

# Hong Kong's 20-square-foot 'coffin homes' reveal the terrifying scope of a housing crisis

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As housing prices continue to soar in Hong Kong, some residents are taking anything they can get — even if that means living in a so-called "coffin home."

At least 200,000 people live in these homes, which measure just 4'x6' and sit stacked one top of the other in cramped apartment buildings. Ladders line the halls to help people get into the upper-level units. The starting rent is around \$180 a month.

Hong Kong's chief executive, Leung Chun-ying, has called this housing crisis "the gravest potential hazard" to society, as only 7% of the city's land is zoned for housing.

Here's what life is like inside.

With so little land available to develop housing, Hong Kong has simply gotten denser. Downtown, one block of 24 coffin homes is located inside an apartment measuring 538 square feet.

The conditions all but force people to live in solitude. Families may live in the same building but occupy separate units due to a sheer lack of space, making life extremely difficult for the elderly, in particular.



*Bobby Yip/Reuters*

Simon Wong, a 61-year-old resident, has just enough room to hang a few shirts and pairs of pants.



*Bobby Yip/Reuters*

Wong's rent of \$226 would be enough to share a one-bedroom apartment in many American towns (though admittedly it would only be enough to rent a closet in big cities like New York City and San Francisco).



*Bobby Yip/Reuters*

The rooms are windowless and barely afford enough space to fully stretch out. People like Wong have the option to apply for the relative comforts of public housing, but he says he's yet to hear back on his requests.

If there is one silver lining, it's that residents can make use of a common area that offers a touch more space, including a toilet and sink. Still, for two dozen people, the resources quickly spread thin.

For the country's elderly, many of whom are unemployed, the units represent one of the only options to live affordably. Lam and Kitty Au, 60- and 63-year-old residents, must sleep in separate units.

The same goes for those with high medical expenses, as housing costs can quickly eat into people's limited savings. Hong Kong's housing prices are currently at an all-time high, with the average price per square foot now hovering around \$1,380.

And Hong Kong's youth face a similar plight. Until they can move up the ranks at their jobs, thousands of newly employed workers turn to ultra-tight spaces as their first homes.

Hong Kong has announced plans to build more affordable homes over the next decade. By 2027, it plans to add 280,000 public homes and 180,000 private homes. Until then, parts of Hong Kong will remain as claustrophobic as ever.