fondly. It may have been the City of Darkness to outsiders, but to thousands who called it home, it was a friends, tight-knit community that was poor but generally happy.

Electric wires were placed outdoors to prevent fires

The street-level shops were a mix of utilitarian devices, shoe doctors, market stalls and cafes that often included dog on the menu. Fish balls, barbecued and roast meat and other foodstuffs were manufactured in premises with little or no sanitation.

Residents carried out their daily lives with complete autonomy.

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Authorities installed eight freshwater standpipes - one inside the city and the others outside its perimeter.

40sq ft
per person

The area's interconnected high-rise towers were built without architects and engineers, and governed by Hong Kong's building and sanitation regulations.

There were several schools and kindergartens, some of them run by organisations such as the Salvation Army.

The metal fabrication shops made up a good number of the 700 or so industrial premises. Most were found between the ground and fifth floors.

There were many heroin dealers but they were untouchable. Police could only arrest non-residents.

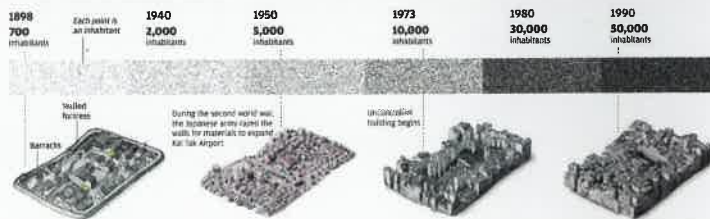
Population density
per square kilometre

KWC: 1,020,000
Mong Kok: 130,000
Hong Kong: 6,700



From fortress to park

The Walled City underwent a dramatic transformation in the final decades of the 20th century



Fresh start

In March 1993, the settlement was demolished and a park that looked like a typical Chinese garden was built in its place. But it kept a few original elements from the Walled City, such as old canals and remnants of the South Gate and its entrance plaques.