

## Chapter 4 Individual Site Assessments

- 73 As shown in Table 2 of Section 1.5, 10 potential clusters were identified which were grouped into four geographic regions. The study team then undertook detailed site evaluations using the assessment criteria in Table 1. An assessment of each of the 10 clusters is provided in this chapter.

Main Region	Cluster
Inner Tolo Harbour	1 Tolo Harbour
Intensive Use Region	2 Plover Cove Reservoir and North Shore of Tolo Channel
	3 South Shore of Tolo Channel
	4 Ap Chau and Kat O villages
Protected Areas	5 Yan Chau Tong Marine Park and Plover Cove Country Park
	6 Tung Ping Chau
	7 Luk Keng and Country Parks
Frontier	8 Wetlands and surrounds
	9 Frontier Closed Area Corridor
	10 Sha Tau Kok

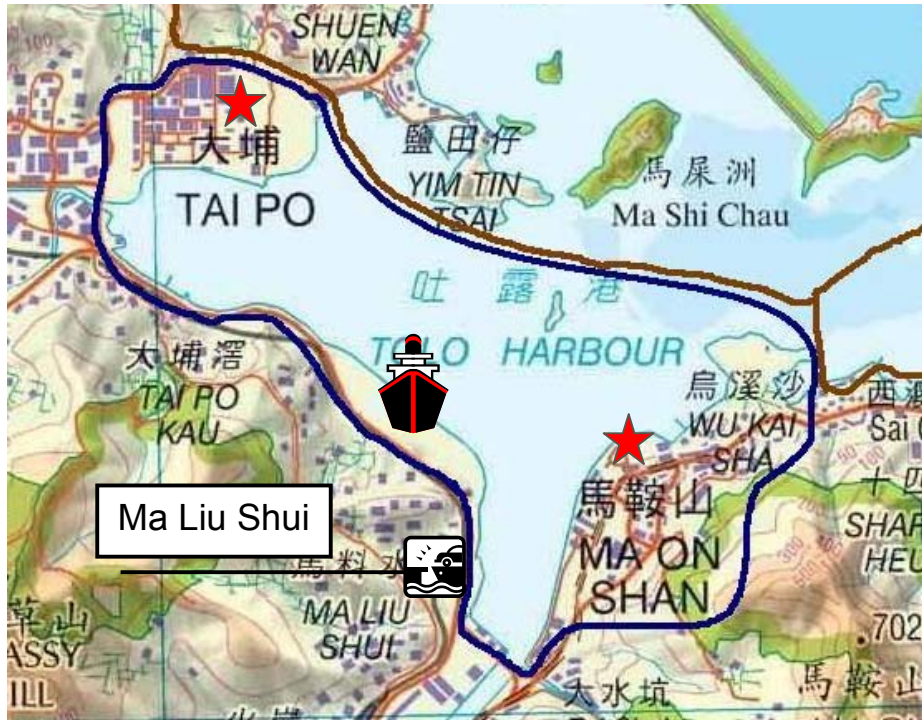


1 — Inner Tolo Harbour      5/6/7 — Protected Areas  
 2/3/4 — Intensive Use Region      8/9/10 — Frontier



## 4.1 Inner Tolo Harbour

### 4.1.1 Tolo Harbour



#### 4.1.1.1 Description

- 74 This cluster includes the only urban centres in the study area (Tai Po and Ma on Shan), as well as the highly modified inner Tolo Harbour (Tai Po Hoi) area and the entrance to the Shing Mun Channel. This area is characterized by urban and industrial development.
- 75 The Tai Po district is one of the oldest settled areas in Hong Kong. It has many historical relics including the porcelain kiln at Wun Yiu dated back to the Ming Dynasty. (Proposals for a management plan are currently being sought. No visitation should be encouraged until the plan is developed.) There is also a Man Mo Temple near the old market. The New Town of Tai Po is located half way between Shatin and the border crossing at Low Wu. Ma On Shan is located on the south-eastern side of Tolo Harbour against the impressive backdrop of the mountain bearing the same name. It is a fast developing New Town. Neither Tai Po nor Ma On Shan are typically associated with tourism activities. The two towns are home to a substantial residential population that is on the increase. Inner Tolo Harbour is a deep-water body of water that is frequented by large commercial cargo vessels but that sees only limited tourism related traffic.

#### 4.1.1.2 Setting

- 76 Tai Po New Town is easily accessible by KCR trains. Ma On Shan is accessible by bus and will be accessible by KCR train from 2004 onwards. The urban areas feature a full range of infrastructure such as restaurants and banking facilities. Both towns provide access to natural attractions such as Ma On Shan and Tai Po Kau (both outside the study area). Tai Po also acts as a gateway to the Pat Sin Leng and Plover Cove Country Parks while ferries departing from the pier at Ma Liu Shui provide access to the outer islands of Tung Ping Chau and Tap Mun.



Ma Liu Shui Pier

- 77 Tai Po has a number of attractions, including:
- Hong Kong Railway Museum
  - Waterfront Park
  - Bicycle hire
  - Yuen Chau Tsai, Island House and Tai Wong Yeh Temple
- 78 As urban areas the two towns would have little difficulty in dealing with an increase in visitor numbers and there are no major environmental concerns regarding tourism.

#### 4.1.1.3 Asset Quality

- 79 The quality of the urban environment is similar to other built-up areas of Hong Kong. Natural areas surrounding the towns are largely intact but with the exception of the areas included in the Pat Sing Leng Country Park they fall outside the study area.

#### **4.1.1.4 Tourism Product Potential and Markets**

- 80 With the exception of the aforementioned historical attractions, the urban areas have limited appeal for international tourists. However, the surrounding natural areas including Tolo Harbour are attractive. Domestic day-visitors will find the Tai Po Waterfront Park of some attraction.

#### **4.1.1.5 Stakeholder issues**

- 81 Stakeholders are primarily interested in the economic development of the region.

#### **4.1.1.6 People Skills and Financial Resources**

- 82 A sufficient skills base exists in the urban areas that would adequately cater for an increased influx of tourists.

#### **4.1.1.7 Overall Assessment**

- 83 The urban areas hold limited attractions for tourists in their current situation, but the areas outside the town have some potential for high intensity recreational and tourism use. Resort development is possible on the south shore of Inner Tolo Harbour.
- 84 The area has potential to become an alternate second or third cruise port for Hong Kong, with the area near the newly established Science Centre being the preferred location. The establishment of a new cruise centre in the area would enable tourists to approach Hong Kong from a more northerly aspect thus exposing them to places in the New Territories they would otherwise not have visited. This area could be used by cruise ships plying the China coast, such as the *Wasa Queen* that travels along the China coast to Shantou, Xiamen, and Shanghai. A more in-depth analysis of this development option is required.

#### **4.1.1.8 Vision**

- Primarily to act as the access and service centre for the southern half of the study region.
- Develop Tolo Harbour as an alternative cruise ship port.

## 4.2 Intensive Use Region



#### 4.2.1 Plover Cove Reservoir and North Shore of Tolo Channel



##### 4.2.1.1 Description

- 85 This cluster is an area where high intensity land and water-based recreation activity already occurs. Hong Kong residents constitute the dominant user group. This area encompasses the north shore of Tolo Channel, including the Ting Kok Rd, Tai Mei Tuk and the Plover Cove Reservoir. Tai Mei Tuk is the focal point of this node, with well established recreational and dining facilities.

##### 4.2.1.2 Setting

- 86 Tai Mei Tuk is accessible by road from nearby Tai Po (private car, public light bus, KMB bus, plus a bicycle trail). Access by public transport beyond Tai Mei Tuk to Bride's Pool is only available on Sundays and on Public Holidays. Plover Cove Country Park attracts about 2 million visitors a year, indicating that this is one of the major attractions in the Northern New Territories.

#### 4.2.1.3 Site

- 87 Much of the site is already heavily used by visitors and has been hardened for such use. Plover Cove Reservoir is managed by the Water Supplies Department and the AFCD. Access to the shores of the reservoir is allowed but at present no boating activities are permitted. The area has a substantial number of attractions that could keep visitors busy and entertained for at least a full day. Tai Mei Tuk has an established water sports centre, hostel, picnic grounds and also has a number of restaurants.
- 88 In addition, Ma Shi Chau, Yim Tin Tsai, Yeung Chau and a small unnamed island about 100 metres northeast of the shore of Yim Tin Tsai have been designated as Ma Shi Chau Special Area in 1999. The Special Area consists of some of the oldest rocks in Hong Kong and is rich in geological and geomorphological features such as folding, faulting, unconformities and wave-cut platforms. Fossils are found on Centre Island and Ma Shi Chau. The unnamed island is a nesting site for egrets and has mature woodlands.
- 89 Looking back to Yim Tin Tsai, sandy deposits can be seen connecting Ma Shi Chau and Yim Tin Tsai. This geological feature is called a tombolo that was formed when sandy sediment built up between the islands eventually rising above high water mark.



Plover Cove Reservoir is an attractive recreational resource



#### **4.2.1.4 Asset Quality**

- 90 The physical state of the assets in this area is good and the environmental quality of the sub-region is still largely intact. Much of the area is protected and the scenery around Plover Cove is very attractive. The foreshore area has a large, remnant mangrove stand. Any additional use of the waterfront must take into consideration the need to conserve the mangroves.

#### **4.2.1.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets**

- 91 The area around Tai Mei Tuk is currently a popular day trip recreational zone. It is ideally suited to continue to serve that role. On weekends the number of parking spaces is insufficient to cater for the current demand. Thus future tourism will have to rely on an improved public transport system to the area, by increasing the frequency of the buses and by providing services during the week.
- 92 Plover Cove Reservoir is currently an under-utilised resource. At present, there are no freshwater recreation opportunities provided in Hong Kong. Plover Cove is well suited to be opened-up for non-motorized aquatic activities such as boating and fishing. It is recognized that the primary purpose of the reservoir is as water storage and that great care has to be taken before it can be used for recreational purposes. The Water Supplies Department will have to give its approval. It is, however, noted that similar reservoirs are used widely for recreation elsewhere and with proper management and water quality control measures the use of the reservoir for non-motorized aquatic recreation should not pose an unacceptable risk to the primary purpose of the reservoir.

#### **4.2.1.6 Stakeholder issues**

- 93 In discussion with members of the Tai Po District Council it was revealed that landowners in Tai Mei Tuk are interested in developing tourism facilities including resort accommodation. Representatives would also like to see greater use of motorised fishing boats as water taxis.

#### **4.2.1.7 People Skills and Financial Resources**

- 94 There are no specific issues under this category. The area has a viable local population. Many locals are already involved in the provision of services to tourists. It can be expected that an increase in visitor numbers would be welcomed by the locals since this would lead to increased economic benefits.

#### 4.2.1.8 Overall Assessment

- 95 The zone is rich in tourism and recreational assets but at present these are mainly utilized for domestic, day-use. It is noted that the HKTB's Land Between Tour visits parts of the zone. The zone is ideally suited for increased recreational use including the use of the marine environment for water sports such as windsurfing, sailing and canoeing as well as fishing. The opportunity also exists to connect Tai Mei Tuk by ferry to Ma On Shan, thereby providing easy access for Ma On Shan residents and creating additional demand for the restaurants and recreational facilities available in the village. Guided international tourists would no doubt enjoy a mix of hiking, dining, general sightseeing and perhaps trying out some water sports.



Tai Mei Tuk

#### 4.2.1.9 Vision

- Retain status quo as a high intensity recreational area offering a diversity of water and land based recreation, food services and dining
- Develop Plover Cove Reservoir for fresh water recreational activities

## 4.2.2 South Shore of Tolo Channel



### 4.2.2.1 Description

- 96 Tolo Channel (Check Mun) is a natural deep-water channel that connects Mirs Bay with Tolo Harbour. Geologically it is a very interesting and scenic area. It is flanked on both sides by attractive mountain and forest scenery. Cruising along the channel is reminiscent of a cruise through a Norwegian Fjord. Tolo Channel was formerly a river valley. The impressive channel was eroded along a major fault line which was formed by water cutting slowly through the rock layers over ages. Some of the oldest rocks in the SAR are found at Bluff Head.
- 97 Hoi Ha Wan is a Marine Park that is formed by a sheltered bay situated along the northern coastline of the Sai Kung Peninsula. Tap Mun (Grass Island) is located north of the Sai Kung Peninsula at the northern end of Tai Tan Hoi (Long Harbour) near the entrance to the Tolo Channel.

#### 4.2.2.2 Setting

- 98 The setting of this zone is spectacular. Water, mountains and forests combine to make for a very attractive landscape. Access is difficult and is largely restricted to weekends when regular ferry services are available. There are no scheduled cruises of Tolo Channel.
- 99 Hoi Ha Wan is a popular local attraction and the Marine Park attracted 71,246 visitors during 2001. Hoi Ha itself does have several basic restaurants, grocery stores and is the base for scuba-diving courses. Access is by boat or by walking trails.



Hoi Ha Wan

- 100 Tap Mun is a small recreational island, with relatively easy and regular access from Wong Shek pier. It is very popular with day-tripper's on the weekend. It has a Tin Hau temple, restaurants and a few shops. In addition some informal accommodation is available. Kite flying, fishing, camping and hiking are popular activities. Tap Mun, is considered as a day trip destination, although some accommodation (unlicensed) is available by word of mouth.

#### 4.2.2.3 Asset Quality

- 101 The environmental quality of the assets in this zone is high. The main detracting feature is the rubbish that has been washed ashore and is now littering the beaches of Tolo Channel. The designation of Hoi Ha Wan as a Marine Park adds to the attractiveness of the zone. With it comes a responsibility to maintain the environmental quality of the location. The new WWF marine interpretive centre will further add to the attractiveness of the location.



Tap Mun

#### 4.2.2.4 Tourism Product Potential and Markets

- 102 The zone features a diversity of sites that can be of interest to local and international tourists. Each of the main sub-areas must be discussed separately:
- Tolo Channel provides some boating and sightseeing opportunities. Possibilities exist to develop circular cruises between Tai Po and Sai Kung
  - Hoi Ha Wan is a protected Marine Park with an attraction being developed by WWF Hong Kong. Its potential rests in maintaining its status as a high quality eco-recreational centre
  - Tap Mun has limited international appeal, but is a popular day trip destination for Hong Kongers. Such activities should be encouraged.
  - Stakeholders identified other areas they felt had high potential (such as the Bay near Bun Sha Pai island). Access difficulties will restrict the viability of all but small-scale, localised projects.

#### 4.2.2.5 Stakeholder issues

- 103 Tap Mun has a very small permanent population. Most tourism related activities take place during the weekends and on public holidays. It is not known how willing or interested the local people would be to participate in an expanded tourism industry. Hoi Ha has a resident population many of whom have moved there to get away from city life. Residents may therefore object if visitor numbers are increased substantially.

#### 4.2.2.6 People Skills and Financial Resources

104 Locals in the built up areas of the zone already participate to a certain degree in tourism albeit often on a part-time/weekend basis. Additional consultation is required to ascertain their willingness to contribute time and money to develop a more permanent tourism industry.

#### 4.2.2.7 Overall Assessment

105 The area has some tourist appeal, but will largely continue to serve the local market. In particular, Tap Mun will continue to be a day trip or overnight destination for Hong Kong residents Likewise, Hoi Ha will continue to serve local residents who seek a nature-based walking or boating day or overnight trip. Some potential exists for the WWF centre to cater to international visitors, but accessibility remains an issue.

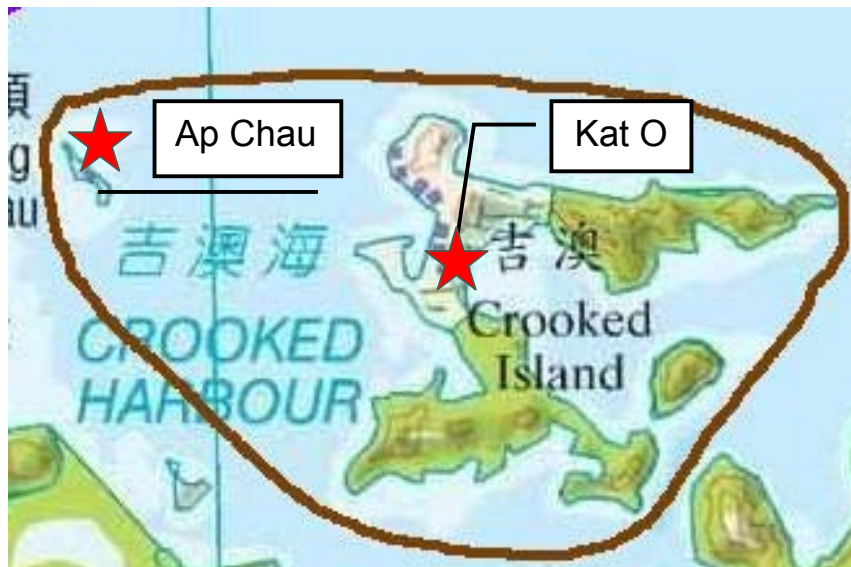
#### 4.2.2.8 Vision

- To retain its status as a high intensity, local recreational area, focussed around Tap Mun
- To develop the ecotourism potential of Hoi Ha Wan, especially after the establishment of the WWF centre.



Tin Hau Temple on Tap Mun

### 4.2.3 Ap Chau and Kat O Villages



106 Note - this cluster focuses on the built up areas of the two islands. The portion of Kat O within the Plover Cove Country Park is included in cluster 5.

#### 4.2.3.1 Description

- 107 Ap Chau is a small island that is about 500 m in length and 100 m in width at its widest point. It is a fishing island with a small resident population and a Christian church. The island is neat and attractively laid out but is too small to accommodate many visitors. Apart from some of the local women selling dried fish goods, there is no other commercial tourism related activity.
- 108 Kat O is a crescent shaped island with country parks and nature preserves at either end. The middle part of the Crescent has two villages, Fung O and Chung Kan O, and is the population centre for the island. The villages have a number of cultural features that are appealing to day trip visitors, including old cannons in front of the police station and near the coast, a shrine dedicated to Pak Kung, a deity who protects villages from evil, Lam, Tsang and Chow Clan Halls, built in the early Ching Dynasty, a large Tin Hau temple built in 1736 and renovated recently, a Qing monument installed in 1802 and a Water and Moon temple built during the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the Emperor Qianlong's reign (Qing Dynasty) and renovated in 1992.
- 109 The area is a popular, low-cost day trip destination on weekends and public holidays. A number of tour operators run specialized boat cruises for around \$109, which includes a visit to islands and a meal. These cruises are targeted at the local population, and in many instances are targeted specifically at residents of different housing estates. On a busy weekend, over 1000 people will visit the area. The length of stay is short. Tourists stay in Ap Chau for 20 minutes. Visits to Kat O are long enough for a meal and a short walk through the villages. Little or no interpretation is provided.

#### 4.2.3.2 Setting

- 110 The broader setting is dominated by its proximity to mainland China. Looking south, one sees pristine near wilderness. Looking west and north, the dominant view is of industrial and port development in China.
- 111 Access remains an obstacle. A strong informal access network exists using charter boats and local tour operators. Without local knowledge and a working knowledge of Cantonese, it is difficult to visit these islands. Some ferry access is provided from Sha Tau Kok, but it is infrequent and access to Sha Tau Kok is restricted.



The proximity of the highly developed Chinese Mainland detracts from the tranquility of Ap Chau

#### 4.2.3.3 Site

- 112 Generally, the amenity of the villages in Kat O is poor. They are in a poor state of repair, with many abandoned and rapidly decaying structures. The harbour is dirty with refrigerators, batteries, beds and other garbage discarded there. Concerns are also raised about the hygiene in some of the restaurants.
- 113 There is little that is unique on these islands, other than the opportunity for a day trip boat excursion to a remote area in Hong Kong. The area is currently of interest to the local market as part of a general sightseeing outer island tour. It has little or no appeal to the international market place.



- 114 A substantial informal tourism network exists. Local tour operators and charter boats visit the islands. On a busy weekend, local sources say up to 1000 people will visit. However, the tourism infrastructure is poor. The tourism industry is typified by part-time operators who return to the island on weekends. As such, restaurants operate only on weekends and public holidays. No formal accommodation exists, but informal accommodation can be found by talking to local residents. The quality is low and accommodation houses are unlicensed.
- 115 Crowding on ferry piers was observed in both Kat O and Ap Chau. Kat O is overwhelmed, when ferries disgorge 200 people at the pier. The current pier at Kat O appears too small for the volume of weekend boat traffic, as vessels have to tie up beside each other to drop off or pick up passengers. This situation will be improved as the pier will soon be modified, as advised by the Marine Department.

#### **4.2.3.4 Asset Quality**

- 116 The asset quality is generally poor. The villages are generally in a state of disrepair, with many abandoned and partly abandoned buildings; garbage is problem.

#### **4.2.3.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets**

- 117 These islands have limited additional tourism potential. Their niche seems to be to appeal to the Hong Kong market as an inexpensive day trip to a different part of Hong Kong. This area is not recommended for international tourists.



Kat O

#### **4.2.3.6 Stakeholder Issues**

118 A small, aging resident permanent population coupled with the influx of former residents to run part-time businesses on the weekends represents a significant limiting factor to future tourism activity. Existing operators appear satisfied with the part-time and informal nature of their businesses. Few operators are interested in becoming full-time operators.

#### **4.2.3.7 People Skills and Financial Resources**

119 Depopulation inhibits further development. Questions are raised about the skill levels of people involved in the local tourism industry to provide quality tourism experiences.

#### **4.2.3.8 Overall Assessment**

120 Overall, the tourism potential of these islands is low. There is little to see and do, there is little unique in the villages and the overall amenity is poor. Other islands with better access and higher quality products effectively out-compete these islands. Cheung Chau and Peng Chau offer a much more easily accessible and much higher quality village experience. Better and more varied hiking is available elsewhere in country parks.

121 The recommended course of action is to continue to target the existing, low end local tourists. Improvements in the overall quality and hygiene of the islands is recommended, especially in the villages on Kat O.

122 A longer-term option could be the development of small resort facilities in Fung O or Chung Kan O. However, such development would necessitate the demolition of some or all of the existing villages.

#### **4.2.3.9 Vision**

- An area of interest for local day trippers primarily
- Continue to provide similar services but enhance the quality

[Note: Cross border tourism proposals may fundamentally alter the potential of these villages]

### 4.3 Protected Areas

123 As a general rule of thumb, protected areas have been protected because of their ecological values. Some mechanism be implemented for controlling and monitoring the types of tourism to be carried out at the sites mentioned below, and the effects that it has on the site itself.

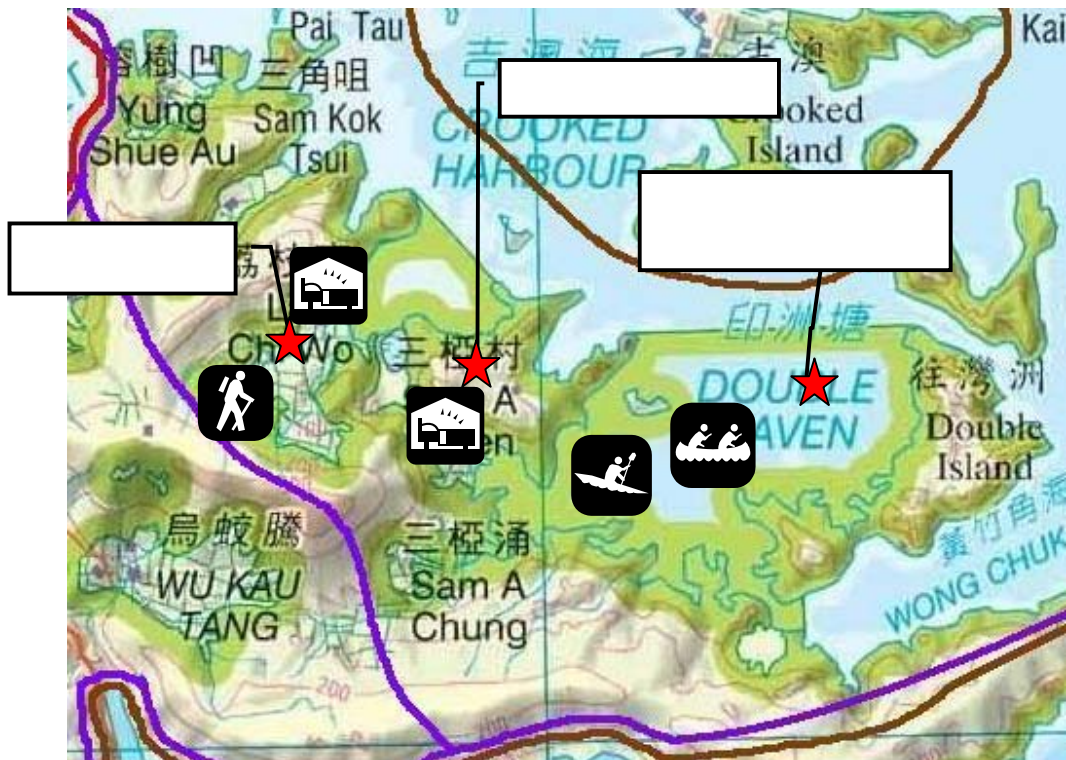


Yan Chau Tong Marine Park



Tung Ping Chau

### Yan Chau Tong Marine Park and Plover Cove Country Park



#### 4.3.1.1 Description

- 124 This zone encompasses the north-eastern part of the study area, including Plover Cove Country Park and the adjacent Yan Chau Tong Marine Park. This area is characterized by wilderness or near wilderness areas offering a variety of eco- and nature based recreational opportunities, plus potential for cultural heritage recreation and tourism.
- 125 The village of Lai Chi Wo has been identified as the focal point for this area. A second focal point is the villages found around Sam A Tseun. Lai Chi Wo has the potential to become a significant remote access tourism node in the region. The Sam A Tseun zone has some potential to become a water based ecotourism hub and also to provide some specialist accommodation.
- 126 Lai Chi Wo is an intact, well-preserved walled village of between 100 and 150 houses. The village is well maintained, although there are few permanent residents. Former residents return occasionally, using it as a weekend retreat or for special events/festivals. The surrounds contain abandoned farmland and grazing pasture. The village has well-preserved temples, ancestral halls and an abandoned schoolhouse. A concrete pier provides water access. Land access is provided by five hiking trails which lead to the village. There are no tourist facilities, although some residents return on weekends to sell drinks and noodles to hikers.

- 127 The Sam A Tsuen village complex area is smaller, less well intact and in a poorer state of repair. The area consists of three villages with the remains of a seven unit village house at Sam A Tsuen being in the best state of repair. Another small village house complex provides accommodation and some food services. Water access is provided through Sam A Wai Bay, which is a popular overnight spot for yachters. Land access is provided by 5 or 6 hiking trails that connect the area. This village complex provides access to the more protected part of the Yan Chau Tong Marine Park.
- 128 The Yan Chau Tong Marine Park comprises of two separate parts: The portion at Yan Chau Tong is bounded by the coastline of the mainland in the west and that of Wong Wan Chau (Double Island) in the east. The northern and southern boundaries are demarcated by the lines linking up Sha Ngam Tau to Sai Lau Kong and Lo Sha Tin to Tong Pai Tau respectively. The portion next to Lai Chi Wo is bounded by the line linking Chung Wan Tsui and the northern tip of Kau Lo Tau. All the landward boundaries are demarcated by the high water mark. The area provides a variety of natural coastlines, sheltered harbours and protected corals.



Pier at Yan Chau Tong

- 129 Plover Cove Country Park covers 4594 ha. and includes the mainland, as well as parts of Kat O, Ngo Mei Chau (Crescent Island) and Wong Wau Chau (Double Island). The Park is dominated by views of water in one direction and by the Pat Sin Leng escarpment that bisects the area in the other. A wide range of hiking trails of different degrees of difficulty criss-crosses the Park. The focus here is on the more remote areas of the Park away from Bride's Pool Road.

#### 4.3.1.2 Setting

- 130 The natural and cultural values of the area are largely intact. In addition, both villages are evocative of traditional lifestyles, with paddy fields, fishponds, etc. Both areas were last re-constructed in the late 1950's to early 1970's using traditional design.
- 131 Access currently is difficult and should remain restricted. At present, ferries connect from Sha Tau Kok, however, access to Sha Tau Kok is highly restricted. High speed water taxis can transport people from Sha Tau Kok to Lai Chi Wo in 10 minutes. No regular ferry service is available from Sai Kung or Tai Po.
- 132 The area is a popular overnight spot for yachts. Numerous anchorage points are available on the outer islands and adjacent to the mainland, with Ngor Tau (near Sam A Tsuen) especially popular.
- 133 Ground based access is provided through the network of hiking trails in the Plover Cove Country Park. Both villages are located between seven and ten km from the nearest parking lot or minibus terminus, and hikes require crossing a height of land. Hiking trails also connect to numerous other small or abandoned villages in the area.



Lai Chi Wo Village

#### **4.3.1.3 Site**

- 134 Lai Chi Wo is a robust, intact village with electrical power services. Town water will be installed by 2005. It has the potential to withstand much higher levels of visitation. Sam A Tsuen is less robust and less capable of withstanding visitation.
- 135 The robusticity of the ecology of the Marine Park and its ability to withstand significantly higher boat traffic, especially when boats do not have holding tanks for waste water, is unknown. Concern is also raised about the ability of tides to flush Sam A Wan Bay. Diesel fuel and other oily residues were noted floating at the surface at 7 am.
- 136 The area as a whole contains a wide array of land- and water-based recreation opportunities, unique natural values, strong intact cultural values and cultural heritage from different clans. In addition, much built evidence of traditional agricultural and aquacultural activities is evident but there is a complete lack of interpretation of any of this.
- 137 Core assets are tightly grouped, with easy access to many other assets, providing opportunities to bundle a variety of experiences to create destination attractions. The area is unique within Hong Kong and has the potential to become a cultural/ecotourism destination with international appeal.
- 138 Current use levels are difficult to estimate but it is probably low. Because of its remoteness, visitation is low. Hikers must make a 15 to 20 km round trip to visit the area. Privately owned yachts may visit, but no formal cruise tours are available. Lai Chi Wo has no formal tourism infrastructure, while a small dai pai dong, offering accommodation is available at Ngor Tau Tsui.

#### **4.3.1.4 Asset Quality**

- 139 Lai Chi Wo village is intact and in a good state of repair. The village houses are well maintained with power provided. The village walls are still intact and the vast majority of houses are still habitable. Sam A Tsuen village house appears to be structurally sound. Natural and cultural assets are intact.

#### **4.3.1.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets**

- 140 Provided that accommodation and appropriate recreation facilities can be established, and that the traditional village owners support the expansion of tourism, this area has high potential. Indeed, this area has the potential to become a significant natural and cultural tourism destination in Hong Kong and provides the one opportunity to develop a new unique tourism product.

- 141 Both domestic and international tourists could be drawn to this area. The challenge is to provide high quality experiences, with the goal of attracting a limited number of high yield tourists. Opening up this area to large scale tourism would destroy its unique character and likely cause irreparable damage to the natural and cultural assets of the area.
- 142 A range of products can be developed and packaged to provide high quality experiences for both the domestic and international market place, using Lai Chi Wo and Sam A Tseun as the focal points. Product opportunities include hike-in / hike out tours with an overnight stay in the villages, boat in/hike out (or visa versa) tours, again with an overnight stay, marine ecotourism focussed around Sam A Tsuen, plus the opportunity to experience traditional lifestyles in an authentic setting.

#### **4.3.1.6 Stakeholder Issues**

- 143 The successful transformation of this area into a destination will rely on property owners in Lai Chi Wo and Sam A Tsuen agreeing to allow their properties to be converted to tourism use. Preliminary discussions with local representatives indicated a high level of support for such an initiative. However, detailed community consultation is required with property owners, many of whom are non resident of Hong Kong.

#### **4.3.1.7 People Skills and Financial Resources**

- 144 It is unlikely that the property owners possess the necessary skills to manage tourism assets. It is for this reason that Recommendation 41 has been developed. This recommendation calls for the establishment of a tourism property management company to be responsible for the marketing and management of village houses as accommodation facilities. Property owners will be responsible for the general upkeep of their houses. Before any of these buildings can be used for tourism, the owners have to invest to bring them up to a reasonable standard. The big question is whether they are willing to do this, especially when they are having comfortable lives overseas.

#### **4.3.1.8 Overall Assessment**

- 145 This area has the highest potential of the 10 clusters identified to become a significant nature based and cultural tourism attraction with international appeal. The lack of suitable overnight accommodation and the lack of suitable commercial nature based water recreation represent current impediments to the achievement of its potential. However, with proper encouragement these obstacles can be overcome.



146 As a medium to longer-term strategy, the study team recommends that Lai Chi Wo be developed as the focal point for heritage resort-style nature-based and cultural tourism, with Sam A Tsuen developed as a service centre for the region also providing some accommodation. Sam a Tsuen (Sam a Wan Bay) is identified as a possible centre for commercial eco-water recreation, such as sea kayaking.

#### 4.3.1.9 Vision

- To convert the area into an internationally attractive nature based and cultural tourism destination focusing around Lai Chi Wo and Sam A Tsuen.
- To use the existing villages of Lai Chi Wo and Sam A Tsuen for commercial accommodation and the provision of other tourism services through the sensitive adaptive reuse of existing structures.
- To develop nature based water recreational activities (such as sea kayaking) in Yan Chau Tong Marine Park, using the Sam a Tsuen area as the base.
- To capitalise on the tourism potential through the development of a series of hike in/hike out, or boat in/hike out touring opportunities using the above mentioned villages for overnight accommodation



Sam A Tsuen

### 4.3.2 Tung Ping Chau



#### 4.3.2.1 Description

- 147 Tung Ping Chau is located in Mirs Bay in the north-eastern side of Hong Kong SAR. This crescent-shaped outlying island is at the most eastern end of Hong Kong's waters and is only 1 km from the Mainland. It has a unique geology and also has two important ecological habitats including coral communities and seaweed beds. The area is included in the Plover Cove Country Park.
- 148 Over 30 species of corals, 130 species of fishes, 40 species of seaweeds and one hundred species of marine invertebrates can be found in the waters surrounding the island. Two core areas were established in Tung Ping Chau Marine Park at A Ma Wan and A Ye Wan, with sea areas of 5.2 ha and 2.2 ha respectively. The aim of core area establishment is to protect the high ecological value of fragile coral communities in Tung Ping Chau. All fishing activities are prohibited within the core area.
- 149 There is little or no permanent population (variously reported as 2 people or no permanent residents). Villages are largely abandoned.
- 150 Tung Ping Chau is a popular weekend day trip destination. Ferries and charter boats visit, disgorging up to 1000 people on busy weekends. Some informal, low-cost and low quality commercial accommodation is available. Prices for accommodation range from \$20 to \$50 per person per night. The central area of the island has a small number of restaurants providing food and beverage services. Chau Tau village offers some accommodation and also some food services.

#### 4.3.2.2 Setting

- 151 The area has a number of attractive features, including:
- discrete, unique and intact site; geologically different; coral reefs
  - intact natural environment;
  - the main village of Chau Tau is a visually pleasing village retaining its traditional character
- 152 Natural values can be appreciated by the visitor. There is good interpretation of natural features but historical and cultural values are not presented or interpreted.
- 153 The area is physically remote and psychologically distant from the main tourist areas of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island and from the major residential areas of Hong Kong SAR. There is generally poor access to the island, with ferry service offered only on weekends. Most visitation occurs by charter boat, which requires local knowledge in the booking process. Some visitors expressed a real fear of missing the last ferry and being abandoned on the island. Because of the inadequate ferry schedule, there is little chance for spontaneous visits.



#### 4.3.2.3 Site

- 154 The terrestrial geology and cultural heritage are robust and can withstand visitation. The reef ecology is more fragile and needs to be managed carefully. Concerns are expressed that the reef is already being damaged by inexperienced divers. Control mechanisms such as setting of quotas and improved diver training may need to be considered.
- 155 The island is small, and apart from the coral and interesting geology, has few unique assets. The Marine Park is potentially of international significance, but its scale is so small that it would be difficult to attract more than the local or regional market. Potential attractions are scattered, of a small scale. A lack of infrastructure, especially accommodation, hinders future growth.



- 156 Current use is restricted to the Hong Kong market with virtually all visitation occurring on weekends and public holidays. Virtually no international tourists visit, unless accompanied by friends or relatives who are resident in Hong Kong. There is enough to see and do to satisfy day trip visitors, who can enjoy nature walks, explore the island, swim, dive, or snorkel. A 4 to 6 hour stay is typical.
- 157 The tourism infrastructure on the island is limited. Informal accommodation houses charge \$20 to \$50 per person per night, offering a bare bed with a thin mattress. Visitors are jammed into decaying, abandoned village houses. No services are provided. One dai pai dong area operates in the central part of the island. Two other remnant villages at the end of the islands also offer some food and lodging, but of an unknown/poor standard.

#### 4.3.2.4 Asset Quality

158 The physical state of the built assets is variable. Shau Tau is intact, while other villages are dilapidated and largely abandoned. The natural asset is still intact, although there is evidence of overuse, especially in the marine environment. The cultural assets are deteriorating, although the main village of Sha Tau is largely intact and aesthetically appealing.

#### 4.3.2.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets

159 The physical remoteness of the island, coupled with its proximity to mainland China, interesting geology and coral reef are its most appealing assets. In addition, the cultural heritage of the area has some appeal. However, at present, Hong Kong people need an excuse to visit Tung Ping Chau. It is seen as an out of the way, remote island. Additionally, the lack of reliable access, especially during the week, limits its ability to cater for tourists. The lack of commercial accommodation limits the ability to extend stays.



160 At present, it will appeal to the local, low-cost market. The tourism potential is limited by the current informal structure of the tourism industry, low prices charged and low quality of services provided. In addition, the weekly cyclical nature precludes any long stay accommodation. Unless these issues can be addressed, there is little potential to expand the market base. More facilities and infrastructure, especially suitable accommodation, are required. In addition, more regular and reliable access must be provided.

161 Tung Ping Chau needs to be packaged as a total experience, including the journey to and from the island. This could include a stop at another island en-route, perhaps Tap Mun. It needs to be presented in a more up-market manner. Additional cultural interpretation and also the possible provision of easier access to the coral through equipment rental or glass bottom boats would increase its appeal.

#### **4.3.2.6 Stakeholder Issues**

162 The villages are abandoned, but former residents return on weekends to provide basic services. Food services are offered in the central beach area (Tai Tong and Chan Uk), with some low quality accommodation offered in Sha Tau. Current commercial operators appear content to own part-time businesses as they have day jobs elsewhere in Hong Kong.

#### **4.3.2.7 People Skills and Financial Resources**

163 The lack of a permanent resident population inhibits further development. Questions are raised about the skill levels of people involved in the local tourism industry to provide quality tourism experiences

#### **4.3.2.8 Overall Assessment**

164 The area has some interesting assets, and therefore, some potential to be an out-of-the-way, small scale destination. However, without significant improvements, the area will remain an inexpensive, day trip destination. Obstacles to further tourism growth include the lack of infrastructure, suitable accommodation, regular access, additional activities and service quality service. As well, the dominance of the informal tourism sector targeted exclusively at the local residents, inhibits international tourism.

165 A variety of immediate actions are recommended to improve the amenity and visitor experience. Longer term actions include the sensitive renovation and adaptive reuse of existing village houses in Sha Tau to provide a unique heritage accommodation experience.

#### 4.3.2.9 Vision

- Develop as a unique, small scale ecotourism tourism resort destination focusing on the marine, land based and cultural values of the island.
- Continue to encourage one day trip visitation, but monitor the impacts more closely
- Use the existing village of Sha Tau for commercial accommodation and the provision of other tourism services through the sensitive adaptive reuse of existing structures.
- Provide visa free access for high quality, non-intrusive ecotourism activities from mainland resorts.
- Note: Conservation of natural heritage must drive the overall management of the island.



The ferry pier at Tung Ping Chau

### 4.3.3 Luk Keng and Country Parks



#### 4.3.3.1 Description

- 166 The cluster encompasses Pat Sing Leng and Plover Cove Country Parks. The focal point for the region is Luk Keng with the Bride's Pool Road offering access to the area. The region combines high quality nature based tourism potential along with cultural and heritage tourism potential. Bride's Pool Road and environs offer high intensity outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 167 Plover Cove Country Park (4594 ha) is dominated by views of water in one direction and by the Pat Sin Leng escarpment that bisects the area. The Pat Sin Leng Country Park (3125 ha) adjoins the Plover Cove Country Park and turns this part of the New Territories into a complete scenic reserve and a heaven for hikers.
- 168 Luk Keng and surrounds, including the village areas of Luk Keng and Nam Chung, has one of the few remaining freshwater marshes in Hong Kong. This is an excellent area for country birds and wetland species, especially kingfishers and bitterns. The island of A Chau off Nam Chung, supports the largest breeding population of herons and egrets in Hong Kong. The area was once an important tea growing region. Luk Keng is divided into a number of different villages, while Nam Chung consists of at least four villages.



- 169 Luk Keng has two fung-shui cannons located at the eastern end of the village. One is real and one is a fake. Until the 1920s, the villagers used to fire the real cannon at the ‘White-tiger’ at Kai Kuk Shue Ha during Lunar New Year, for it was believed that the tiger had spoiled the fung-shui of the village.
- 170 Bride’s Pool Road provides a central access point to the country parks. It and the Wu Kau Tang village area provide most of the park infrastructure, including toilet blocks, parking spaces, picnic areas, pavilions and barbecue sites. The area is extremely popular on weekends, with parking lots often filling by midmorning.
- 171 This cluster also includes the abandoned villages at Sha Lo Tung. The Sha Lo Tung valley and its neighbour, the Ping Shan Chai valley, form an elongated basin cradled between the western arms of the Pat Sin Ranges and the north-eastern arms of Cloudy Hill. Thus they are protected on all four sides making them invisible from below.



Abandoned village in Sha Lo Tung

#### 4.3.3.2 Setting

- 172 The Country Parks have largely retained their natural features and represent largely intact landscapes. The parks consist of steep, wooded hillsides and valley bottoms with mostly abandoned farmland. Walkers looking for an invigorating hike can enjoy the natural values of the area.

- 173 The villages in and around Luk Keng are typical of many villages in the area. There is a small permanent population with a larger number of people using village houses during the weekends. Many of the buildings, especially in the older villages are abandoned and decaying. Personal effects of the previous occupants can still be found in some of the structures. Interestingly, a number of the abandoned houses appear to have been converted to temples, shrines or ancestral halls. Visitors to Luk Keng can access eight or 10 such shrines.
- 174 The farmland around Luk Keng has been mostly abandoned, although the fish ponds remain active. Some of the fish ponds have been converted to recreational fishing use and from observation they appear to be very popular. There are questions regarding the legal status of the operators. Others are used for commercial fish farming. Much of the former rice growing area is in the process of reverting to wetland.
- 175 Access to this area is generally good. A mini bus service runs all week, with a bus service offered on weekends. Parking spaces are provided, but they fill early during the weekends. Expanding the number or size of parking lots is not practical. Consequently, increasing the frequency of bus services is proposed.



A view across abandoned farmland to a section of Luk Keng

#### **4.3.3.3 Site**

- 176 An extensive trail network is provided in the country parks, offering visitors a range of hiking experiences from easy, flat, short walks, to long, robust walks crossing ridge lines. The Lord Wilson Trail runs through this area. While some walking tracks become congested during the weekend, the more remote or difficult tracks remain largely under-utilised.
- 177 Luk Keng village area, including Nam Chung consists of about 10 villages linked by pathways and walking trails. These villages provide the visitor with an opportunity to explore the fast disappearing agricultural heritage of Hong Kong within a short walk. A variety of tourist services are provided in Luk Keng, including food and beverage service.

#### **4.3.3.4 Asset Quality**

- 178 For the most part, the quality of the natural and recreational asset is strong. The villages have largely retained their integrity, although many are falling into disrepair. A number of abandoned villages are scattered throughout the country parks, again in various states of repair. The Sha Lo Tung valley houses form arguably the most aesthetically appealing villages.
- 179 Different parts of this cluster evoke different values. The Country Park and abandoned villages within the Country Park evoke feelings of wilderness appreciation, isolation and an understanding of past life styles. The Luk Keng area evokes memories of a rapidly disappearing agricultural lifestyle. Bride's Pool Road is a high intensity recreational use area.

#### **4.3.3.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets**

- 180 Use levels are difficult to estimate but the area is generally busy to crowded on weekends and under-utilised during the week. The Bride's Pool Road is one of the few scenic roads in Hong Kong that offer visitors a country road experience. As such, it is popular with motorcycle clubs, bicycle clubs and day trip drivers.
- 181 The area has potential for high intensity recreation, nature based tourism and heritage tourism. High intensity recreation will be concentrated along existing access roads and can include such activities as picnics, nature walks and fishing.
- 182 Quality nature based tourism experiences are available in the more remote areas of the country parks. The provision of minimal accommodation facilities as identified in the next chapter could facilitate more overnight use of this area.

183 Heritage tourism activities can be concentrated in and around Luk Keng. Indeed, it could become the focal point for a new heritage tour focusing on the tangible and intangible cultural values of the region. In addition, a number of hikes can be developed to link abandoned villages.



Recreational pond fishing at Luk Keng

#### **4.3.3.6 Stakeholder Issues**

184 The needs of the remnant, resident population need to be considered. Members of the study team were discouraged by locals from visiting some villages in Luk Keng. In addition, conservation of cultural and heritage assets must occur before they can be promoted for tourism.

#### **4.3.3.7 People Skills and Financial Resources**

185 For the most part, this area covers unpopulated lands. Minimal tourism infrastructure is required and, apart from guided tours, few opportunities exist to expand commercial tourism opportunities. As such, current residents engaged in tourism through the provision of food and beverage services are probably sufficiently skilled to meet any increase in demand.

#### 4.3.3.8 Overall Assessment

- 186 The Bride's Pool Road corridor is already well suited for intense, local recreational use. Few issues emerge, apart from increasing the frequency of bus services and also addressing the garbage problems created by users. In all likelihood, this area will remain as a popular picnic and country drive destination for Hong Kong residents.
- 187 Wilderness or near wilderness hiking opportunities exist in the country parks. The provision of strategically located camp sites and sheltered accommodation could increase overnight use of this area. There is some limited international tourism potential, but most of the visitors will continue to be Hong Kong residents.
- 188 The cultural and heritage tourism potential of this area is under developed. Luk Keng is well suited to become a cultural tourism node for the Northern New Territories. In addition, more adventurous wilderness heritage walks can be created, using abandoned villages as the way points for hikes.

#### 4.3.3.9 Vision

- Develop further the nature based and cultural heritage tourism potential of the region.
- Luk Keng and surrounds to become the focal point for cultural tourism activities in this part of the Northern New Territories
- Encourage day trippers and overnight hiking by domestic and international visitors
- Develop linked, thematic cultural hikes between villages in Country Parks

#### 4.4 Frontier



#### 4.4.1 Wetlands and Surrounds



##### 4.4.1.1 Description

- 189 This cluster encompasses the area to the west of the Lo Wu border crossing, with a primary focus on the wetlands and fish ponds. The primary attraction in the region is the Mai Po Nature Reserve (MPNR), managed by the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong (WWF-HK) and AFCD. It is part of the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay RAMSAR Site, giving it recognition as a wetland of international importance. About 54,000 waterbirds winter in and around the Deep Bay wetlands. Some 40,000 people visit the Mai Po Nature Reserve annually, with some 2,000 coming from overseas. Visitor numbers are restricted however, due to the small size and sensitivity of the site. All visitors must first obtain a Mai Po Entry Permit from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department or else, follow one of the guided tours organised by WWF Hong Kong or private tour companies.
- 190 A new Hong Kong Wetland Park is being built to the west of the MPNR at Tin Shui Wai. This \$518 million development will accommodate up to 510,000 people annually when its final phase opens in 2005. At present, a small interpretive centre has been constructed.
- 191 The area to the east of the MPNR is largely flat lowland with operational or abandoned fish ponds. The local fishermen are interested in participating in tourism. Further the abandoned fish farms have the potential to have their ecological values enhanced by converting them to wetlands.

#### 4.4.1.2 Setting

192 The area within the FCA is largely intact and represents the largest remaining wetland in Hong Kong comprising intertidal mudflats, mangrove stands, traditionally operated shrimp ponds (*gei wai*), reedbeds, and commercial deep water fishponds.



Floating boardwalk at Mai Po provides access to bird hides at Deep Bay

193 The amenity within the FCA is quite spectacular. The border fence is a most unusual feature, and the fish ponds are attractive. The amenity of the area outside the FCA, however, is poor. Abandoned vehicles, garbage and container depots mar the landscape. The new wetland centre is set against a backdrop of the massive high-rise housing estates of Tin Shui Wai, which greatly detract from any illusion that this is a ‘remote’ and natural site.

194 There are some villages with long histories (notably San Tin and Yin Kong). These places have a few remnant buildings, but many of the villages are dominated by modern Spanish-style villas and the industrial landscape. The historical context is lost.



195 Access remains an issue for two reasons:

- Restricted access needs to be maintained in the MPNR due to its sensitive nature. The site needs to be maintained as a low volume, high quality destination.
- Much of this area is within the FCA, where access is strictly controlled through a permit system. Permits are difficult to acquire. The MPNR overcomes that permit problem by having five floating permits allowing 50 people per permit to visit the reserve. Prospective visitors must register at least one day in advance to gain access, restricting spontaneous visits.
- Access to the Hong Kong Wetland Park will be much improved after the completion of West Rail and the Tin Shui Wai Light Rail extensions by the end of 2003.

#### **4.4.1.3 Site**

196 This area is ecologically and politically sensitive. Many of the potential sites for promoting tourism are spoilt by polluting land uses, such the illegal discharge of waste from pig farms. These need to be controlled before the area can be made attractive for tourists to visit. Maintaining and where possible improving the ecological values must drive all management actions.

197 Elsewhere in this report, proposals are made to ease access to the FCA for organized tour groups. It is recognized that if access restrictions are eased for tourism, then it is inevitable that other stakeholder groups will call for opening up of the FCA even further for other uses. As there is currently no land use zoning in the FCA, the Planning Department must start work on designating land-use zones as soon as possible, to restrict or limit land uses which will be unsympathetic to (parts of) the use of the FCA.

198 Apart from bird watching activities and general nature appreciation, the area offers a limited range of other tourism or recreational activities.

#### **4.4.1.4 Asset Quality**

199 The MPNR is a high quality, internationally recognized natural asset. At present, the first phase of the Hong Kong Wetland Park attracts some 100,000 visitors per year. Once the full development is completed, it is hoped that a new wetland area capable of accommodating the needs of mass tourists will be created.

200 The fish ponds and fish huts are in generally good shape. Much of the other farmland is abandoned and overgrown. Opportunities exist to renovate abandoned stilt houses built over fishponds for day use or tourist accommodation.



#### 4.4.1.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets

- 201 The need to maintain the essential character of the area and to manage it primarily for its ecological values places a limitation on the level of tourism. At present, visitor numbers are small and the potential for increased visitation is limited by the carrying capacity of the MPNR.
- 202 The construction of the wetlands centre holds the promise of developing a new, purpose built primary attraction for the local market.
- 203 Many tourists interested in nature coming to Hong Kong would have heard of Mai Po, and the HKTB is actively promoting the area. There is potential to expand the product offering outside the MPNR to not just birdwatchers, but general nature appreciation, cultural heritage (fishponds) etc.

#### 4.4.1.6 Stakeholder Issues

- 204 As in other parts of the study area, land ownership and the ability of local residents to enter into and benefit from tourism remains an issue. A small, remnant, mainly aged resident population lives in this area.

#### 4.4.1.7 Overall Assessment

205 The tourism potential will be improved when the Hong Kong Wetland Park is fully operational. In addition, the ability to link Mai Po Nature Reserve and the new Wetland Park through a network of bicycle and hiking paths creates new market opportunities. Such a suggestions would necessitate the construction of a bridge over the Shan Pui (Yuen Long) River linking up the area of fishponds at Tsim Bei Tsui (close to the water treatment facility and the industrial estate) and Nam Sang Wai.



Entrance at Hong Kong Wetland Park

206 Opportunities exist to develop one of the old fishing huts as a heritage museum and the ponds around it as demonstration ponds. Oral histories could be collected from retired pond-fish farmers about their experiences and their involvement in the industry, and into the industry in general.

#### 4.4.1.8 Vision

- To develop this area as an international ecotourism centre and Hong Kong's wetland of international importance
- Note: Conservation of natural heritage must drive the overall management of the area.

#### 4.4.2 FCA Corridor



##### 4.4.2.1 Description

- 207 This cluster encompasses the Frontier Closed Area between the Lo Wu KCR Station and Sha Tau Kok. The area is about 16 km from east to west and is bounded by mainland China on the north and the designated closed area line to the south. The area is divided by the Low Wu border crossing and the KCR train line. The one-lane, sealed border road runs along the length of the corridor.
- 208 The area to the west of Lo Wu has a substantially different character than that to the east and also has less tourism potential. It is characterized by a low, flat land and fish ponds. Little active farming exists. However, the fish ponds are home to a large bird population. The area to the east of Lo Wu encompasses a number of small village complexes, including Chow Tin Tsuen/Fung Wong Wu; Tsung Yuen Ha; Heung Yuen Wai; Ha Heung Yeung; Lin Ma Hang and other villages that have retained their traditional character and possess significant cultural and heritage tourism potential.
- 209 Heung Yueng Wai village is built in a U-shape. The western boundary has a small village house with a fortified tower. The middle contains new Spanish style villas. The eastern part consists of a large family complex with a huge building with intricate finishing design. It has an attractive setting, with intact woods surrounding the village.
- 210 Chow Tin and Fung Wong Wu are 200 year-old villages with an estimated 60% of their buildings being constructed in traditional architectural style. Banana plantations and abandoned farmland are evident and the remains of a large wealthy landowner's building. There are shops in Ta Kwu Ling and Ling Ma Hang
- 211 In addition, there is an abandoned lead mine at Lin Ma Ha that has some potential for visitation. The MacIntosh Castles (lookout posts), former Ghurkka patrols in the area, and border issues provide an opportunity for historical tours with an interesting flavour.

#### **4.4.2.2 Setting**

- 212 This area is scenically very attractive. Some farming still occurs and much remnant farmland exists. The villages are still largely intact, with many of the older buildings either still in use or structurally sound. Visitors can appreciate the traditional lifestyle of the region as well as the cultural heritage of the area. In addition, proximity to mainland China presents a contrast to the rural feeling of the region.
- 213 Access to the FCA is restricted. Unless and until access restrictions are eased, little or no tourism activity can occur. It is for this reason that Recommendations 19 has been identified. These recommendations provide a means of allowing limited access to occur in a controlled manner.
- 214 Access inside the FCA is moderate to strong but only if one includes walking and cycling. The patrol road along the border is sealed and provides an ideal opportunity for bicycle tours. A limited number of hiking trails exist, but none connect the villages.

#### **4.4.2.3 Site**

- 215 The area has the potential to develop a critical mass of recreational and cultural heritage assets. One could spend a day in a vehicle or bicycle exploring the villages and traditional farm life. One could probably spend a weekend doing gentle village to village walks (providing trails were provided). Further, opportunities exist to link natural (west) and cultural heritage (east) assets to create an appealing day or overnight destination.
- 216 At present, visitor numbers are negligible.

#### **4.4.2.4 Asset Quality**

- 217 Because of its status as a closed area, this corridor has avoided the types of urbanization and industrialization that have altered much of the amenity of other parts of the Northern New Territories. It is relatively unspoiled and retains much of its traditional character. The area evokes memories of Hong Kong's pre-colonial past, the peace and quiet of village life and provides a contrast to urban life, which is visible across the border.

#### 4.4.2.5 Tourism Product Potential and Markets

- 218 The area has significant potential for international and domestic visitors. The area east of Lo Wu offers a very different experience to anything found in Hong Kong. Providing access issues can be resolved, a wide range of outdoor recreation, bicycle tours, village to village rambles, self guided exploration and guided tours can be provided. In addition, the cultural heritage of the area can be interpreted and presented to visitors.
- 219 The greatest appeal of the area is that its essential character has remained largely unchanged. Any future tourism activity must be managed to retain the traditional character of the area, including limiting the vehicular access, new building construction, the destruction of farmlands urbanization and industrialization.



Village in the FCA

#### 4.4.2.6 Stakeholder Issues

- 220 Like most of the Northern New Territories, there is a small remnant aged population. Further detailed community consultation is required before tourism is developed.
- 221 The provision of overnight accommodation for tourists, using existing village houses or converting and refurbishing abandoned structures, is proposed. Ownership is often vested in non residents, with many landowners living outside of Hong Kong. Support of these people is clearly essential to the expansion of tourism activity.

#### **4.4.2.7 People Skills and Financial Resources**

222 As discussed elsewhere, it is unlikely that the small resident population or absentee landowners have the necessary skills to provide quality tourism experiences. The achievement of the tourism potential of the area, therefore, will be reliant on non local professionals.

#### **4.4.2.8 Overall Assessment**

223 The area has moderate to high tourism potential for specialized types of activities, such as guided bicycle or walking tours and heritage tours. In addition, opportunities exist to provide heritage-style accommodation. However, it is recommended that visitation levels be kept low.

224 Physical and administrative access is the most immediate obstacle to development and unless that barrier can be overcome no tourism activity will occur. Opportunities exist to follow the model for access into Mai Po Nature Reserve, whereby floating permits can be allocated to tour operators to take a limited number of tourists into the FCA.

225 In addition, some infrastructure development will be needed, such as the construction of a bicycle bridge or under-path near Lo Wu, or the development of hiking trails linking villages.

#### **4.4.2.9 Vision**

- To establish the region for small scale, specialized tourism focusing on cultural heritage, traditional agriculture and active nature based tourism
- Given current access restrictions, to limit use to organized tour groups for day trips and overnight trips.
- Note: this area has high tourism potential for small scale, up market activities. Visitor numbers should remain low and access to the general public should remain restricted in order to retain the essential character of the region.

### 4.4.3 Sha Tau Kok



#### 4.4.3.1 Description

226 Sha Tau Kok was most adversely affected by the return of Hong Kong to China. Prior to 1997, it was a vibrant market community with broad access provided from the Mainland. Access by Mainland Chinese has been restricted since the Handover to Chung Ying Street. As a result, Sha Tau Kok has entered a period of prolonged economic decline. Many shops in the town are empty, especially close to the pier and in the former downtown core. The population is reported to have declined from 20,000 to a current level of about 6000.

227 Chung Ying Street is the area's unique feature. The Sino-British Agreement in 1898 split Sha Tau Kok Village but allowed indigenous villagers of both sides freedom of movement across the Sino-British boundary - now the Shenzhen-Hong Kong boundary - at Chung Ying Street. The 250m-long street is an open international boundary without any physical barriers. Instead, the boundary is designated solely by a few granite marker stones.

#### 4.4.3.2 Setting

228 Sha Tau Kok has two possible roles to play in tourism in the Northern New Territories:

- an access and supply point to the outer islands and the more remote parts of the study region. High-speed water taxis can provide access to most of the outer islands and Lai Chi Wo in 10 to 15 minutes.
- developing the village itself as a shopping and day trip destination for Hong Kongers and Mainland Chinese.



229 Sha Tau Kok is a modern town with basic services and infrastructure. For the most part, there is little evidence of traditional or historic village houses. The Mainland side of the border is a thriving, modern and fast-growing urban centre. High rise apartment complexes, up market residential houses overlooking Starling Inlet, major tourist attractions including the Minsk aircraft carrier and the bustling container port of Yantian dominate the landscape. Sha Tau Kok, by contrast, appears to be a sleepy hamlet that has missed out on much of the development across the Frontier.

230 Chung Ying St typifies the disparity between the Hong Kong SAR and mainland Chinese sides of the border. The Mainland side of the street contains large, multi-story shops selling a variety of jewellery and electronic goods. The Hong Kong side of the street, on the other hand, consists largely of aging single or double story buildings with small shops offering basic supplies and a much narrower variety of poor quality goods.



Chung Ying Street

231 Access is the critical issue for this area. It is situated inside the FCA, which precludes most Hong Kong residents from entering the community. New access restrictions since the Handover allow Mainland visitors to enter Chung Ying Street but not to enter the Hong Kong side of the village proper. Indeed, many Mainland shoppers were observed having their picture taken at the frontier. Any prospect of future economic growth depends on addressing the access restrictions.

232 A 500 m long pier abutting the border juts into Sha Tau Kok Hoi (Starling Inlet). This pier is currently being rebuilt, with renovation scheduled for completion in 2005. It is currently an under-utilised resource which could become the focal point for water based access to outer islands and the east coast of the study area.

233 Sha Tau Kok Hoi is a shallow tidal inlet with mangrove stands, and an extensive aquaculture industry. The water quality appears rather poor and the sea has a foul odour.



Sha Tau Kok border crossing

#### 4.4.3.3 Site

234 The community is a relatively modern village. Unlike many of the smaller, abandoned or near abandoned villages, much of the traditional architecture has been replaced by modern style shops, village houses and apartment complexes and at present, this area has little unique to offer to tourists.

235 Visitation levels are currently low, primarily because of access restrictions imposed by both Hong Kong and mainland China.

#### 4.4.3.4 Tourism Product Potential and Markets

236 Unless and until access restrictions can be resolved, little tourism activity will occur. Providing access can be facilitated, Sha Tau Kok could play two roles:

- It can become the supply and access point for tourism to the outer islands and to the coastal regions of the mainland. The pier will be the focal point for this activity. Regular ferry service, high-speed water taxis, tour boats and supply boats can provide a range of services and products to tourists. Recommendation 14 of the following chapter outlines how the pier could be developed as a tourism access node, while maintaining the overall integrity of the FCA.
- The village itself has some potential to become a shopping and dining day trip destination, primarily for the Mainland Chinese accessing from the mainland side of the Frontier. Its remote location from major tourism nodes in Hong Kong will make it difficult to compete effectively against other established shopping areas, such as Stanley. However, the high volume of Mainland visitors, coupled with the high population density across the border provides many opportunities for Sha Tau Kok to serve this market. This would need a major upgrading of facilities.

#### 4.4.3.5 Stakeholder Issues

237 As several newspaper reports and consultation with the village representatives indicate, the community is very supportive of endeavours that would revitalize the local economy.

#### 4.4.3.6 Overall Assessment

238 Sha Tau Kok is different from any other part of the study area and, therefore, the range of tourism options will be different than the rest of the study area. It is an urban centre, whose tourism future relies on the provision of urban tourism opportunities, such as shopping and food services. In addition, its advantageous position coupled with strong infrastructure, positions it uniquely to be the service centre for the Northern New Territories. However, access restrictions exclude most people from visiting, thus effectively preventing the area from benefiting from tourism.

#### 4.4.3.7 Vision

- Sha Tau Kok, potentially, has two roles to play:
  - a shopping and dining destination in its own right, serving primarily the Mainland visitor
  - the access and service centre for tourism to the outer islands
- Note: Unless and until access restrictions can be liberalized, this area has little tourism potential

