

# pearl river heliports

The Hong Kong and Macau Heliports provide a vital and fast connection between the two cities across the Pearl River estuary.

**Luigi Vallero** took a flight with Sky Shuttle to sample both.

**R**eputed to be Asia's most vibrant city and one of the most fascinating metropolises in the world, Hong Kong is one of several cities that dot the rich Guangdong and Pearl River Delta (PRD) region, along with Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Macau.

Located just 37 miles (60km) across the Pearl River estuary from Hong Kong, the once sleepy Portuguese enclave of Macau has evolved into a veritable 'Las Vegas of the Orient', with a growing number of casinos and resorts contributing substantially to the local economy. The two cities have always enjoyed strong economic ties, which have increased significantly in the last couple of decades. Now a 31 mile (50km) causeway is planned to be completed by the end of 2016, connecting the westernmost tip of Hong Kong's Lantau Island with Macau, considerably improving travel between the two. In the meantime most traffic continues to use ferries and, to a lesser extent, helicopter services, operating from the two cities' respective ferry terminals. These have evolved to become fully integrated multifunctional transport hubs.

In 2009-2010, a total of 15.7 million passengers travelled between Hong Kong and Macau, and also to other nearby ports

in the Guangdong Province, using the HK-Macau Ferry Terminal (HKFT). Although this figure had dropped by 5% compared

to the previous year, the terminal was still Hong Kong's busiest immigration check point among all harbour control points. Approximately 70% of the passengers (11 million) were Hong Kong residents, while the ratio of foreign or mainland China visitors has gradually increased.

The HKFT and its counterpart in Macau operate round-the-clock with up to 300 daily sailings between the two cities provided by different companies catering to all tastes and budgets.

#### **Hong Kong Heliport**

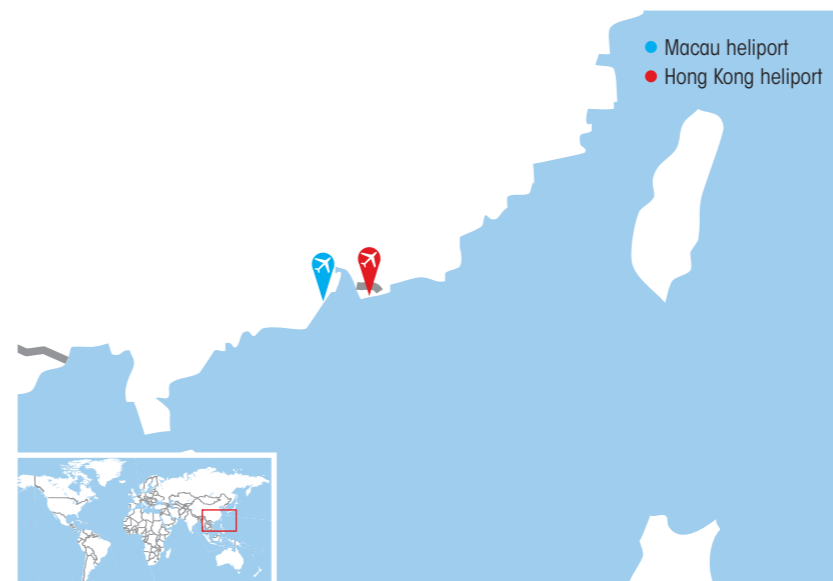
Located in Sheung Wan on Hong Kong Island, just west of the main business district, the HKFT is a comprehensive multifunctional maritime terminal and heliport, usually simply known as the Macau Ferry Terminal. The facility is actually part of the Shun Tak Centre, a major commercial complex easily identifiable by its two glass office towers trimmed in red, and is easily reachable from any point in

◀ Sky Shuttle  
Agusta Westland  
AW139 B-MHK  
comes in to land at  
the Shun Tak Heliport  
in Hong Kong.  
(Sky Shuttle)





The modern Sky Shuttle lounge offers plenty of amenities for waiting passengers.



Hong Kong International Airport was not a desirable proposition, because of its remote location from the city centre.

The Hong Kong Heliport Expansion Project was launched in April 2008, and Sky Shuttle Helicopters worked closely with a multi-disciplinary team of experts from HKSAR government departments, industry consultants and professional contractors. A new 138 x 138ft (42 x 42m) aluminium helipad was built over the eastern end of the pier, as well as a completely new passenger lounge and improved operational areas. Once the new helipad became operational, the original one was rebuilt as well, and links between the two were completed by October 2009, doubling the capacity of the heliport.

The substantial investments by Sky Shuttle meant that the previous 1,000sq ft (93m<sup>2</sup>) lounge had been superseded by a stylish and luxurious 6,000sq ft (557m<sup>2</sup>) one, bringing the passenger experience on the ground in line with the service provided in the air by a new fleet of 12-seat Agusta Westland AW139 helicopters. In

recognition of its efforts, Sky Shuttle has received several important accolades for the heliport (see table).

Sky Shuttle operates up to 54 scheduled daily round trips on the 15-minute ride to Macau, between 0900 and 2300, as well as private charter and sightseeing. Passengers can buy tickets at the Sky Shuttle counter inside the main ferry terminal building, and then proceed through immigration to the comfortable lounge located just below the two helipads. The heliport has no refuelling facilities, so helicopters are fuelled in Macau.

### Macau Heliport

On the other side of the Pearl River estuary, travellers are welcomed in the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal, also referred to in Portuguese as Terminal Marítimo do Porto Exterior, or more simply known as the Macau Ferry Terminal or Macau Maritime Terminal.

Located in the Porto Exterior (Outer Harbour) area of the Macau Peninsula, on the coastal Avenida da Amizade just a



▲ Sky Shuttle AW139 B-KHN awaits departure from the Macau Heliport; the rocky structure immediately behind it is one of the many attractions at the casino resorts. (All photos author unless stated)

Departure				
Operator	Trip No	Destination	Information	Sch Tim
TurboJET	CD807	Taipa, Macau	Scheduled	09:30
Sky Shuttle	EAA208B	Macau	Scheduled	09:30
TurboJET	JX802	Macau	Scheduled	09:50
TurboJET	J0103	Macau	Scheduled	10:00
TurboJET	CD808	Taipa, Macau	Scheduled	10:00
TurboJET	J0203	Macau	Scheduled	10:15
TurboJET	J0303	Macau	Scheduled	10:30

▲ The departure board in the HK-Macau Ferry Terminal displays both water and air departures.



▲ Part of the Hong Kong lounge offers splendid views across the water.

▲ One of the alternative TurboJET ferries.



the city, thanks to its connection with the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and the city's extensive bus, tram and taxi network.

Ferry services are mostly provided to Macau, and to a lesser extent to Shekou and Nansha, by TurboJET, Cotai Jet and Macao Dragon. These are by fast ferries, including catamarans and Boeing Jetfoils,

serving both the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal in central Macau and the Taipa Temporary Ferry Terminal close to Macau airport and the major new casino resorts, like The Venetian Macau. Ferry services run at 30-minute intervals, or even more frequently at peak times, while during the night limited services are provided on the one-hour crossing.

The facility, usually referred to as the Sky Shuttle Heliport - officially known as the Shun Tak Heliport - is located on top of the inner pier of the Ferry Terminal. The original infrastructure was built in 1990, for the use of Macau-based East Asia Airlines' first Bell 222 scheduled services, and offered a single helipad situated atop the western end of the pier. Over the years East Asia joined forces with HeliHongKong, trading as Heli Express, before morphing into the present day Sky Shuttle Helicopters

Ltd in November 2008.

The rebranded company was instrumental in the re-launch and substantial redevelopment of the heliport, when the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) awarded it the tender to develop the existing heliport, granting it a new 18-year lease concession.

The need to enlarge the Sky Shuttle Heliport had been made clear by a 2004 study that envisioned substantial growth in demand of about 9.4% by 2020 for fast helicopter connections in the PRD region. The single helipad had been designed for 30,700 movements per year, and by 2002, it was already handling 17,883 movements. Its capacity limit was expected to be reached by the end of 2006. The study concluded that expansion works should be carried out as soon as possible, underlining that providing helicopter services from the new

## hong kong heliport

IATA code	HHP
Built	1990
Facilities	Two landing pads No fuelling available
Permits	VFR and SVFR operations
Restrictions	Single-engine helicopters are not permitted. Helicopters are limited to a maximum take-off weight of 19,841lb (9,000kg)





▼ A passenger walks to the helicopter in Hong Kong, while the engines are already running.



▲ The Sky Shuttle terminal in Macau was upgraded in 2004 but is to be revamped again to bring it up to a similar specification to the one in Hong Kong.



▲ Like the facility in Hong Kong, the Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal serves both ferries and helicopters.

macau heliport	
IATA code	HZM
Built	1993
Facilities	Two landing helipads with three parking spots Fuelling available
Permits	VFR and SVFR operations
Restrictions	Single-engine helicopters are not permitted. Helicopters are limited to a maximum take-off weight of 19,841lb (9,000kg)

few minutes' walk from downtown Macau, the terminal was moved to the current location in 1993. An additional ferry facility was completed on Taipa Island in 2007 for the convenience of travellers heading to Macau International Airport, and the casino resort complexes that have been built there in the last few years. The Outer Harbour Ferry Terminal features 12 berths for jetfoils and two for ferries, a duty-free shop and Macau Tourism office.

In 1995 a two-helipad facility was built on top of the ferry terminal, enabling the handling of East Asia Airlines' helicopter services to Hong Kong. Three additional parking positions were added in 2001 to cope with the growing traffic. The helipads are interconnected by taxiways. Proposals for three more parking pads to the north of the current site are under evaluation.

Sky Shuttle Helicopters operates scheduled flights between 0900 and 2300 to Hong Kong, as well as a six times daily service to Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport, plus charter and sightseeing flights.

The heliport's passenger lounge was upgraded in 2004, but Sky Shuttle is already planning to launch a refurbishment project to bring it closer to the standard of its Hong Kong lounge.

### Sky Shuttle

Sky Shuttle is the sole cross-boundary commercial helicopter operation in the Pearl River Delta offering daily, year-

round passenger transportation services between HK, Macau and Shenzhen. Its flights provide a premium and efficient service, enabling passengers a significant saving in time, compared with other modes of transportation (eg the flight time from HK to Macau is just 15 minutes compared to almost an hour by ferry).

It handles over 100,000 passengers per year and in terms of customer profile, the passenger mix is dominated by Hong Kong residents and mainland travellers.

The company was established in July 1988, with its sister company, East Asia Airlines Limited, commencing HK-Macau services using two Bell 222 helicopters with 6 flights per day. Helicopters Hong Kong Limited was established in 1997, forming a partnership with EAA to create the largest commercial helicopter operation in the region and introduced a fleet change of Bell 222 and Sikorsky S76C+ helicopters. Subsequently, Sky the Shuttle Helicopters Limited name was launched in November 2008 as part of a new corporate branding exercise. ✕

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