Guide to International Adoption from Hong Kong

Mother’s Choice
Mother’s Choice is a local charity serving the many children without families and pregnant teenagers in Hong Kong. Since 1987, we have joined hands with our community to give hope and change the life stories of vulnerable girls and babies.

How to use this guide

This guide is for prospective adoptive parents, who are living outside of Hong Kong and who are considering adopting a child from Hong Kong through Intercountry Adoption.

In this guide, you will find details on the process of Intercountry adoption from Hong Kong, learn why adoption is needed for some children, and the unique aspects of the Hong Kong adoption program.

If you are a Hong Kong resident (including expatriates living in Hong Kong) you may apply to adopt a child through Local Adoption Services. For more information, please visit http://www.motherschoice.org/en/what-we-do/for-families/adopt-a-child/

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Introduction To Adoption

What is Adoption?
Adoption is the permanent legal transfer of all parental rights from one family unit to another. Adoptive parents have the same rights and responsibilities as biological parents, and adopted children have the same emotional, social, legal and kinship benefits of biological children.

At Mother’s Choice, we have the privilege of helping to build families through adoption. Our vision is to see every child in a safe, loving, and permanent family. We believe every family is unique, and that family is defined by love, not just blood. We work hard to ensure, that every child can either be reunited with their birth family, or join an adoptive family as soon as possible.

Hong Kong Adoption Highlights

Hong Kong is a great choice for those looking to grow their family through Intercountry Adoption. Here are some highlights and advantages of choosing to adopt a child from Hong Kong:

Children
- Waiting children have detailed child profiles - with comprehensive medical information, and (where available), health and background of birth parents
- Characteristics of waiting children include:
  - Children with special needs (aged 6 months +)
  - Older children (over 3 years)
  - Sibling groups

Eligibility
Adoption applicants should have:
- A strong desire to be parents and to make a permanent commitment to a child
- Strong family relationships. If married, a stable relationship of three years (five years if either of the couple has been divorced)
- Good physical and mental health to raise a child (confirmed by medical examination)
- Stable and sufficient education, employment, financial resources and accommodation
- No criminal record
  - And be at least 25 years of age

Considered on a case-by-case basis:
- Single applicants
- Applicants older than 50 years of age
- Families with five children or more

Receiving Countries
- Eligible families from the following countries are welcome to apply to adopt a child from Hong Kong: Australia, Canada, Germany, Singapore, Sweden, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States of America
Adoption In Hong Kong

Hong Kong is party to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993), which aims to prevent the abduction, sale of, or traffic of children. As a result, all adoptions in Hong Kong must meet the requirements of the Convention. Established safeguards ensure that adoptions take place in the best interests of the child, where their fundamental rights are taken into account at all times.

The Convention requires that we must first attempt to place a child with a family in Hong Kong, before looking for a family overseas. If a family cannot be found for a child within Hong Kong, Intercountry Adoption helps the child to be adopted by a family overseas.

The Adoption Unit of the Social Welfare Department has accredited three Adoption Bodies in Hong Kong to support Intercountry Adoption of children. These agencies include Mother’s Choice, International Social Service – Hong Kong Branch, and Po Leung Kuk.

Mother’s Choice partners with four adoption agencies in the U.S. (listed below) to ensure that every child thrives in a safe, loving, and permanent family.

U.S. Adoption Agencies

- Dillon International (www.dillonadopt.com/hong-kong)
- Lifeline Children’s Services (www.lifelinechild.org/country/hong-kong)
- Family Connections Christian Adoption (www.fcadoptions.org)

Mother’s Choice Intercountry Adoption is available for U.S. citizens living in the U.S. only. For applicants with other country passport holders, please contact International Social Service - Hong Kong Branch, or Po Leung Kuk.

Travel

- In-country stay of seven days to adopt and bring the child home
- Families are strongly encouraged to travel to bring the child home, but if not possible, an escort service is available to bring the child home

Timeline

- The time from application to adoption varies, but on average it can take between 17 and 24 months.
- Parents are matched with a child based on their suitability to parent a particular child, not on how long they have been waiting.
Q: What is the difference between an Adoption Agency, an Adoption Body, and the Adoption Unit?

A:
- A U.S. Adoption Agency works with a family to assess their suitability to adopt a child.
- A Hong Kong Adoption Body works with the child in Hong Kong to be matched with a family.
- The Adoption Unit is part of the Hong Kong Government Social Welfare Department, and oversees all adoptions in Hong Kong.

Q: I am a U.S. Citizen/ Foreign Passport Holder, and a Hong Kong resident, currently living in Hong Kong. Should I apply to adopt a child through the Local Adoption or Intercountry Adoption Services?

A:
If you have lived in Hong Kong for more than 12 months, plan to live in Hong Kong throughout the duration of the adoption process, and for 12 months afterwards, you can apply directly to adopt a child through Local Adoption.
Who Are The Children Waiting For Families Through Intercountry Adoption?

Every child who is waiting for an adoptive family is special, and deserves a family who can meet their unique needs. The Adoption Unit of the Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong will always first try to match a child with a family living in Hong Kong. If there are no waiting families available to be matched with a child, then the child will have the opportunity to be matched with a family through the Intercountry Adoption program.

Children waiting for a permanent family through Intercountry Adoption fall into the following categories:

**Children with identified health issues or special needs (aged 6 months to 18 years)**
Children with health issues and special needs could range from those with mild to severe illnesses including asthma, conditions requiring surgery or medication, visual or hearing impairment, heart conditions, premature birth, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, or orthopedic issues. Children may have been diagnosed with learning needs or developmental delays, including speech delay, physical delay, Dyslexia, behavioral needs, or other learning and developmental delays.

*A diagnosis is not who my daughter is, nor do limitations define her. None of the medical words, that so many use to describe her, can give you an accurate picture of my daughter. She is a very special child. She radiates a deep happiness, loving personality, an excitement for life, and courage in all situations. She is loving and sincere, generous and kind, forgiving and resilient. She is the center of our family.*

– Adoptive Parent

**Older children (aged 3 to 18 years)**
Older children are those who are over three years old, some are generally healthy while others may have mild to moderate health needs, development delays, and/or behavioral challenges. Some children, who are older, may have lived with their birth families, and some may have lived in foster care or in other institutions.

*The greatest gift to an older child is to know they are wanted and they can belong in a forever family. Bonding with an older child is a beautiful journey over a lifetime. It requires patience, heart, mind and will – it’s a real adventure!*

– Adoptive parent
### Siblings

Some children may be waiting for a family along with their sibling. These children vary in age and may have a difficult family background that has prevented them from staying in their family of birth. Being adopted with a brother or sister can be very beneficial for children, helping them make sense of their new lives. Siblings placed together often feel more safe and secure and are able to help each other adjust to their new family and community. Preserving the bond between siblings can even strengthen relationships with the whole family.

> **Adopting siblings is a gift - it allows two children to grow up with a biological connection in their adoptive family, and enables them to answer one of the lifelong questions of every adoptee: “Who do I look like?” My two biological siblings have grown up with so much physical similarity, whilst having such different personalities and interests.**

> - Adoptive parent

### Q:

**Why are there no healthy children or children with minor and correctible special needs available for adoption in HK?**

**A:**

The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993), requires, that all children should first have the opportunity to be placed with a family in Hong Kong, before determining that a child is eligible for Intercountry Adoption. Healthy children or children with minor and correctible special needs are usually adopted by families in Hong Kong through Local Adoption.

### Where Do Children In Hong Kong Live When Waiting For A Family?

A child waiting for a family is considered a ward of the Director of Social Welfare. They may be living with a foster family, or in an institution, small group home, or boarding school, run by the government, or by a nonprofit organization. Children in residential care in Hong Kong generally receive suitable care, medical care when needed, and older children may attend kindergarten or school.
The Social Welfare Department of the Hong Kong Government is the central authority, that oversees Intercountry Adoption in Hong Kong. The adoption process is designed to ensure, that every child who is waiting for a family is placed with a safe, loving, and permanent family.

1. Application
Contact one of the adoption agencies in the U.S. who have a partnership with Hong Kong. Details of these agencies can be found on page 4. The agency will give you an application to fill out, so that they can learn more about your family.

2. Home Study and Dossier
Your chosen Adoption Agency in the U.S. will conduct a home study process to assess your suitability to provide a safe, loving, and permanent family for a child. This includes gathering detailed information about your family background, finances, employment, education, and health status. Each Adoption Agency may have slight variations in their procedures, so please clarify their processes at the point of application. Your full application and corresponding documentation will later be forwarded to the Accredited Body and the Adoption Unit in Hong Kong, who may request additional information and supplemental documents after reviewing your application.

3. Immigration Step One
In order to adopt a child from another country into the U.S., a family must file a Form I-800A with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) National Benefits Center. This ensures that your family is found suitable and eligible to adopt under U.S. law. Your Adoption Agency will guide you through this step.

Q: If my adoption agency partners with Mother’s Choice, does that mean my child will be in the care of Mother’s Choice?
A: Mother’s Choice cares for a number of children in our Child Care Home and in foster families, but it is not guaranteed that your child is in the care of Mother’s Choice. However, we ensure that all of the children we find families for live in a safe and loving temporary placement.
4. Pursuing a Specific Child

Depending on your U.S. Adoption Agency’s procedures, after your Home Study has been approved and/or you have received USCIS approval, you will be able to view the information of waiting children. Each agency may manage this information sharing differently, they may show you files of children, which will include the child study (a social work assessment of child’s comprehensive needs), photos and video of the child, and their medical information.

While considering a match, you are permitted to take the child’s report to a doctor or specialist to seek medical advice.

If you decide to pursue the adoption of that child, your Adoption Agency will work with you about your decision and inform Mother’s Choice (or other Hong Kong Accredited Body). Based on the information provided by your Agency about your family, the Accredited Body will make a decision on the suitability of your family to meet that child’s needs. The Accredited Body may ask for more information on your family in order to make a well informed decision, especially in cases where more than one family has requested a match with the same child. Once a suitable family has been identified, the Accredited Body will place the child’s profile on hold, and inform the Adoption Unit in Hong Kong that a potential family has been found for that child. This child’s profile will be put on hold for two months.

5. Formal Matching Approval

As legal guardian of the child, the Adoption Unit of the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department are responsible to determine a potential family’s eligibility and ability to meet that specific child’s needs. If they are satisfied, they will grant a formal Matching Approval.

In order to do this, the Accredited Body submits all the documentation of the potential family to the Adoption Unit for consideration. The Adoption Unit may have further questions after going through the documents.

As the child’s profile was put on hold once the Accredited Body informed the Adoption Unit of the potential family, it is expected that all the necessary documents are submitted within these two months.

Q: When I am matched with a child, can I tell my friends and family?

A: You may share the news with your loved ones, but you are not allowed to post photos of the child on social media or elsewhere online.

Preparing the Child for Adoption

Before your family travels, your child’s social worker will introduce the concept of adoption to your child, using your family photos, videos, and any gifts that you send, and their caregiver will continue this conversation over the following weeks and months. Depending on the age of your child, they may have a Skype call arranged to talk with your family, they may have some English lessons to prepare for life in the U.S., and they may choose to say goodbye to those in Hong Kong, who have been significant in their life.
6. Immigration Step Two
When the Matching Approval has been issued, you will apply to USCIS for provisional approval to continue with the adoption and immigration process for your child. This ensures that the child who will be adopted is covered by the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. You will then apply for a visa on behalf of your child in order for them to enter the U.S., and our social worker will take your child to their visa appointment in Hong Kong. Your Adoption Agency will guide you through this process.

For more information about immigration, please visit: https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/adoption-process/how-to-adopt/hague-adoption-process.html

7. Travel
After your child has a U.S. visa medical examination and their visa to the U.S. is approved, the Hong Kong government will apply for a High Court Order to be issued and your family can arrange their travel to Hong Kong. At least one parent (preferably two parents) should travel to Hong Kong to meet your child. Although an escort option is considered for special circumstances, families are strongly encouraged to travel to Hong Kong in person as it is in the best interests of your child to have a smooth and gradual transition. You will be sent a draft itinerary of your schedule in Hong Kong, you will be met by your social worker at the airport, who will escort you to your appointments throughout the week. You will spend approximately 7 days (5 working days) in Hong Kong in order to complete the adoption process. Families are responsible for scheduling and paying for their travel.

8. Meeting the Child
When your family arrives in Hong Kong, a social worker will lead you and your child through your first meeting, and help with your child’s transition over the next few days. On the first day, your family will meet your child where they currently live, and will spend some time playing with the child and their main caregiver. On the second day, you and your child will continue bonding, and if all parties feel that your child is ready, they will go back to the hotel with your family for a short period. Your child will leave their placement and stay at your hotel from the third day if they are ready. Your social worker will organize outings and activities for you and your child to understand more about the child’s Hong Kong culture and heritage. Your family will return to the U.S. with the child a few days later.
9. Adoption Finalization

Your family will work with your U.S. adoption agency to complete six months of post-placement supervision with visits after one, three, and six months. The post placement report (which includes photos) will be sent to the Hong Kong Accredited Body and the Adoption Unit, who may also share the photos with the child’s Hong Kong caregiver or foster family with your agreement. After this time, your U.S. agency social worker will support you to apply for your child’s adoption finalization to be granted by the court. You may then apply for a Certificate of U.S. Citizenship for your child (it is strongly encouraged that you do so). The adoption case will be closed in Hong Kong once all the miscellaneous procedures (i.e. receiving the Adoption Decree from the family, and clearing the financial accounts of the child in Hong Kong) have been settled.

This is the end of the formal adoption process, but just the beginning of your lifelong journey as a family!

Fees

Fees vary, based on your Adoption Agency of choice, as well as your travel plans. Check with your agency to confirm the fees and timeline of payment. Grants and loans are often available to adoptive families from the U.S. to support families who hope to adopt a child. These grant making organizations and other resources include:

- Lifesong for Orphans (www.lifesongfororphans.org/adGrantLoans.html)
- JSC Foundation (jscfoundation.org)
- Show Hope (www.showhope.org)
- Gift of Adoption (www.giftofadoption.org)
- The Sparrow Fund (www.sparrow-fund.org)
- National Adoption Foundation (https://fundyouradoption.org/)
- Resources for Adoption (www.resources4adoption.com)

Understanding Loss And Attachment

Although I was so full of love for my new son, and excited to welcome him home, my heart was also breaking for him. It was so painful and sad to see him leaving all those who have loved and cared for him so much.

~ Adoptive parent
Loss
Every adoption starts with separation and loss. No matter how young a child is when they are adopted, or how much they are loved by their adoptive parents, an adopted child may experience feelings of loss in their life. Understanding your child’s loss and grief, as well as how you have experienced loss and grief, is an extremely important part of the journey of parenting a child who was adopted.

Loss occurs when someone or something, that offered love and/or security, is taken away, and grief is a process of withdrawing emotional attachment from that loss. Grief can be expressed in a number of different ways. Even when a child is adopted by a safe, loving, and permanent family, they may still experience feelings of grief and loss throughout their childhood, and as an adult.

Children can experience grief, because of the loss of many things, including:

- Places and things: rooms, beds, toys
- People: familiar caregivers, family members, or children they used to live with
- Care differences: the way they were held, fed, bathed, and changed
- Language, culture, and food
- Hopes, dreams, and future plans
- Known family history, medical information, identity

Each individual loss contributes to a loss of a sense of safety, predictability, or justice in the child’s world. Each child grieves in their own unique way. Although some children may seem unaffected, they may still feel loss deeply at different times throughout their lives.

Attachment

“I count my blessings every day to be part of my adoption journey with my children. The thread of loss and pain is intertwined with gifts and joy, and together they create a tapestry of unconditional love which is the best definition of what family means.”

– Adoptive parent

One of the most important ways to help a child work through feelings of separation and loss is to focus on building attachment. Attachment is an emotional bond that forms between the child and caregiver. Attachment is built when an adult responds to the child’s emotional and physical needs over time. This sets the stage for all future trusting relationships. Safe and healthy attachment is especially important for children who have experienced loss.

Almost all of a child’s brain growth occurs in the first three years of their life, and interaction with adults has a profound influence on brain development, affecting emotions, language, and abstract thought. Infants naturally form strong attachments to their primary caregivers, but if a child’s caregivers are unresponsive or threatening, the attachment process is disrupted and a child may find it difficult to form healthy relationships later in life.
Closed Adoption And Finding Birth Parents

Hong Kong practices “Closed Adoption”, which means there is no interaction of any kind between birth parents and adoptive families during the adoption process. With the exception of a child, who has been abandoned, adoptive families will receive medical information about their child’s birth family. Names and other identifying information are not shared.

After an adoption is finalized, an adopted person or the adoptive family can make the decision to find out more about their birth family. This process is called Root Tracing in Hong Kong. The Adoption Unit provides a root tracing service for adoptees aged over 18 years (although children under the age of 18 may may start this process earlier with the consent of their parents). Contact may include exchange of photographs and letters, or face-to-face contact, if both parties agree and are ready. There is no guarantee that an adopted person will be able to connect with their birth parents or that their birth parents, if found, will consent to arranging contact.

“When my daughter was six, she asked for a photo of her birthmother. We were fortunate enough to receive one, and when she saw it for the first time, my little girl said to me, “This fills a hole in my heart, now I know who I look like, and why I was adopted.” This was such a gift for my daughter to receive.”

- Adoptive parent

It is natural for an adopted person to show curiosity about their history, and the identity of their birth parents. Seeking information does not necessarily mean that they want to reunite with their birth parents, but that they may be looking to find answers to their questions. Researching information and exploring more about one’s background can be very important for an adopted person, and the support of adoptive parents is essential. At Mother’s Choice we believe that it is important that birth parents are spoken of with respect, especially when talking about them in front of children who have been adopted. Mother’s Choice Adoption Services is available to provide advice, support, and guidance for families who are thinking about contacting birth parents. We may represent an adoptive family or an adopted person and contact the Adoption Unit on your behalf if you formally authorize us to do so.
Am I Ready To Adopt A Child?

Building a family through adoption is a lifelong commitment. Before making the decision to move forwards in the adoption process, here are some important and useful questions to consider. Talk them through with your spouse (or with a friend/family, if single). Reviewing these questions with a qualified counselor can also be helpful.

**Motivation to adopt**
- Why do I want to adopt a child?
- Is this the same reason, that my spouse wants to adopt?
- Are we ready to start our adoption journey together?

**Educating myself before adopting**
- Am I willing to learn about adoption parenting, childhood trauma, bonding and attachment, and the unique ways to parent an adopted child through books, online research, seminars, etc.?
- Am I willing to meet with families who have already adopted a child to learn about their experiences?
- Am I open to consider adopting an older child or a child with health needs?

**The adoption process**
- What fears or concerns do I have about the adoption process?
- Am I ready to accept the entire adoption process, including working with different people and systems, answering personal questions, the assessment process, and the unknown timeline?
- Do I accept, that the adoption process prioritizes the best interests of the child, rather than the family?
- Do I accept the possibility, that the wait may be long, and that there is no guarantee of a match?

**Family and friends**
- Am I willing to talk to my family about our adoption journey?
- If there are other children in the family, are they ready for a sibling through adoption and their unique needs?
- Is there good support for the children already in the family for when my time and focus is needed by my newly adopted child?
- Does my family support our decision to adopt? Which friends will support me through this process?
- Is my support network ready and willing to assist me in adopting an older child or a child with health needs? Do they know how to support me and my family?
- How will my child access any additional health or developmental support that they need? What support do I need to ensure that my child gets the support, that they need?
- How do I feel about other people knowing that our child is adopted?
Parenting
• How do I see our current lifestyle changing with the addition of a child with additional needs?
• How is my health? Am I physically and mentally ready to take care of a child?

My child
• Can I fully accept a child who is not my biological child?
• Can I accept the unknowns involved in adoption, including the health and family background of my child?
• Can I embrace my child completely, committing to them forever?

Expectations of my child
• Am I prepared that it will take time for my child to love, trust and feel safe with me?
• Do I have a ‘dream child’ in mind?
• What expectations do I have about my child, including their academic performance, moral, and other values? What if my child does not meet my expectations?

Talking to my child
• Am I prepared to talk about adoption with my child, knowing that this is an important part of their identity?
• How will I reassure my child that they will always be a part of our family?
• Am I prepared to talk about my child’s birth family with love and respect?
• How will I react if my child expresses an interest in meeting their birth family in the future?
• How will I support my child’s understanding of their cultural and ethnic heritage and identity?

Staying Connected to Mother’s Choice

If you adopt a child from Mother’s Choice and/or your Adoption Agency has partnered with Mother’s Choice, you and your child will always be considered part of the Mother’s Choice family! For children who spent time living at the Mother’s Choice, Child Care Home, we invite you to visit if you return to Hong Kong. We will also try to arrange visits with foster parents, although we cannot guarantee this. When you are ready, we also encourage you to share your story with other families, so that more families will be familiar with the idea of adoption.

Please visit www.motherschoice.org to learn more about how we serve children without families and pregnant teenagers in Hong Kong.
Points Of Contact

Adoption Unit (Social Welfare Department)
Address: Room 201, 2/F, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong
Phone: 852 – 3595 1935
Website: http://www.swd.gov.hk (Family and Child Welfare > Adoption)

Accredited Bodies in Hong Kong
Three non-governmental organizations are accredited by the Director of Social Welfare to support the Intercountry Adoption of children from Hong Kong.
Mother’s Choice
Unit H, 21st Floor, Legend Tower, 7 Shing Yip Street, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Phone: 852 - 2537 2285
Email: adoption@motherschoice.org
Website: www.motherschoice.org

International Social Service – Hong Kong Branch
6th Floor, Southorn Centre, 130 Hennessy Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong
Phone: 852 - 2834 6863
Email: ia@isshk.org
Website: www.isshk.org

Po Leung Kuk
Address: 1st Floor, Vicwood K.T. Chong Building, Po Leung Kuk, 66 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong
Phone: 852 – 2277 8368
Email: ias@poleungkuk.org.hk
Website: www.poleungkuk.org.hk