



the New Territories, from there towards Hong Kong harbour and Hong Kong Island then back north towards Shek Kong. A flight down the harbour at 500 feet, way beneath the tops of the skyscrapers, is spectacular.

The club is blessed with highly skilled and experienced staff. CFI Captain SK Gupta has 51 years flying under his belt, including four wars. He flew for the Indian, the Iraqi ("before Saddam"), and the Singaporean Air Forces and for Singapore Airlines (SIA). He set up SIA's first training college and went on to train Malaysian cadets and RAAF pilots in Australia. His vast experience is evident throughout the club. Since his arrival, he has implemented several initiatives including training courses. He organises three ground school courses a year to bring students up to their PPL level. The syllabus is similar to that of the UK CAA, as is the RT. He says: "I love to share my passion for flying with students. The greatest reward and satisfaction comes from helping students coming up through the ranks."

Helicopter pilots benefit from DCFI(H) Captain John Li, a retired accountant and passionate aviator, who is also regional vice chairman of GAPAN. He has been instrumental in bringing recreational helicopter flying to Hong Kong. The club took delivery of its first R22 in 2003. He explains his

**Left: Hong Kong instructors (from left) Kenny Choi, Capt SK Gupta, and John Li**  
**Below: the offices of the local air cadets are right next door**



## Hong Kong heroes

*The flying is sweet and the rules are sour. Thanks to the kindness of the Hong Kong Aviation Club, Liz Moscrop enjoys a nourishing Chinese takeaway*

Think GA's got it tough in the UK? The Hong Kong Aviation Club (HKAC) would love to have some of our problems. Unless you are a member of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) or Government Flying Service, flying with the HKAC is the only way to fly smaller aircraft in Hong Kong. And despite the fact you can only fly light fixed wing aircraft at the weekends from Shek Kong airfield in the New Territories near the border with China, are restricted to a fairly small geographical area and have to deal with weather extremes, there is a thriving GA scene in the Fragrant Harbour. The upsides are, of

course, that most VFR flying offers stunning views, the club members are passionate about their hobby and the club consists of highly intelligent and motivated people, ten percent of whom are very active. And helicopter pilots can also fly during the week from the famous old Kai Tak Airport.

Flying isn't cheap (fuel tax is astronomical Hong Kong), with rates for a C152, for example, starting at around HK\$2,000 (£140) an hour. However, you do get to experience the magnificent views of Hong Kong from the air. A typical sight-seeing flight will take you from Shek Kong out to the east around the coast of

motivation: "When the student learns, we learn. We train around 20 fixed wing pilots per year and qualify around one helicopter pilot per month." Of the 100 helicopter pilots at the club, some 60-70 have been trained in house to PPL level.

There are 300 full HKAC members, all of whom are pilots, divided between fixed wing and helicopters at a ratio of roughly two to one. The club owns eight fixed wing aircraft, a Cessna 182, three Cessna 172s, two Cessna 152s and a Slingsby Firefly, plus five Robinson R22s, two R44s two Eurocopter EC120s and one Eurocopter EC145 twin. Since the club does not have an AOC to do commercial work, it is restricted to training and hiring the aircraft to members.

The HKAC enjoys good relations with the PLA. Li explains: "Last December there was a change of commander at Shek Kong. He has already liaised with us and we had a nice dinner together." He also alludes to potentially forging relationships with clubs over the border in Shenzhen; however, GA is such a fledgling industry in China that there are very few





**Top: on the infamous 'checkerboard' approach to 13 at Kai Tak**  
**Above: Chek Lap Kok took over from Kai Tak ten years ago in July**  
**Right: Wan Chai, one of the busiest commercial areas of Hong Kong**  
**Below: Victoria Harbour, close to the perimeter of Kai Tak**



private pilots. That said, here are positive indicators for growth as wealth increases in China and the restrictions on airspace slowly relax.

### Flying in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China, so its airspace, like that of the Mainland, is controlled by the military. This means that there are strict regulations governing all flying and GA pilots must be cleared by the PLA. The club recommends that any foreigner wishing to fly in Hong Kong allows one month's notice in which to have his or her passport checked and obtain permission to fly. If you wish to pay a visit, there is a downloadable form on the club's website.

Several years ago I had a lovely flight from Shek Kong, and since I was visiting this February, I had a spur-of-the-moment idea to go and fly with them again and report back to GA readers just how good it is. I contacted Captain Gupta, who was more than accommodating, but unfortunately could not arrange for me to go in one of the club's Cessnas for the reasons outlined above. Instead, he kindly offered me a "trial lesson" with an instructor in one of the club's R22's so I could get pictures with which to tempt you to see them.

If you are ever in Hong Kong, it is well worth doing so. Says John Li: "We are AOPA members and would welcome other AOPA members from the UK. Casual visitors can fly with the club in two ways, but we have to arrange these well in advance. For non-members, even the local general public, we provide trial flights on both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. For licensed pilots coming in for a longer time we can offer overseas temporary membership for up to three months with no entrance fee, as they would be club members flying club aircraft. The Hong Kong Civil Aviation Department is happy so long as



pilots have an ICAO licence and a valid medical current in their own country – you don't need to convert."

I flew with the club's full time helicopter instructor Kenny Choi, a local pilot who had trained in the US. We were lucky with the weather. To fly in Victoria Harbour the minimum cloudbase should be 2000 ft agl, with 5km in sight of the surface. Hong Kong had been cold and muggy for several weeks previously and we were blessed with a clear sunny day. We took off from Kai Tak and flew down Victoria Harbour past the famous Hong Kong skyline to Green Island, which is one of the main transit reporting points. We turned south down the East Lamma channel to do a quick tour of Hong Kong Island itself, taking in the sights of Aberdeen, Stanley and (my personal favourite) Shek O en route.

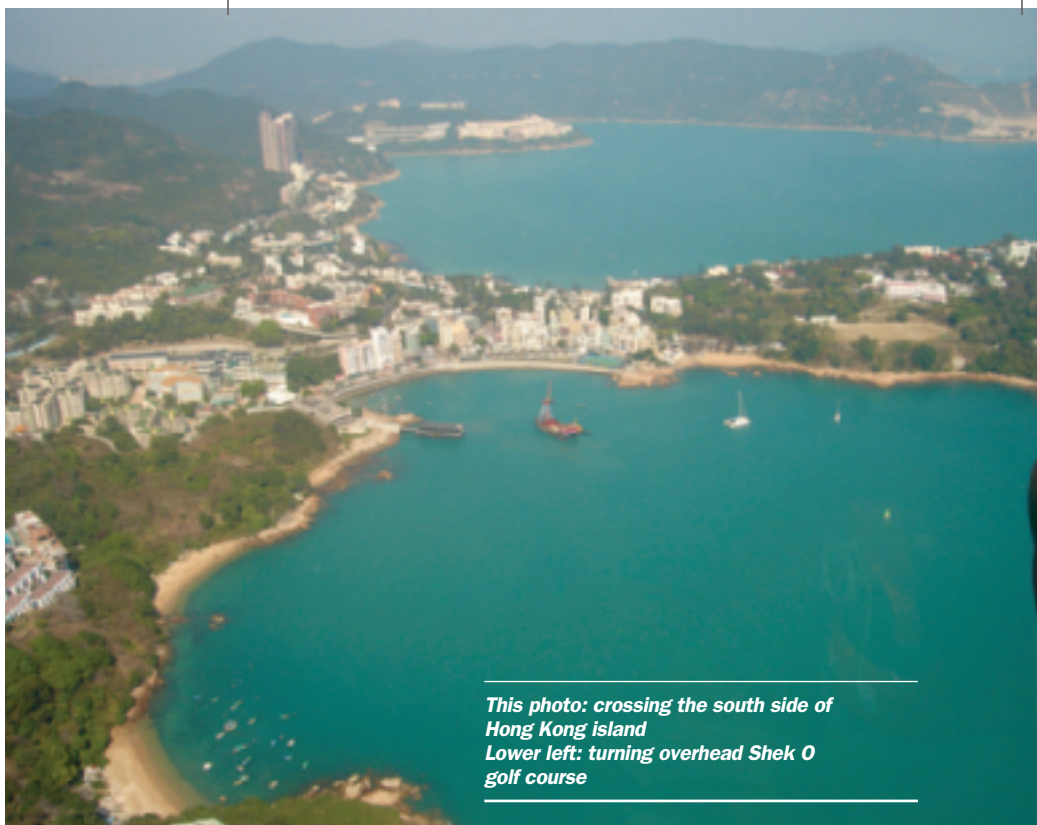
Because flying privileges are so hard won, the club is deeply protective of its rights. The HKAC expects pilots to fly sufficiently often to remain current with aircraft operation and local



procedures and applies recency requirements. Pilots are considered out of recency if they have not flown a minimum of one hour within a period of 45 days and have to fly a dual check with an instructor. All pilots also have to have a dual annual flight review. This means that everyone, regardless of experience or status, flies with a club instructor at least once per year.

There are only ten one and a half hour fixed wing slots at the weekend, so in order for the flying programme to run to schedule, pilots absolutely must turn up on time. If they do not do this, their aircraft is reallocated to another member and they are fined HK\$600 (£38). Runway use is restricted to three fixed wing aircraft and three helicopters south of runway 11 in the circuit and anyone turning up at Shek Kong has to be booked in and out at the main gate.

Pilots in the tropics contend with different weather issues. Apart from thunderstorms that can blow windows out of skyscrapers, on a regular day at Chek Lap Kok, windshear can get to as high as 30 knots in sea breeze, which usually sets in from the west. There are constant weather updates at Shek Kong. When there is thunderstorm activity in the area, apart



*This photo: crossing the south side of Hong Kong Island  
Lower left: turning overhead Shek O golf course*



offered flights to children and on to the Zuhai Airshow. (See the August 2006 issue of *General Aviation*).

They are both fiercely dedicated to the club and frustrated by some of the restrictions they face. There are no nav aids at Shek Kong, so training for now must stop at PPL level. Gupta points out that there is a large usable runway outside the clubhouse. At least 2,000ft of the old Kai Tak runway is still in situ, though there are plans to develop it into a new shopping centre – just what Hong Kong needs. Despite these annoyances, the spirit of HKAC is

evidently strong. As I left, Gupta introduced me to a couple of long serving members who had popped into the bar for lunch. There were cadets milling around the office next door and the clubhouse is obviously well-used. Seems those bulldozers would have to break more than concrete if they want to decimate VHHH. ■

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from the possibility of severe turbulence, heavy rain can rapidly and drastically reduce visibility.

**Activities**

Given that HKSAR airspace is so restricted, and it is costly and time consuming to fly elsewhere (a hop into China would set you back some US\$2,000 (£1,000) per time and you must have permission to fly there), the club is constantly finding ways to keep its members flying. It has initiated schemes to attract young members, such as “The Spirit of Hong Kong” Youth Flying Scholarship it arranged last year. Open to young people age 17 to 30, the scheme offered 20 recipients the opportunity to take a basic private pilot licence (PPL) theory course as well as sponsoring individual flight training up to 11 hours in fixed wing aircraft.

Captains Gupta and Li organise formation flying, treasure hunts and picnics. Says Li: “We have arranged treasure hunts with easy orienteering and a picnic in May, which is a good time to fly – and when we do something like a spot landing competition, this means the members have to fly regularly to practise.” Gupta adds: “We also do formation flying and aerobatic training, plus we have organised rallies to the Zuhai Airshow, which were a great success. Last time we took four aircraft and one helicopter.” They took this a stage further and promoted GA education to children in Mainland China. This involved flying from Shek Kong to Chek Lap Kok to Zuhai and then on to Luding and Yangjiang, where members



**The day I banged out of my Hunter...**

Captain Gupta is a living legend. Despite the fact he’s into his seventies, he is a display pilot at the Zuhai Airshow and a driving force behind the club’s success today. A Martin-Baker tie wearer, he flew in the Indian Air Force Squadron Number 7, probably the only unit to have flown both in the Eastern and Western theatres during the Bangladesh War. On 3rd December 1971 the Pakistan Air Force struck many Indian Air Force (IAF) airfields on India’s western border in a surprise attack, causing widespread damage. The IAF retaliated and Gupta’s Hunter Squadron joined the coordinated attack on East Pakistan. On one of the missions his Hunter was hit by ground fire. He ejected safely in an enemy area and later flew his squadron to the Western Sector, attacking Pakistani strategic targets. In an interesting personal note for me, I had one of those ‘six degrees of separation’ moments when I spoke to him. It turns out he knew my partner’s father, who also flew for the IAF in the Bangladesh War.