Introduction

This will be an unusual rental car tour. Not only was it not conducted by rental car, it was not even conducted by car. Airplanes were the mode, specifically four flights by Shanghai Airlines, Viet Nam Airlines, British Air and United Airlines. The subject is China’s Pearl River Delta, an emerging mega region composed of at least seven adjacent metropolitan areas --- Guangzhou-Foshan, Dongguan, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Zhongshan, Zhuhai and Macao. Each of these metropolitan areas has a large urban area at its core and in some cases, the urban areas have grown together. Nonetheless, there are expanses of agricultural or other rural space generally surrounded by urbanization.

Scale of the Pearl River Delta

The metropolitan areas of the Pearl River Delta combine for a population of approximately 50 million. Guangzhou and Foshan, two metropolitan areas that have grown together, have a population approaching 17 million. Shenzhen, just a fishing village 30 years ago, is approaching 12 million. China Daily recently reported that Dongguan, located between Shenzhen and Guangzhou has reached 10 million. The fourth largest urban area in the Pearl River Delta is Hong Kong at less than 7 million. Zhongshan is approaching 3 million, Zhuhai 2 million and Macao has approximately 500,000 residents.¹

The Pearl River Delta in Context

¹ These are metropolitan area (labor market area) populations. The urban areas (areas of continuous urban development, urban footprints or agglomerations) are somewhat lower.
All of this urbanization is located in the space of less than 5,000 square miles --- 8,000 square kilometers, slightly more than the land area of the New York urban area, which covers more space than any other in the world and has less than 20 million people. It seems likely that the population of the Pearl River Delta will continue to grow, as people continue to move from China’s rural areas.

The Pearl River Delta mega-region now has more people than the Tokyo urban area, the world’s largest urban area.

The Pearl River Delta is among the few world mega-regions, which are large adjacent metropolitan areas. Probably the first was the Northeast Corridor of the United States, which has a population of approximately 45 million in 30,000 square miles (less than 50,000 square kilometers).

The other obvious mega-region --- the Yangtze Delta (Shanghai, etc.) has approximately 55 million people in somewhat more than 10,000 square miles (16,000 square kilometers). Thus, the Pearl River mega-region may claim to be the world’s most dense expanse of urbanization. From traveling through and over these two mega-regions, it is clear that the Pearl River Delta is the much more intensely developed of the two.

The Pearl River Delta also includes the world’s most dense urban area, Hong Kong.

The Flights

The Pearl River Delta Overflight includes photographs from four flights taken in 2008.

Flight #1 landed at Baiyun International Airport in Guangzhou. The route of flight (Slides 2-3) was from the north, into Guandong province from Jainxi province (Slide 10). The flight operated to the west of the airport (Slides 12 & 41), down to Foshan (Slide 20), and turning north near the core of Guangzhou (Slides 20-22) positioning itself for landing.

Flight #2 took off from Baiyun a few hours later (Slides 2-4). This flight circled over mountains to the north of the airport and then turned south, to the west of the airport. Several villa (detached housing) developments were identified (Slides 44-47 & 49). Then came the hills to the north of Guangzhou’s core and the old international airport (Slide 52). Clear views of central Guangzhou, on the main channel of the Pearl River, were obtained (Slides 52-57). The flight continued down the less developed south side of Guangzhou (Slides 58-66). The flight crossed into Zhongshan, (Slide 68) with views of Dongguan across the Pearl River and Shenzhen in the distance beyond (Slides 69-74). The flight continued into Zhuhai (Slides 82-85) and Macao (Slides 84-87). The three bridges from Macao peninsula to Taipa Island are visible in Slide 86. The last view before venturing out to open ocean is Macao International Airport, built on fill to the east of the urban area (Slide 87). There is a plan for a bridge to be built between the Pearl River estuary’s western and eastern shores (Macao and Hong Kong).

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3 Shanghai, Suzhou, Wuxi, Changzhou, Zhenjiang, Nanjing, Huzhou, Jiazxing and Hangzhou.
Flight #3 took off from Hong Kong International Airport, providing views of Tuen Mun (Slides 89, 90 & 92). There are also views of Shenzhen in the distance (90, 91 & 93). Slide 93 shows Shenzhen over the hills from Hong Kong’s “Junk Yard Valley,” the large central valley to the east of Yuen Long that has all of the less attractive land uses necessary to an urban area, but could not look more unlike the rest of Hong Kong. Yuen Long is also shown in Slide 91. The flight continued to Tseun Wan (Slides 94-96). There are a number of views of Kowloon (Slides 97 to 107), with the abandoned former Hong Kong International Airport in Slides 100 to 102. The new towns of Sha Tin (Slides 97, 99-100, 104 & 118) and Ma On Shan (Slides 99-100) are also visible. Just to the north of the old airport is the park that replaced the Kowloon Walled City, destroyed by the British government in the early 1990s (Slide 100). This may have been the world’s most dense settlement, with as many as 5 million people per square mile (3 million per square kilometer) in its 18 acres (8 hectares).

Flight 4 took off from Hong Kong International Airport and circled back to provide views of Hong Kong Island (Slides 110-113), Kowloon (Slides 115-116) and continued across Shenzhen and Dongguan into Guangzhou (Slides 78-80).

http://www.rentalcartours.net
http://www.demographia.com
http://www.publicpurpose.com
Routes of Flights

OVERVIEW FLIGHTS 1 & 2
Guangzhou-Foshan-Zhongshan-Dongguan-Shenzhen-Zhuhai-Macao

DETAIL FLIGHTS 1 & 2
Guangzhou-Foshan

OVERVIEW ROUTE FLIGHT 3
HKIA-Kowloon

DETAIL: FLIGHT 3: HKIA-Kowloon

Urban Tours by Rental Car: Pearl River Delta Overflight
OVERVIEW
ROUTE
FLIGHT 4
HKIA-
Kowloon-
Shenzhen-
Dongguan

DETAIL
ROUTE
FLIGHT 4
HKIA-
Kowloon-
Sha Tin

PEARL RIVER DELTA OVERFLIGHT

Guangzhou-
Foshan

Mountains of Jianxi Province (Flying Toward Guangzhou)

Industrial Development: North Guangzhou

Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport (from Northwest)
Urban Tours by Rental Car: Pearl River Delta Overflight
Urban Tours by Rental Car: Pearl River Delta Overflight
Urban Tours by Rental Car: Pearl River Delta Overflight
Zhongshan, Dongguan & Shenzhen

Guangzhou & Dongguan (Distance)

Guangzhou & Dongguan, Shenzhen, Hong Kong (distance)

Guangzhou & Dongguan (Over River)

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Kowloon (Tsuen Wan) 115

Kowloon (Former Airport in Upper Right) 116

Kowloon, Hong Kong Harbour & Hong Kong Island 117

Sha Tin 118

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