



Should I Stay or Should I Go?

A Temperature Testing Survey of Expats in Hong Kong

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Foreword

People ask me every day whether expats are leaving Hong Kong following the stress of the 2019 violent protests, the passing of the National Security Law, recent electoral reform, and strict COVID-19 quarantine measures.

In this latest flash survey our membership anonymously answered questions and gave comments showing the anxieties they feel, both personally and professionally after a tough few years. While people share their love for living in this dynamic city, they also reveal growing underlying tensions and nagging fears.

AmCham is dedicated to remaining in Hong Kong for the long haul. We believe many businesses will have strong opportunities to thrive in the future. Right now though, it's easy to worry about a brain drain of top talent and skills in a gateway city that is fuelled by trade, international capital flows and global connectivity.

Background

- Hong Kong, with its historic reputation as a diverse business hub highly favoured by expatriates, has seen an unprecedented number of expatriates leaving or planning to leave the city over the past few years.
- The international business community in Hong Kong has recently been caught at a crossroads, with rising concerns about issues such as US-China tensions and high living costs being at odds with the many benefits of Hong Kong's key business offerings.
- In light of this, the Chamber surveyed its wide collective of members to anonymously capture sentiment.
- 325 responses (24% of membership) were recorded between May 5 and May 9.
- Please note that further breakdown of data is unavailable. Comments may have been edited for brevity and clarity.

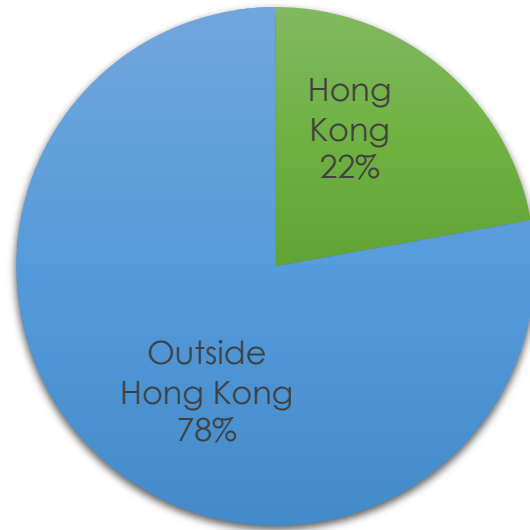
Key points

- The survey shows 58% of respondents have no plans to leave Hong Kong, while 42 % of those surveyed say they are considering or planning to move away.
- The most widely shared concern was discomfort due to the National Security Law, although other key issues were prevalent in members' minds.
- Based on the survey results, AmCham strongly suggests that the government pay close heed to the sentiment of expatriates in Hong Kong and work towards allaying major concerns through stronger understanding of Hong Kong's international talent, lest the city lose competitiveness versus other business hubs.

Demographic Information

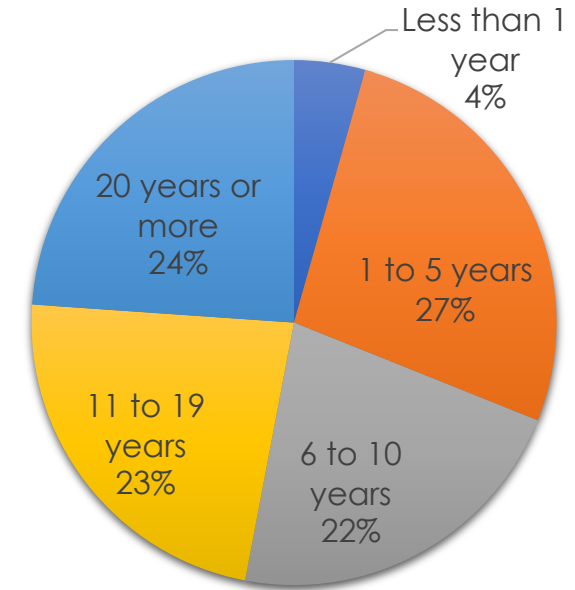
1. Where are you from?

The majority of respondents hail from outside Hong Kong. A large majority, 95.6% of those who come from outside Hong Kong, have lived in Hong Kong for a year or more.



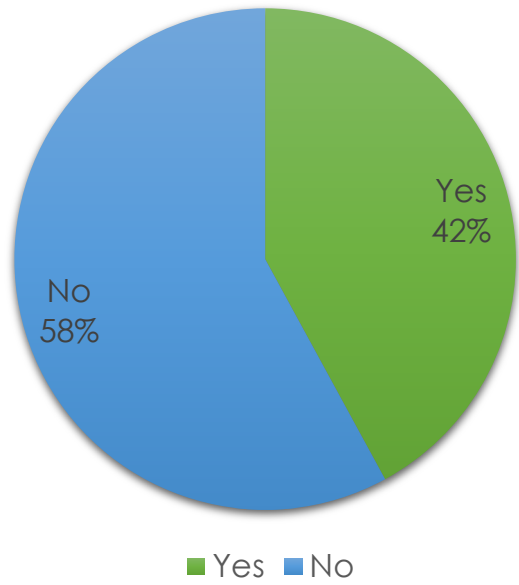
■ Hong Kong ■ Outside of Hong Kong

2. How long have you lived in Hong Kong? (for those who answered "outside Hong Kong" to Q1)



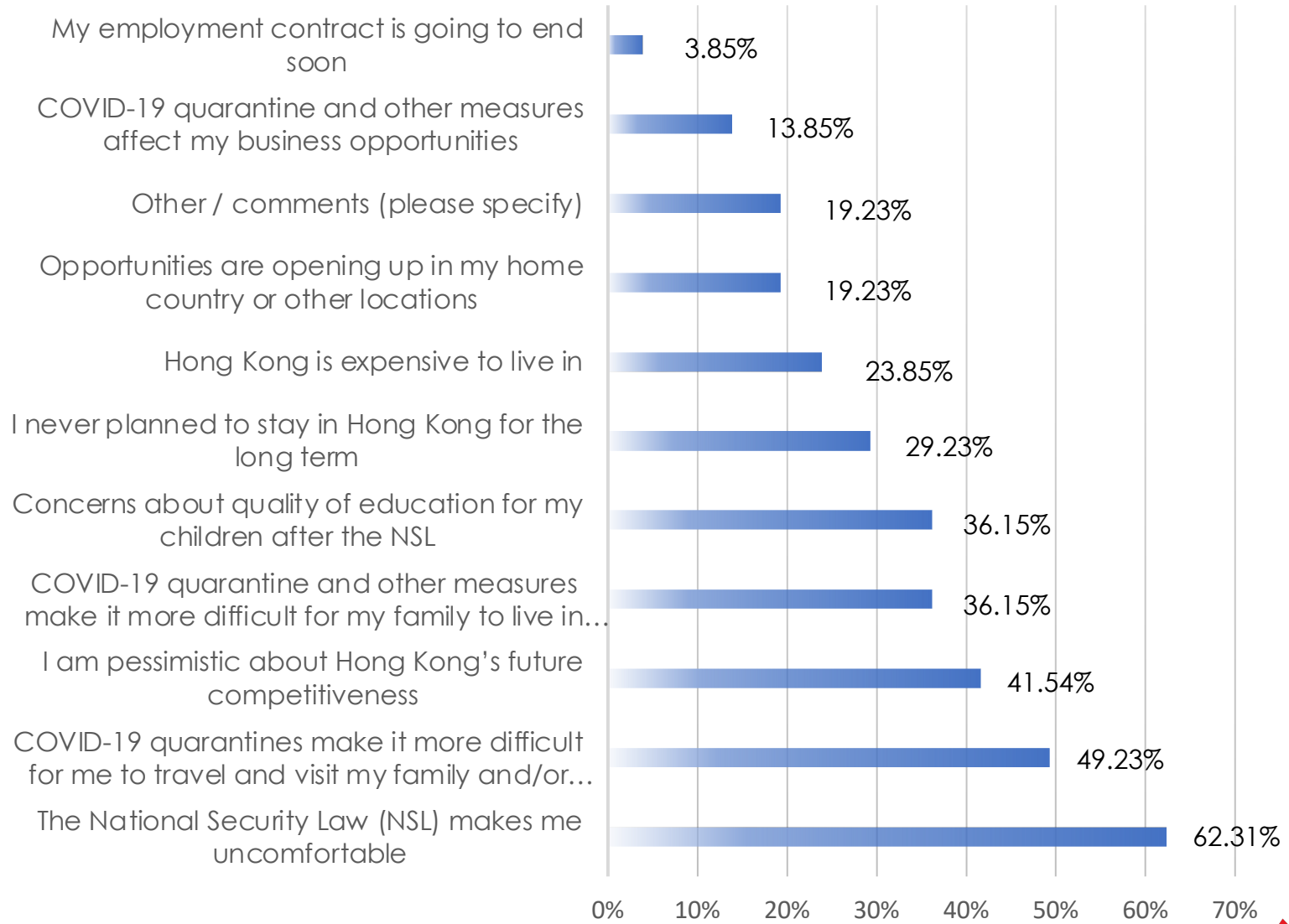
■ Less than 1 year ■ 1 to 5 years ■ 6 to 10 years
■ 11 to 19 years ■ 20 years or more

3. If you are residing in Hong Kong, are you considering or planning to leave the city?



A slight majority of respondents (58%) said they are not planning to leave, although a very significant percentage (42%) said they are considering leaving.

4. I am making plans to leave because... (for those who answered 'yes' to question 3)



4. (Continued) I am making plans to leave because...

(for those who answered 'yes' to question 3)

- Respondents gave a myriad of reasons which culminated in their ultimate decision to leave.
- Key reasons that appeared frequently were concerns about the National Security Law, generally declining mood across the community and increase in anti-foreigner sentiment and messaging.
- On the other hand, some noted that COVID-19 and NSL are secondary considerations. There are other practical drivers to relocate, such as retirement planning and career opportunities elsewhere.

"We are moving to the US next summer (2022) after 17 years in HK... we will put our kids in private high school, be closer to family and live in a more cost-effective city as I plan for retirement. COVID-19 restrictions and NSL are secondary considerations which are not really driving the decision to relocate next year. We deferred this decision by one year as we wanted one more year in this remarkable city."

"I think the tolerance towards non-ethnic Chinese and Caucasians in particular, which was a hallmark of post-colonial Hong Kong, is waning. As to the NSL, it's not just that, but also the rise of illiberal values as Hong Kong becomes more closely integrated into China."

"I am actively planning to change careers. This would be best served by moving elsewhere. I would consider returning to Hong Kong in the future, whether or not circumstances change."

"People here are unhappy...[there are] no indications there is a plan...for changing things for the better. All that means a higher risk of instability - and continued unhappiness."

"The way and culture of working seems not to be as international as before. I would like to go where the professional workforce is more open-minded and where there is more access to opportunities."

"I am fearful for foreigners in Hong Kong as the geopolitical situation becomes very tense, especially around Taiwan and the South China Sea. Also recent government actions show that we no longer have HK's historical freedoms."

"The fabric of HK is rapidly changing. We are in no hurry to leave as a family unit, however we are keeping a keen eye on other markets for appropriate opportunities."

"My social circle has mostly departed. Irrespective of COVID-19 and the NSL, we do not intend to have our children educated in HK and so we did not plan to stay in HK long term."

"Spouse is uncomfortable here. Increase in anti-foreigner sentiment in the media and government statements. Reduced long-term career opportunities for foreigners."

"I'm not in property or financial services so there are no career opportunities for me here."

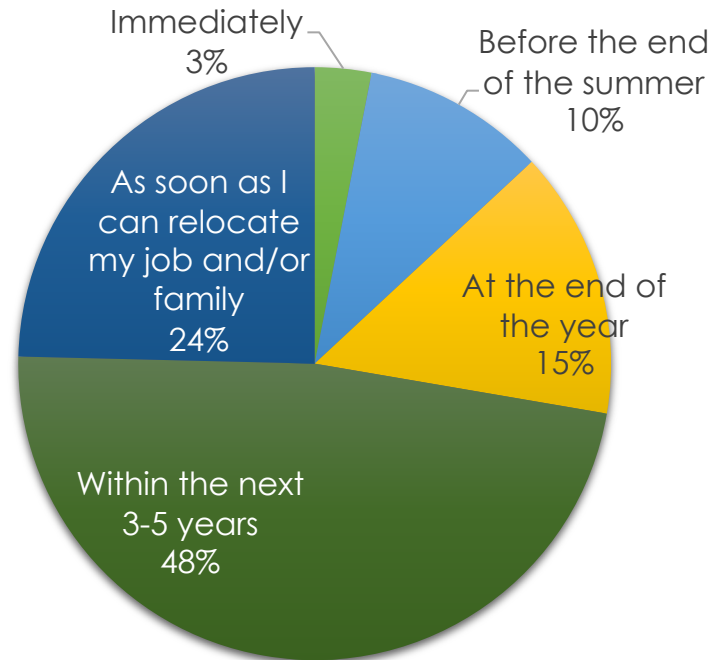
"The NSL is destroying Hong Kong's international appeal."

"It seems that expats are being pushed out as employment opportunities are more and more going to mainlanders."

5. I plan or hope to leave Hong Kong within the following time frame:

(for those who answered 'yes' to question 3)

- 47.69% of respondents for this question said they plan to leave within 3 to 5 years
- The other 52.31%, however, all said they aim to leave within a very short time frame; some will be leaving immediately, while others will leave as soon as they can relocate.



- Immediately
- Before the end of the summer
- At the end of the year
- Within the next 3-5 years
- As soon as I can relocate my job and/or family

"Still determining based on a range of variables - local job prospects, international travel opening up, etc."

"Already left on what was planned as an extended trip on purpose. And now, after reflection, may not return."

"Depends on quarantine requirements being competitive with other hubs in Asia, including Tokyo, Bangkok, Seoul and Taipei."

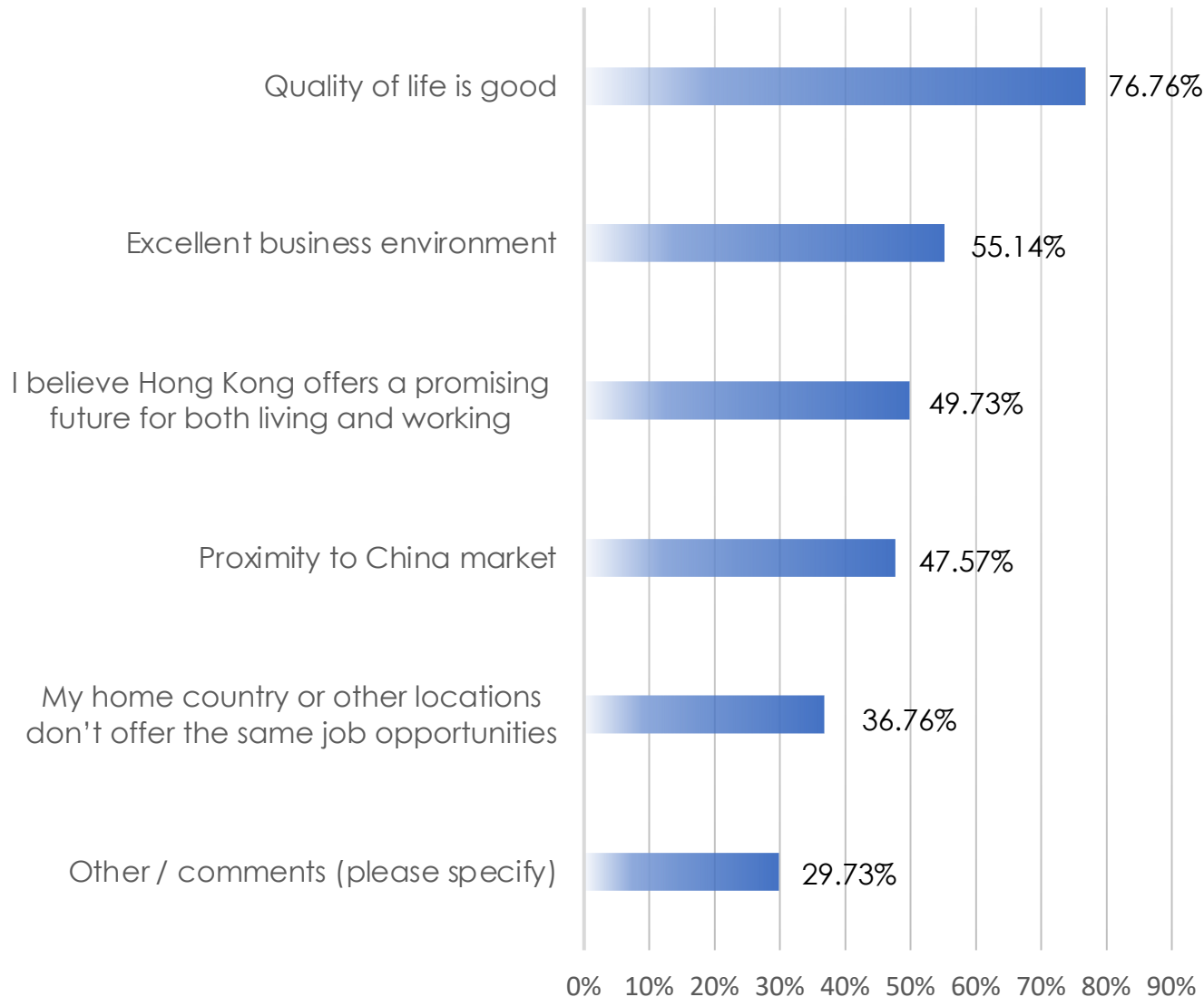
"My family and I are still bullish about being in HK. However, geopolitical dynamics continue to be a concern."

"Subject to on-going developments (could be sooner/later than 3-5 years)."

"No immediate/definitive timetable, however if/when another opportunity presents itself we'll consider leaving Hong Kong."

"I am essentially hedging bets and taking a wait and see approach over the next few years, rather than making immediate plans to leave."

6. I plan to stay in Hong Kong because: (choose all that apply) (for those who answered “No” to Q3)



"I am unclear as to how this will change over the medium-term, but for now, job opportunities in HK are still quite strong."

"As a Chinese-Australian family, we want our child to receive a good bilingual education."

"I am required by my company to reside in HK for the corporate tax benefits."

"My long-time communities (academic, professional, family, etc.) remain here."

"Whilst we plan to stay for now, we are not sure about the long term in light of the political changes that have been taking place recently which make HK a less attractive place to be."

"Proximity to Asia markets and opportunities."

"Even if I relocate to other countries, there's no way we can avoid questions like COVID, housing and education. National security is a norm in today's world - US also has its own homeland security department. To be honest, HK is much more safer than US...Hong Kong is still a conduit of the east and west and it has so much more to offer to businesses."

"I believe Hong Kong will return to 'normal' once the pandemic is over."

"Easy access to vaccines, low number of COVID-19 cases, safe to move around for kids and family."

"Personal safety and security is important to my family especially with young children."

6. (Continued) More comments:

"Job and partner are in HK and situations in the US aren't much better for now."

"I am an owner of my business and I run a number of our Asia offices from Hong Kong which is our headquarters. Also my clients & consultants are in part located here."

"This is my home and I love it. If I leave I cannot be a positive force for continuing the good that is here."

"Easy access to vaccines, low number of COVID-19 cases, safe to move around for kids and family."

"I'd much rather raise my children here than in the US, and the way things are going in the US, I'll probably retire out here rather than ever go back."

"As an expat, so far, my family and I have not been severely impacted by the last two years events. The riots of 2019 are history, COVID-19 is basically everywhere in the world, so it's no different elsewhere, and likely BETTER here in Hong Kong for the moment during this pandemic crisis."

"Asia is shining!"

"The business I am involved with is growing rapidly in Asia. This will continue for the next decade I expect."

"Hong Kong is efficient and things get done in a timely manner. Hongkongers are hard working."

"It is much safer than other countries (low crime!)"

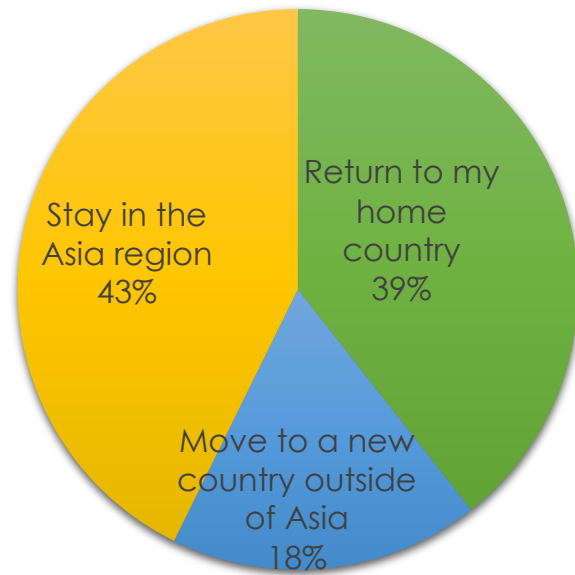
"Good location for regional oversight at the moment.. could change in the future."

"A great and dynamic regional hub! Best place to get things done in Asia! 5 hours flight to the worlds largest markets."

"I have a hard time agreeing with those who feel there has been permanent damage done to Hong Kong. Our resilience has been tested many times and we always come out just fine."

"Despite the protests, HK is still comparatively safer than elsewhere. Hong Kong, for the most part, is also more tolerant of races. Through the pandemic, the city also showed that it is slightly resilient than many other places because its citizens will cooperate with masks and gathering limitations for the greater good (for the most part)."

7. If I leave Hong Kong now or in the future, I will likely: (all respondents)



- Return to my home country
- Move to a new country outside of Asia
- Stay in the Asia region

"Perhaps Thailand."

"Tokyo, Taipei, Singapore."

"Headed to Singapore, just like everyone else."

"Options in Singapore for tech and finance look attractive. While an expensive city, it has done relatively well on COVID-19 measures and shows long term vision and plans to make it more liveable and more business attractive and ability to communicate to its population and internationally."

"The city is no longer being managed for the benefit of the Hong Kong citizens...I fear Hong Kong will be fighting COVID-19 for the next 18+ months with restrictive quarantines. There are better places to live and work in Asia. I will miss Hong Kong, but life here has changed for the worse and I have no confidence it will improve."

"I have no plan to leave."

"Perhaps to UK, not because of its latest policy supporting HK people, but an overall quality of life / medical system / education system / culture..."

"Singapore is looking more and more like the right place to be for families."

"Maybe Singapore? Quite unsure."

"Want to start again in a new environment which is different from my current one. Bring some freshness to my life."

"If I were to leave Hong Kong I would stay in the Greater China and APAC region."

8. Final Comments: (optional)

"Previously, I never had a worry about what I said or wrote when I was in Hong Kong. With the NSL, that has changed. The red lines are vague and seem to be arbitrary. I don't want to continue to fear saying or writing something that could unknowingly cause me to be arrested."

"We have seen very little from the government in terms of making housing more affordable. The international school in which my child attends was poor in its handling of COVID-19 and took longer than other schools to re-open. The offers for better education long term is still better outside of Hong Kong."

"I remain bullish on Greater China and see no better place to raise my family and grow my business."

"I'm now more optimistic about the future of Hong Kong than in 2019."

"HK is changing faster than ever and losing its unique status, security, character and heritage."

"This past year has demonstrated that HK can offer much more than my own home in the US regarding COVID, equality, and safety."

"Although I do not condone the violence of the protests, the Government seemed to have gone from a stance of inaction during/before the protests of dissenting views to the other extreme of overly clamoring on opinions different from its own."

"It's very hard to tease out the reasons why people are leaving or not coming to Hong Kong while the pandemic is happening. When the public health situation improves, we will have a clearer view. I believe Hong Kong will take steps to encourage travel and investment and will be well positioned."

"I'm not 'actively' considering leaving HK. That said, there will become a point at which the COVID-19 regulations become too oppressive - the government needs to quickly come to a sensible position around reduced local and arrival quarantine for vaccinated people."

"Inconsistent policy arbitrarily enforced and at times targeting specific groups is a real hazard to HK's ability to retain expatriates."

"Hong Kong has problems to deal with, so do other places around the world. If the government would like to see HK continue to be an international talent hub, it has to address fundamental problems like cost of housing and education. Companies no longer offer CEO packages and we see more young entrepreneurs wanting to start a business in Hong Kong but end up moving to Shenzhen because they can't afford housing or education for their families and children."

"Hong Kong remains the premier business city in Asia as long as we have a solid, independent judiciary and law and order is maintained."

"COVID-19 in HK is not an issue - it is being handled successfully (albeit aggressively). I feel depressed every day when someone new gets thrown in jail, a media outlet is banned, art exhibitions cancelled, and other tell-tale signs of Beijing's playbook being applied in HK. I have lived in China, so I know where we are headed. But I hate to watch the transition."

"There are many benefits still living and working primarily around the professional opportunities. I have little children and will get back to the USA in 3-4 years as the quality of living here is not what I want for teenagers."

"Strict quarantine measures are making Hong Kong less appealing as it has become extremely challenging to see our family and friends back in the U.S."

"For expats, HK offers a great balance between professional opportunities and personal life. COVID and politics aside, western nations don't fully realise the value and benefit of the quality of life offered in HK and the economic viability here."

"Hong Kong will always be a wonderful special place but it will never be the HK of the past, if people cannot understand and appreciate that my guess is they will leave. I also feel a new wave of people will come in once the dust settles."

"There is so little visibility how the HK government will allow travelling for fully vaccinated people overseas without hotel quarantine. This is very depressing after the US and Europe will reopen over the next 3-4 months."