

Haskell to establish a global design centre in Greater KL

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American design and build industry leader sees great potential in the country's young and creative skilled talent.

The Haskell Company (Haskell), an industry leader in the design-build construction method, is looking to develop a global design centre in Greater KL. Headquartered in Jacksonville Florida, USA, this privately-held company has built its name by performing a wide range of services in design and construction for a variety of customers. Services range from business case analysis and master planning, to systems analytics and modelling, to architecture, all disciplines of engineering, project management, specialized engineering (process, packaging, material handling, CIP systems), to sustainable design and Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality models. Its multinational clients are industry giants such as PepsiCo, Safran, Diageo, Procter & Gamble as well as government entities.

Although Haskell has been working on projects in Southeast Asia since 2007, the company only established a permanent regional hub in Malaysia this year. "We have been supporting clients, like PepsiCo, Gulfstream, ImBev, and, Spirit AeroSystems (during the construction of their original plant in Subang), for a long time in the region, but we did not have the correct resources to sustain our presence in this market. However, since 2014 we have built a strong team of expats and local talent in order to provide a quality services at local pricing. With over 1300 employees worldwide, more than half of the global team are design professionals, most of them came from the client's side prior to joining our team. Our entire delivery system is focused on improving the client's business case. We are always looking for the best combination of innovation, cost, operational ease of use, maintainability, reliability, quality, sustainability, safety, and time to implement any of the systems we recommend," says Jonathan Toke, vice-president of Asia for Haskell (USA), and managing director for the branches in the region, including Malaysia Services Sdn Bhd.

When Toke was looking to establish a full-time operation for Haskell in Asia, he surveyed universities in different countries to evaluate their talent pool. After evaluating the calibre of fresh graduates in Malaysia, Toke decided that Greater KL was a suitable location for Haskell's regional hub.

"Greater KL offers many advantages over its peers in this region. It is strategically located and politically stable with good infrastructure. Locals speak many languages including English and the country is business-friendly and cost-efficient. To me, what was more interesting but less obvious is the capacity and the capability of its talent pool. There is a melting pot of different races, cultures, and upbringing here. This situation along with the many education institutions here has created 'diversity of thought' among its graduates," says Toke.

A relatively new concept, diversity of thought is believed to boost innovation and creative problem-solving at the workplace. With different cultures, backgrounds and personalities shaping how employees think, companies are able to stimulate creativity, spur insight and increase efficiency. This is vital for Haskell, a thought-leader in integrated delivery where the right solution must be provided for each of its unique clients.

"Haskell has worked on some of the biggest and most complex industrial projects around the world. We aim to deliver a collaborative project experience by working closely with our clients. It is our hallmark to provide certainty of outcome for every project. In other words, we look to minimise the risk involved in meeting our client's objectives by identifying potential roadblocks and hurdles along the way. By discussing these issues early on, we stand a much better chance of delivering the project on time or even before the expected completion date, and within budget," says Toke.

"Once you take the talent pool into account, Malaysia stands out when measured against other countries. The competency of young professionals that are able to blend new technology and old technology that stands out. There is a lot of creative energy here and we hope to be able to harness and nurture it to deliver on an international level," says Toke.

Set for rapid growth in Greater KL

Toke has big plans for Haskell's operations in Malaysia. Its office in Greater KL has only been opened for a few months but he sees the potential of doing more to support Haskell's global operations.

"We opened the doors to our office on September 6. The aim of this space is to harness creative energy and it able to sit 20 comfortably. We have since hired 15 local employees. We also have another six employees based in Singapore, and we will quickly reach 15 more team members at our new office in the Philippines," says Toke.

He adds that there is a strong possibility of increasing the number of local employees by three to five times over the next five years or so. "Of course, this largely depends on securing new clients and on whether we are able to support our operations in the US in a competent and professional manner."

As Haskell's regional operations are in a different time zone to its American operations and other developed markets, the company



HASKELL

Trusted engineering company
and global leader in integrated
project delivery

Established for
more than
50
YEARS
and a pioneer in the
design-build model

Permanent presence in
Singapore and Malaysia since 2014,
expanding to Philippines in 2018

WHY GREATER KL?

Diversity of talent

Holistic infrastructure

English is widely spoken

BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Aim to increase Malaysian talent by
3 to 5 times within 6 years to serve new
clients and support U.S. operations

In-house training programme and
knowledge transfer with the U.S. for
local employees

is poised to benefit from a reduced turnaround time and in better utilisation of resources when working for global customers. "There are a lot of advantages in operating in different time zones. For example, the team in Greater KL, when trained and ready, would be able to continue working on design proposals when their American counterparts go to bed. This is one way that we can support Haskell's design operations which is a huge part of our business. With this in mind, the aim is to build a global design centre for Haskell, in Greater KL," says Toke.

With over 50 years of experience, Haskell is able to leverage on a history of innovation and technical expertise to craft the optimal solution for each project. For example, it uses virtual reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) in its design and building process. This cutting-edge technology allows clients and any major capital expenditures to see what the end result will look like long before major capital expenditures. This allows the team to optimise layouts, improve coordination of the facility components, and explore options before or even during actual construction without impacting the project cost or schedule.

"Using technology is one way that we differentiate ourselves in the competitive industry of construction and design. Our competitors have been in this region for longer than we have and we respect their presence and the services that they offer," says Toke.

"Our goal is to be a respected and trusted company. How we behave when things go well or when dealing with an unforeseen circumstance is another way that we differentiate ourselves. Haskell puts trust in the middle of our relationship with our clients. We view

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— Jonathan Toke, vice-president of Asia for Haskell (USA)

ourselves as business partners that happen to specialize in design and construction. We are fully vested in the successful completion of each project. We work best with companies that enable us to use our skills to support their entire operation as a truly integrated team member. We can often build value for our clients by looking at the total cost of ownership of an investment, ranging from the capital cost, to the operating cost, to the cost of the training and maintenance required to fully benefit from the investment.”

Honing skilled local talent

To succeed in meeting their client's objectives, Haskell offers training and development opportunities to its employees. Its training programmes are created with the scope, challenge and diverse experience needed for professional growth. Local employees are put through an in-house training programme that requires them to travel and work in Malaysia and the US.

"There are training plans for all our technical staff. We look to improve their technical ability and skills, instill the right attitude and work culture. Their training consists of work assignments that are discussed in the US and implemented in Malaysia. This means that they do a fair amount of travelling to the US. By sending them to our headquarters, they are also able to interact with professionals with more than 25 years of experience in this industry. Haskell has a pool of knowledgeable and professional engineers that work alongside architectural and construction teams. This ensure that we are able to execute seamlessly and achieve the ideal outcome," he says.

Toke also adds that government agencies such as InvestKL played a meaningful role in helping the company when it decided to establish its operations here. "InvestKL helped us get plugged into the community and assisted us as we did our survey of educational institutions. Having a great partner like InvestKL is important as we aim to build our presence in this region and to find the best talent that can assist us in building a global design centre for Haskell in the country. We look forward to working with them for many years to come," says Toke.

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