



Taking root

Four mums share their triumphs and tribulations of starting a family in Hong Kong. By Charmaine Ng

– COCO CHAN –

Coco Chan is a serial entrepreneur and mum of an active seven-months-old baby girl, Harper. Throughout the years, she founded Voltage PR, Wellness Warriors HK, and most recently, online spiritual wellbeing portal OMSA. Coco's favourite family day out in Hong Kong is anywhere in nature. "Whether it's a short hike or a day at the beach, my husband Dan and I always find important lessons to teach Harper among plants and wildlife," says Coco.

Conscious parenting

Her parenting style is relatively laid back and she hopes to raise Harper in a more conscious manner. "We want to raise our child to have strong values," Coco says. "At the end of the day, we want our daughter to be a kind and thoughtful human being. We don't know what life will be like in 20 years and don't believe that the current educational system is equipped to prepare them for what the future holds. But, with a positive moral compass and a strong set of life values, we're sure she will navigate the waters ahead with ease."

Raising a family in Hong Kong

Both Coco and Dan grew up in Hong Kong and loved it. The city, an international hub that welcomes citizens from all over the world, "is able to pave an opportunity for children to be familiar with interacting with vast cultures and people on different levels, like at school or at work," says Coco. As a firm believer that it is important to know one's ancestral heritage as well as get along with other cultures, she "is grateful that Harper, who is of Scottish-Chinese descent, lives in a place where Chinese culture is rich".

Daily routine during the coronavirus

During the last stages of her pregnancy in the summer of 2019, Coco migrated her business online, which meant she was able to avoid many of the initial problems that the onslaught of the coronavirus brought for small businesses. The only thing that has changed is the frequency of which she socialises with other families and friends. "Harper is only seven months old so we don't bring her out too much for safety reasons," Coco explains. "But we do visit our siblings over the weekends so she gets some playtime with her cousins and gets to leave the house. FaceTime and Zoom have made it easier for my family to 'hang out' with others virtually. Not quite the same as in-person interaction but it's a way of connecting during these times!"



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KATIE ABRAHAM

Katie Abraham moved to Hong Kong from Melbourne, Australia with her husband Anton in 2009. She is a performing artist who has been trained as a dancer, teacher and singer. When she is not teaching dance or fitness, she likes going on junk trips or visiting the beaches in Shek O and Mui Wo with her husband and two sons, Max and Axel.

The perfect balance

One of the biggest benefits of raising a family in Hong Kong for Katie is that it has the perfect balance of living in an ambitiously rapid and exciting urban city, varied with alluringly healing nature and outdoor adventures. "It's such a treat for the kids to eat lunch across the harbour at West Kowloon Art Space, then go for an evening hike up to Victoria Peak," she says. "I love that Hong Kong is such an international city and it's wonderful to see my kids growing up in such a multicultural community."

Strong support system

When it comes to bringing balance in her life, Katie is grateful for her support system. "I am so lucky to have such a supportive husband who's been very patient with my volatile career. Our helper, our delightful friends and the diverse Hong Kong community all help to keep things in harmony," she says. "It's a lifelong journey of finding balance between family, work and for me specifically, artistic expression."

Despite the challenges, she finds that building a daily routine for herself and the kids is essential to bringing order to the chaos. Even if Anton is frequently traveling for business or if she is working on a show for an event, it's important that her children have a sense of normalcy and security.

Fighting cancer

Three years ago, Katie was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She faced one of her biggest parenting challenges to juggle between taking time out for her own self care whilst raising a four year old and six month old baby. "Making time for myself rather than worrying about everyone else has not always been my strong suit," she says. "I could not have dealt with that battle without the love and support from Anton, my family and friends. But I also had to find the courage and strong will to live within myself."

Since her battle with cancer, she has practiced a deep gratitude for the life that she has. "It's not always an easy task but for the most part I just try to see the goodness in the world and find the fun in whatever I do."





JEMIMA CALLAGHAN

Seven years ago, Jemima Callaghan and her family of five moved to Hong Kong from Australia. She now operates her own textile business, Lost Property, and homeschools her children, whilst her husband, Scottie, runs their coffee business, Fineprint.

Homeschooling

Jemima's homeschooling journey began because she had a child in the local primary school system who was struggling with reading and writing in English as all her

classes were taught in Chinese. At first, the mother of three was reluctant to become a homeschooling mum, especially given the challenges of a day-to-day life whilst running her own business. "I couldn't possibly manage being with my kids all day and teaching them – what would I teach them?" She says.

Jemima tried replicating the school system, but that didn't work and after lots of trial and error, the family finally found a way to learn that they are all mostly happy with. "The huge plus for homeschooling is that we can spend so much time delving deep into topics that we want to learn about and have more time for slow mornings, lunchtime swims and art all afternoon," says Jemima. "It helps that we have the 'non-attendance' team from the

EDB follow us up regularly because we had been enrolled in the local system."

Living in Mui Wo

Mui Wo wasn't the first place Jemima and her family stayed when they arrived in Hong Kong. Their first home in the city was in Discovery Bay, which "was a great neighbourhood for small kids, easy to make friends and get around". Later on, though, when her family decided to ditch the comforts of a salary job and go out on their own, they made the move to Mui Wo for its beautiful surroundings and the relaxed village life it entails. "We love Mui Wo for the great community and the surrounding beaches and mountains," says Jemima. "We can go mountain biking, SUPing, hiking or swimming in rock pools, all within 15 mins of our house."

— VERONICA SANCHIS —

Originally from Caracas, Venezuela, Veronica Sanchis has lived in London and New York before moving to Hong Kong with her husband Mikko. They now live with their adopted rescue dog, Capa, and their two year old daughter, Liisa. When she is not spending time with her family, Veronica is busy working on Foto F  minas, her personal project and an online platform to promote the works of Latin American and Caribbean women photographers.

Connecting with her Latin American roots

For Veronica, being so far away from her family is the toughest part about raising a child

in Hong Kong. When she first moved to the city, she spent a lot of time searching through Facebook for Venezuelan families who were in the same boat. She even met her broker through a Facebook group!

While settling in, she also joined the Association of Spanish Speaking Women, a membership club which conducts social and educational events including dinners and workshops. Now, she has an amazing group of friends from Latin America who are great at keeping her in touch with her roots. "Geographical distances don't matter – it's what you make out of them," she says.

Raising a third culture kid

Lessons learned from living in multiple countries have become a part of Veronica and her husband's identities. She hopes that when Liisa grows older, she too will be inspired to

travel and experience the world for herself. "I think we're very lucky in that we have access to travel at a very young age," says Veronica. "Hong Kong is great for its proximity to nearby Asian countries, making travel easy and convenient."

Work-in-progress

Veronica has been working full-time and freelancing for a few years, so accommodating work at odd hours is something she is used to. She also hired a helper, Analyn, when her daughter was six months old, a move that has certainly made balancing her life easier. "Overall, I have found that becoming a mother has made me better at organising my time. Somehow, I procrastinate less. But, I must admit that I still find it hard to have me-time – that's still a work-in-progress," she says. ■

