

Hong Kong - Transiting with Firearms and/or Ammunition

As it is possible that many participants in the IPSC Handgun World Shoot XV will need to transit Hong Kong with firearms and/or ammunition on their way to Bali, I thought it would be worthwhile writing an article to explain local laws and handling procedures, so that your transit through Hong Kong will hopefully be smooth and uneventful.

Firstly, what does Hong Kong law define as "Arms & Ammunition"? I'm sure you'll be surprised to learn that many "BB" pellet guns, spear-fishing guns and even empty cases qualify.

Secondly, how can you legally transit Hong Kong with firearms and/or ammunition ? Well, strictly speaking, you need an Import License and an Export License issued by the Hong Kong Trade & Industry Department. However I believe that my past representations to the Security Branch of the Hong Kong Government (the top of the security tree above both the Hong Kong Police and the Hong Kong Customs), have been successful, because recent experiences have shown that **provided** you are:

(1) A *bona fide* transit passenger, who is only stopping in Hong Kong to change aircraft, or

(2) A person intending to visit Hong Kong for a few days, but you surrender your firearms and/or ammunition to Hong Kong Customs immediately on arrival;

-:an Import License and Export License is generally **not** required.

However there are certain preparations you should take prior to your departure from the airport at which you board your flight to Hong Kong:

Transit Passengers:

It is **absolutely essential** that you declare your firearms & ammunition to the staff at the check-in desk at the airport **each time you board a flight to Hong Kong**, and insist that **they fly as secure baggage** to Hong Kong, even if they are tagged by the airline through to Bali or another airport.

Customs hate surprises ! If they know your firearms are coming, no problem. In Hong Kong **all transit baggage is x-rayed**, so don't even think about not declaring your firearms and/or ammunition prior to your departure.

Also ensure you keep a copy of your domestic firearms and/or ammunition license and a photocopy of your Indonesian firearms permit with you at all times in your back pocket or carry-on baggage, just in case you need to present them to Customs. The Indonesian permit will be sent to your Regional Director, but you should obtain a copy prior to embarking upon your travels.

On arrival at Hong Kong Airport, you will change aircraft within the same terminal building and, if your connecting flight departs within 2 hours, it's likely your baggage will be transferred by ground handling staff, without the need for your involvement.

However, if your connecting flight is scheduled to depart more than 2hours after your arrival flight, you may be paged in the transit lounge and asked to accompany security personnel to the airport tarmac in order to personally identify your bag containing the firearms or ammunition prior to it being temporarily transferred to the Customs armoury in the passenger terminal.

This glitch arises because there is no armoury on the tarmac, and the authorities are only willing to guard your guns in open view for 2 hours or less.

If it's deemed necessary to move your firearms, two or more members of the elite Hong Kong Police Airport Security Unit may be present on the tarmac. **Do not be alarmed** at their presence or at them holding MP5s. They're not there to shoot or intimidate you; they merely need to secure your baggage pending transfer on-board your departing flight !!

In any case, this should be a smooth and uneventful operation and it's unlikely you will be given any

grief, apart from being asked a few pertinent questions. However if there happens to be a rookie on duty when you arrive, he may get excited and want to find out whether somebody is "smuggling" firearms and/or ammunition through Hong Kong.

This can happen anywhere in the world, so just stay calm and deal with the situation as cooperatively as possible. You're not a criminal or a terrorist, so don't act like one !

Of course once you arrive in Bali, our dear friends from the Indonesian Practical Shooting Association will be waiting for you in the arrivals area, and they will be delighted to assist you with local customs clearance formalities, in their usual friendly and efficient manner.

Visitors to Hong Kong:

For visitors to Hong Kong, the drill is essentially the same, except that since you are intending to stay in Hong Kong for a few days, you must surrender your firearms and/or ammunition to Customs on arrival. These very same rules apply in respect of firearm parts and magazines, but holsters and other such accessories are usually not an issue.

However if you are in doubt about any item, then declare it to Customs, who will be happy to guide you accordingly.

Now as I presume most of you intending to visit Hong Kong will probably do so **after** the competition, you will not need your ammunition, so I suggest you lawfully dispose of it (or shoot it !) in Indonesia before you leave. The reason for this is that if you bring your unused ammunition (or empty cases) to Hong Kong, each and every round (and empty case), will need to be counted by you and checked by Customs when you surrender them, and this is a laborious task. Enough said ? :-)

Next I strongly advise you to place your firearms in a small pistol box or bag inside your luggage, because Customs do not have a very large armoury at HK airport, so it will be far easier if you can remove and surrender a small pistol case or bag to them, instead of a whole suitcase. Once again, the same rules apply for firearm parts & magazines.

If you followed my earlier advice about declaring your firearms to airline staff at the check-in desk at the airport at which you board your flight to Hong Kong **and** you insist they go as secure baggage **and** if the airline does their job properly, when you arrive at Hong Kong your suitcase containing your firearms will be escorted by security staff and Customs from the aircraft directly to the **Customs Duty Officer**, who is situated **directly opposite baggage carousel number 9** inside the terminal.

However if, by chance, your suitcase containing firearms just happens to "pop out" on the baggage carousel with your other baggage, this means that the airline screwed up, for which they (not you!) will receive a heavy fine.

Should this occur, immediately retrieve and secure your firearms suitcase from the carousel, and go immediately to the Customs Duty Officer opposite baggage carousel number 9, and tell them exactly what happened. They will probably thank you for being so responsible by securing your firearms and coming straight to them, after which they will merrily go beat the doo-doo out of the airline which allowed this major gaff (for Hong Kong) to happen.

Anyway, one way or another, you and your firearms have now arrived at the Customs Duty Office. Just inform the officer on duty that you wish to spend a few days in Hong Kong, and you wish to surrender your firearms to him, pending re-export on whatever flight and date you plan to leave Hong Kong (have this information available).

He will take you into a nearby examination room (for privacy to avoid brandishing firearms in front of other passengers), he will inspect your firearms and other bits and pieces, he will ask you to complete a **Surrender Form** and an **Authorisation Form**, on which the make, model, calibre and serial numbers of your firearms will be recorded, and he will then give you an official receipt. There are no fees for this service or storage.

He will then lock your firearms in the armoury, after which you can exit through the normal Customs

channels with your "non-strategic" belongings, after which you can spend the next few days boosting our local economy.

Welcome to Hong Kong, the "City of Life" !! If you see Jackie Chan, say "Hi" for me :-)

A word of warning: corruption is virtually non-existent in Hong Kong, so don't even joke about giving **any** official a tip or gift. The Hong Kong Customs and the Hong Kong Police, are arguably the finest and cleanest in the world, and they will be **very, very upset** if you try anything stupid like **attempting to give them a bribe**, and the penalties for doing so are very, very severe. Clear enough ?

By the way, if you do get arrested for attempted bribery, do not call me. You're a fool and I don't want to know you !

Anyway, when your credit card finally melts from too much shopping and fine dining, it will be time to leave our wonderful, exciting city.

Departing Hong Kong:

When you check-in for your flight out of Hong Kong, inform the airline staff at the normal check-in desk that you have firearms deposited with the Customs Duty Office in the Arrivals Hall, and give them the various documents you were given by Customs when you originally surrendered your firearms on your arrival at Hong Kong. Of course, before going to the airport, it is advisable to make a photocopy of these documents for your records.

The airline staff will weigh, tag and check-in your "non-strategic" suitcase, then they will get one of their colleagues to take your documents to Customs to retrieve your firearms.

Customs and your airline representative will make arrangements to escort your firearms to your outgoing aircraft prior to your departure, probably without any further involvement on your part.

However if you only surrendered a pistol case to Customs on arrival, this will need to be repacked into one of your suitcases, in which case you **may** be asked to accompany the airline staff to the Customs Duty Office in the arrival hall, to assist with this task.

Conclusion:

Yes, I realise these procedures are cumbersome, but I don't make the rules - I just know them and I want to share them with you, so that your visit through (or to) Hong Kong with firearms will be as smooth as possible.

I hope this article will help you to have an uneventful transit and/or a pleasant visit to Hong Kong but if you still have questions, email me on pinto@ipsc.org

I look forward to seeing you all again in sunny Bali !

**DVC,
Vince Pinto**