

For International SOS, Kuala Lumpur is the gateway to Southeast Asia

As International SOS celebrates its 24th year of operating in Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur remains of ever-increasing importance to its regional business strategy. For Jing Tan, its newly appointed regional general manager and director of Southeast Asia, Kuala Lumpur is simply the gateway to one of the most exciting growth markets on the planet.

"We are excited to be in the heart of Southeast Asia as it is one of the fastest-growing regions in the world with gross domestic product growth averaging between 4% - 5% annually in recent years," says Jing. "Kuala Lumpur, being strategically located in the heart of Southeast Asia, is the preferred gateway to this region, which has a population of more than 655 million and combined GDP of US\$3.3 trillion."

For perspective, Kuala Lumpur is a critical cog in the global machine that is International SOS, the world's largest medical and travel security risk services organisation. Over the years, International SOS has evolved from being a medical emergency evacuation specialist to offering risk mitigation and prevention solutions.

The group's clientele includes 87% of Fortune Global 100 companies as well as two-thirds of existing Fortune 500 companies around the world, served by its workforce of 11,000 employees spread across 90 countries.

Approximately 47% of its workforce are medical professionals — including 1,400 full-time doctors — who, supported by a network of 81,000 preferred medical, legal and security providers, help clients by resolving 4.1 million assistance calls annually.

Its global operations necessitate multilingual ability among its workforce and that is why Kuala Lumpur, with its naturally multilingual profile of human talent, fits perfectly as one of International SOS's 26 Assistance Centres worldwide.

"Malaysia's operations have consistently exceeded their business targets and, within Southeast Asia, it has the largest number of employees of around 500. Effective July 2019, Kuala Lumpur has become the head office for the Southeast Asian region and is the regional hub for medical services for the whole of Asia," says Jing.

He acknowledges that the group's successes in Kuala Lumpur so far was built on the foundations of a strong relationship between International SOS and InvestKL, the agency mandated to facilitate



Jing Tan

100 multinational companies (MNCs) to invest in Greater Kuala Lumpur by 2020.

Among other major milestones achieved with InvestKL's support was the successful relocation of the company's Asia Medical Services Regional Operational Headquarters (OHQ) from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur in 2012.

InvestKL also facilitated the company's new Global Shared Services Centre in 2014, which created 150 new jobs. About 95% of the new employees are Malaysians.

"Our relationship with InvestKL is one of the partnerships that adds tremendous value to our business in Malaysia. InvestKL understands the needs of investors and is always there to support and guide," Jing adds.

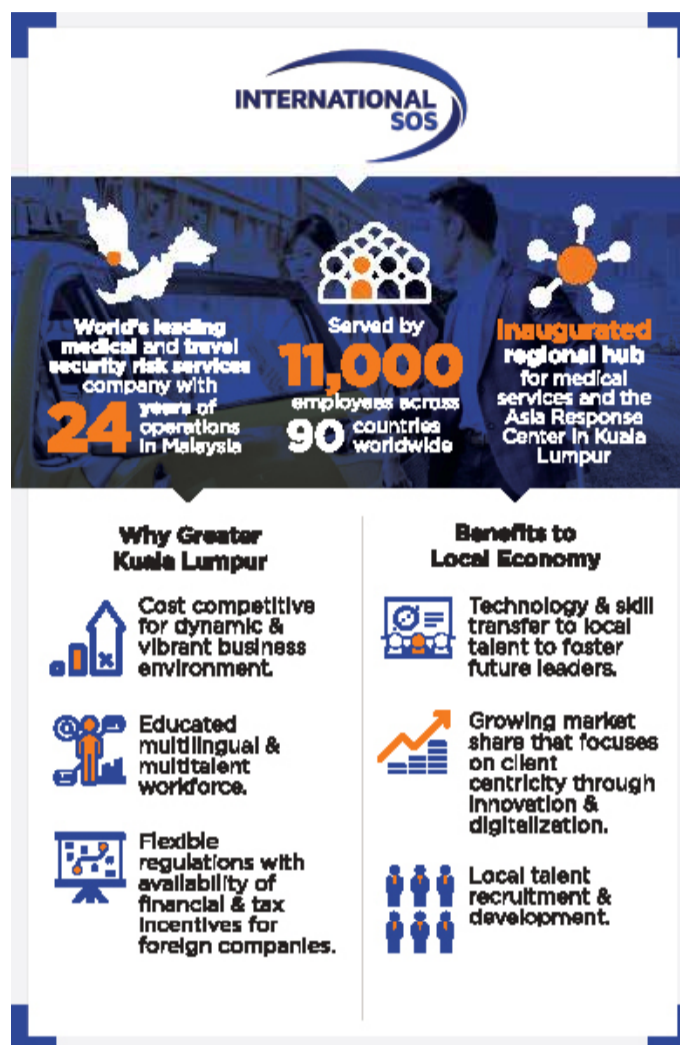
A competitive advantage

While International SOS has grown its Kuala Lumpur base rapidly in recent years to support accelerating business expansion across the region, this growth is only the beginning, says Jing.

"In the last five years, we have doubled our headcount in Malaysia, and we foresee this trend to continue as we grow our business not only in Malaysia but also in the region. We will expand in the digital space and continue to invest in technology for TeleHealth by embedding digital innovations into our solutions such as telemedicine, TeleConsultation and Wellness Applications in an integrated platform."

He adds that the group is pleased with its current rate of expansion in Kuala Lumpur and that the next five years is expected to see International SOS more than double its operations in the city.

Explaining further, Jing notes that Kuala Lumpur is the group's regional hub for medical services and that the city houses its Asia Response Centre for all offshore medical activities. With a single response centre in Kuala Lumpur,



its clients have a single escalation point with consistent operating standards and economies of scale.

"This has become our competitive advantage to grow our medical services business in the region, which has consistently grown in double digits," says Jing in explaining the group's enthusiasm in investing in the capital city.

The potential returns on its continuous investments in Kuala Lumpur are clear. According to the group's latest "Business Resilience Trend Watch" survey done with over 1,300 business travel decision-makers, 51% of respondents believe that health and security risks increased in the past year.

In addition, a Global Mobility Effectiveness Survey by EY found that 50% of companies surveyed thought their global mobility team was understaffed and that only 30% have a system in place for tracking business travellers.

"This is not surprising as more com-

panies are operating across borders and travellers today are exposed to even more risks than before — pandemic risks and terrorism threats, to name a few. Therefore, we foresee demand increasing and not diminishing," says Jing.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic is an example of growing risks that International SOS had mobilised quickly to address for its clients. Among others, the group provides critical, accurate and timely information on the outbreak to support its clients' decision-making. In addition, its medical and security experts serve as advisers to review and validate its clients' pandemic response, policies and business continuity plans during the outbreak. International SOS also provides assistance both in person and virtually, including TeleConsultation and, increasingly, in the area of emotional support. It has provided open-access information, accessible via its corporate website at www.internationalsos.com.

Perfect base

For Jing, who had spent the past decade spearheading the financial leadership of International SOS in Asia, the region offers untold promises that are yet to be tapped. To put that into perspective, the group's Asian business has accelerated with strong double-digit growths for both revenue and profit under his financial leadership prior to his current role.

At the global level, International SOS's vision is to be the world's leading medical and travel security risk services company and Jing aspires to realise that vision at the Southeast Asian level. His key areas of focus are "our people, business growth and service quality", he says.

"We will continue to focus on our people and our productivity by recruiting the best, developing and retaining our talents. With our nationalisation agenda, we are also focusing on transferring our skills and technology to our local talents in order to have a strong pipeline of future national leaders," he says.

"We will also grow our market share by focusing on client-centricity through innovation and digitalisation while continuing to deliver with the highest quality of service and continue to improve our capability via innovations."

And Kuala Lumpur is the perfect base from which to realise the vision, Jing adds, for a multitude of reasons. Chief among them is that many MNCs have chosen Kuala Lumpur as their regional hub and it makes business sense to stay close to clients in order to provide better service within the same business ecosystem, he clarifies.

On the operational side, Malaysia presents investors such as International SOS a dynamic and vibrant business environment that is driven by steady GDP growth rates of between 4% and 5% annually.

Additionally, Greater Kuala Lumpur ranks top across the region in terms of cost competitiveness and value for investment by way of a well-developed infrastructure, an educated multilingual and multi-talented workforce as well as flexible regulations.

"Kuala Lumpur is the right choice as we can also attract talents who are able to deliver great service to our clients not just in Malaysia but worldwide. The availability of financial and tax incentives for foreign companies to set up business and operations in Malaysia is also an added advantage," explains Jing.

Delivering long-term value for the nation and investors

For InvestKL, attracting 100 multinational companies (MNCs) to make meaningful, high impact investments in Greater Kuala Lumpur by 2020 is not solely about fulfilling a key performance indicator target. It goes hand-in-hand with creating a long-term impact and a mutually beneficial relationship between the MNCs and the nation, and benefiting the public, as part of shared prosperity, says CEO Muhammad Azmi Zulkifli.

"The continuously growing investments by International SOS into Greater Kuala Lumpur exemplifies the kind of long-term economic benefits we seek to create for the benefit of

Malaysia and Malaysians," he says.

The agency mainly focuses on services-based MNCs that intend to set up regional hubs to serve the Asian or Asia-Pacific regions. It is focusing on six sectors — smart technologies, consumer technologies, e-commerce, medical devices, industrial automation and energy and renewables.

The investment promotion agency under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry currently reports to Datuk Seri Mohamed Azmin Ali.

In that vein, International SOS is the perfect fit for the mould. Since 2015, International SOS has more than dou-

bled its headcount from 200 to 477. Nearly all of the jobs went to highly trained Malaysian professionals, which provides them with a regional platform to gain invaluable knowledge and exposure, says Azmi.

"At the heart of the matter is the strong fundamentals of Greater Kuala Lumpur that provides invaluable ease of doing business amid modern amenities, state-of-the-art infrastructure and a dynamic talent pool."



Azmi

Therefore, InvestKL is playing a critical role in connecting discerning MNC investors who are looking for what Greater Kuala Lumpur can offer as a stepping stone into Asia-Pacific, he adds. The location is especially advantageous for MNCs with

geographically diverse operations given that Greater Kuala Lumpur's central location translates into easy air mobility into most of Asia-Pacific.

In terms of the larger national economic agenda, which hinges critically on digitalisation and disruptive technologies, Azmi says the MNC profile that it seeks to attract is also consciously tailored towards supporting the digitalisation drive at the national level.

"Therefore, it is imperative that we ensure the creation of present employment opportunities via the investing MNCs that also prepares our local talent pool for the digital future via continuous learning and upskilling, among others," Azmi adds.