

It's business (and fun) as usual

When Machiavelli wrote "Entrepreneurs are simply those who understand there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to their advantage", he could well have been referring to Hong Kong's big corporate names. This year, key co-sponsor Cathay Pacific has opted for a theme "the fun is back", and it sums up the current zeitgeist. A handful of key corporates give **Robby Nimmo** the low-down on the state of play in the city that bounces back like no other.

Kerry McGlynn
Special adviser to Cathay Pacific's corporate communications department

"The Hong Kong Sevens is a pretty good barometer of how the world economy is performing. The Sevens are a sell-out every year, but we can gauge how things are going globally by the number of overseas packages we sell. We've sold out our quota for 2010 so that's a good sign things are on the up and up. Our key markets have been Singapore, China, the UK and South Africa. Last year, our overseas package sales were down – and that told you something about the global financial crisis. But, as our Sevens TV commercials say: 'The fun is back!' So stand by for the party, Hong Kong."

Kai Nargolwala
CEO of Credit Suisse, Asia Pacific

"There's more investor interest than ever in Hong Kong, China and Asia, demonstrated by the record attendance at the Credit Suisse Asian Investment Conference this week. This is our 13th year of sponsoring the world's greatest sevens. Each year, it gets better. Hong Kong has proved itself resilient in the face of the financial crisis and we are expecting over 4 per cent growth in 2010. Domestic demand and exports are in much better shape, employment levels are set to improve and China looks set to see another year of solid growth. After all the hard work our clients put into meeting companies and analysing future investment trends and ideas, the Sevens is a perfect tonic to relax and enjoy a world-class sporting event."

Nicholas Brooke
Chairman, Professional Property Services Group

"Hong Kong has shown remarkable resilience during the past two years, buffered by growing links with the mainland, bouncing back quicker than most economies. The property sector continues to be a major focus with residential values increasing by an average of 30 per cent and more

last year. I have lived in Hong Kong since the late 1970s and witnessed five major property surges and major corrections. Despite the peaks and troughs, I have only missed three Sevens. It's a great institution – great for rugby and for Hong Kong."

Hamish Tyrwhitt
Managing director, Leighton Asia Limited

"Leighton has had a spectacular year after navigating through the financial crisis, emerging in better shape in all aspects than when we entered the storm. We have been incredibly successful across our business and had significant upswing and growth, with much expansion into emerging markets. As a result of that success, we hosted a Sevens box for the first time last year, having increased our business fourfold in the 12 months prior to that. Leighton Asia's positive growth story has continued over the past year. The Sevens is the perfect way to celebrate."

Noah Ward
Chief operating officer, Deutsche Bank Hong Kong

"The entire banking industry looks forward to the Hong Kong Sevens each year regardless of the economic climate. It's a great mix of sport and business."

Corporate boxes still the hottest ticket in town

The finance sector is well represented in the stadium during the weekend. Each year, the boxes are hotly contested by Hong Kong's corporate titans, who know there is no better platform for networking and getting together with clients and colleagues. "Our sales for boxes have been very strong this year, with all hospitality boxes and Jade Club packages sold out in October last year," says tournament director Warrick Dent (pictured). "The renewal rate was very high, with approximately 95 per cent of last year's box holders renewing. We are fortunate to have very strong support

Benjamin Hung
Chief executive officer and executive director, Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited

"The Sevens is more than a sporting event. It brings spirit. It brings tourism. It brings positivity. There are not many cities around the world which carry the resilience of Hong Kong. When you consider Nylon.kong (NY, London and Hong Kong featured recently on the cover of *Time* magazine), the 'Kong' component is clearly in the best shape of all."

Paul Hart
Executive director, Knight Frank

"One of the best barometers to gauge the health of our economy is the property sector. A well supported property market indicates that businesses are thriving and employment prospects are strong. Much of Hong Kong's current prosperity has to do with our closer economic ties with China. Investment banks, which are significant users of prime offices, are benefiting from capital raising opportunities north of the boundary. In our luxury residential sector, mainland purchasers are reported to constitute 18 per cent of buyers. My property tip for 2010 and beyond is, *xue xi pu tong hua* – learn Mandarin!

not only from our box holders, but also with our event sponsors. "Our co-title sponsors – Cathay Pacific and Credit Suisse – along with our official sponsors – Coca-Cola, EMC, Kukri, Guinness, Telstra International – continue their support.

"A very conservative estimate is the Hong Kong Sevens injects US\$40 million into the Hong Kong economy, although this doesn't include figures relating to the many corporate events and hospitality during the week. The real figure is probably far greater."

Sam Farrands
Partner head of projects, Minter Ellison law firm

"In tough times, the Hong Kong government is building itself out of recession. Our clients are in the enviable position of having a large amount of work in hand and significant opportunities down the track. The MTR's and the government's large infrastructure projects that were put to market late last year are starting to be awarded. Macau, the industry's saviour years ago, then culprit after, is now also coming back. It's almost the perfect storm for the construction industry, which is great for our clients and sets a great mood for the 2010 Sevens."

Robert Gazz
Markets leader, PricewaterhouseCoopers Hong Kong

"For over 30 years, PricewaterhouseCoopers has had a corporate box at the Sevens to entertain clients and our staff. Our commitment to the Sevens is testament to the value it brings everyone involved. It's a highlight on the calendar. We've noticed a stronger demand in 2010 for tickets from people in Hong Kong and around the world, which reflects positively on the improving local and global economic environment. The Sevens will remain a popular and much revered sporting event in Hong Kong."

Caroline Darcy
Head of sponsorship, UBS

"While I am not an economist, the vigour with which corporate Hong Kong participates in the Sevens is usually a pretty accurate indicator of economic health. UBS has been a partner of the Hong Kong national teams since 1996 and, over that period the popularity of rugby at all levels in the local community has increased exponentially. The Sevens is one of the most high-profile events in the region. This year – our 15th as a partner to the HKRFU national teams – we have launched our most ambitious rugby sponsorship activation to date."



Hong Kong's bars are the hallowed halls of après Sevens fun. Not just for 40,000 fans, but also for former and current players. Since the Sevens' inception in 1976, the nightlife has shone a ubiquitous Hong Kong neon light on the whole shebang. After a day of hardcore rugby, make sure you pace yourself. Just remember, players play hard and have more stamina than us mere mortals, says **Robby Nimmo**

VICTOR UBOGU
Former England prop (24 caps) and a regular Sevens visitor

I first came to the Sevens in 1995. In those days, I'd head to Lan Kwai Fong and then on to Joe Bananas until daybreak with a huge group of mates. We'd order endless trays of vodka jellies, tequila, Slippery Nibbles and Springboks. Named after the South African team, this concoction features Crème de Menthe and South African Amarula. It tastes a lot like a mint Aero chocolate bar. Then I'd sleep and head to the stadium to do it all over again. I admit, I am one of the Sevens revelers who has sometimes made it to the stadium just in time for the semis and the final.

These days, we usually arrive on the Wednesday and kick off with dinner at the West Villa Chinese Restaurant in Lee Gardens, then on to the Devil's Advocate, bar-hopping in Wan Chai and finally ending up in Dusk Till Dawn. One year, five long-legged stunning Russian girls breezed in, ordered five flaming Lamborghinis, downing them one by one and breezed right out – what a stunning sight! One year after touching down, I was followed by a coach load of Chinese kids who thought I was Mike Tyson!

BUDDHA HANDY
Former Wallaby and popular MC at Hong Kong rugby events

I am a big fan of what Nick Farr-Jones refers to as 'the third half of the game'. This is the term for the off-pitch shenanigans of a rugby crowd, the camaraderie, the banter... and the bars.

A night out starts with Jello shots, Frog skulls, Green Chartreuse shots rounded off with a couple of Bacardi Breezers on the eternally excavated footpath at the Devil's Advocate. Being outside 'Devils' is like standing down at the front of the old stadium pre-1994, where all of the rugby world circled the field to say 'g'day' and have a jug of beer or pimmis with old and new mates.

Then I head to Joe Banana's for an 'uncle mery' and then Dusk Till Dawn with the desperates and the best music in town. In the real old days, we'd head downstairs to The Dickens bar in the Excelsior with former English prop Gareth 'Coochie' Chilcott, John and David Hall and the Gulliver's Group leaders. It was fantastic for a singalong until Wan Chai warmed up! Lovely! Go you good thing.

JUSTIN SAMPSON
Commentator and regular MC at Sevens events

Don't even try to keep up, and remember the mantra: 'One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor'. I always dance on the bar at Carnegies, it's a

good strong bar made to support rugby players. I'll dance to anything by Tom Jones, especially *Delliah*, which I love hearing at the stadium every year when everyone gets up and does the actions. It's kind of like the Hong Kong Sevens own version of the Mexican wave.

I also frequent the Devil's Advocate, to honour one of the owners at the time, Stevie Speirs, a fantastic Scotsman who was killed in the Bali bombing in October 2002. I am also partial to Dublin Jack in Lan Kwai Fong. There's nothing in the world like the bars in Hong Kong during Sevens time.

GORDON TIETJENS
New Zealand sevens coach and former player

I am known to keep my team on a pretty tight leash. When Eric Rush was still in the team, he used to say he was the only 40-year-old who wasn't allowed to eat ice-cream after his meal, even if he ate all of his vegetables. In recent years, with the Adelaide Sevens falling straight after the Hong Kong Sevens, I've had to keep a pretty tight rein on the team. This year, I might loosen it just a little as the Adelaide Sevens is before Hong Kong. Might.

But of course, New Zealand has had some sensational wins over the years, and how could we not celebrate?

Joe Bananas has been the stuff of legend in the team, and the rookies always hear about this and the Hong Kong Sevens in the same breath. It's a veritable institution and is popular with other visiting sports teams, not just rugby players.

JOHN BENTLEY
AKA "Bentos" the former England winger and regular sevens circuit speaker

I always say that in Hong Kong, I never really go to bed, I just go 24/7... from speaking engagements to the stadium, and for some reason I seem to gravitate towards Wan Chai. I was at the closing of the old Fenwicks last year, and look forward to seeing the new one [now called Escape]. I'll drop into The Doghouse too and I have to confess I like Neptunes. I met some mates at 3am there once and the next thing I knew it was 8am.

Time just disappears like that in Hong Kong. It's my favourite, favourite place on the planet. I've done the trip to the Hong Kong Sevens many times, it's one of the greatest rugby experiences ever.

I played in South Africa with the Lions in 1997 and went there with them in 2005 and 2009 in an ambassadorial role. It was very emotional each time, but still doesn't compare to the Sevens, which is by far the most intense rugby experience you can have.

I will be outside of the Devil's Advocate doing my famous party trick of drinking a pint of Guinness upside down while doing a handstand. Every year I'll go through hoops to get back to Hong Kong.

ERIC RUSH
Celebrated New Zealand veteran of 18 sevens in Hong Kong, and regular guest speaker

I've made my annual pilgrimage many times to the Bull and Bear to get in the mood and then I head to Joe Bananas.

The players' function after the Sevens is always a riot, too. Titch [Gordon Tietjens] is a strict coach. When he came on board in the early 1990s, hitting the bars got knocked on the head.

I remember the old China Jump. They were serving jelly shots out of girl's bellybuttons one year. Our eyes were popping out of our heads! Titch ripped us out of there after about five minutes.

Bars like Post 97, California and Al's Diner in LKF were already operating when I first came to Hong Kong around 20 years ago, and they're still in full Sevens swing today. I remember in the early 1990s walking into Post 97 one night. The ceiling was black with all these exposed pipes. I couldn't miss them because hanging upside down from them was [Australian Wallaby] Simon Poidevan and the Scottish player, John Jefferies. They had their shirts off and were dancing. They looked like a couple of hyperactive bats. It brought the house down with laughter.

Actually, I don't drink; I just like to watch all the action. Some say I can get into enough trouble without drinking! And hey, someone has got to keep an eye on the boys.

PETER WHEELER
Chief executive of the Leicester Tigers, former Lion, England and sevens player

There's always been a great sense of occasion and camaraderie around the Sevens, in the stadium and in the bars. The last time I was in Hong Kong, I really enjoyed some of the hotel bars in Central for the quiet repose. But over the years, like a lot of Sevens fans, I've had some great times in Joe Bananas. Like many I've gone from the bar to the stadium. I confess I've dressed up in 'Desperate Dan' T-shirts and worn a sampan hat. The event brings out everyone's sense of fun.

Hong Kong has such a unique environment, it's an intriguing place. Apart from the bars, I like to soak up the atmosphere and just wander the back streets. I love heading down to Stanley market then have a quiet beer on the waterfront.