



A Smooth Transition to Life in Greater KL

MANY EXPATS ARRIVE IN GREATER KL AT THE DIRECTION OF THEIR COMPANIES, WITH LITTLE OR NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE CITY. EDITOR **CHAD MERCHANT** SPOKE WITH ONE SUCH EXPAT WHO FOUND ADAPTING TO LIFE IN HIS NEW HOST COUNTRY TO BE MUCH EASIER THAN HE EXPECTED.

It seems that many people automatically think of Westerners when they think of expats in Malaysia. But a significant expat population from other Asian countries also thrives in Greater KL, perhaps most notably expats from the two countries behind the construction of the Petronas Twin Towers, Japan and Korea. We recently spoke with Japanese expat Keigo Iechika, who is the Chief Strategy Officer and Director for Hitachi Sunway Information Systems Sdn Bhd, and asked him some questions about his life and experiences as an expat in Greater KL.

Hi Keigo-san. How long have you been living here in Greater KL?

I was assigned to Malaysia in September 2013, five months after the establishment of the joint venture between Hitachi and Sunway, so it's been about two years now.

Did you move here with your family?

I moved to Malaysia with my wife only. I have three daughters and all of them are married. My eldest and youngest daughters are both new mothers, too, each blessed with a one-year-old baby.

Had you visited Malaysia prior to relocating here? Did you have any knowledge of or preconceptions about the country or Greater KL prior to your arrival?

No, I had actually never been to Malaysia prior to this. I had little knowledge or information about Malaysia, and I thought it was a rural and not developed country. Similarly, I didn't know very much about Greater KL, either. However, I felt comfortable here within a short time.

Apart from the weather and the food, what are some of the most notable differences between Malaysia and Japan?

I would say the number of women in the workforce is something I have noticed. The ratio of women to men in the workplace here in Malaysia is much higher as compared to Japan.

Have you travelled around Malaysia? Any favourite destinations?

I have travelled to a few cities such as Ipoh, Melaka, and Penang. And I have to say, Ipoh is my favourite destination. I like Ipoh because it is so calm and relaxing when compared to KL! Ipoh is rich with historical architectures and heritage, friendly folks, and a lot of delicious food on every corner.

Do you think Greater KL provides a good environment for foreign companies?

Yes. Located at the heart of ASEAN, Greater KL offers a gateway to a regional market. The people here are multicultural, multilingual, and quite friendly. Malaysia also offers the Malaysia My Second Home Programme, and the living environment here is very conducive. I feel it's easier for foreigners to adapt here than perhaps other cities in the region. For example, driving in the city here, even with the traffic, is much easier as compared to major cities in Thailand or Indonesia.

What more could Greater KL and Malaysia do to entice foreign companies to invest or have a presence here?

Though Greater KL does a fine job overall, personally, I think the Malaysian government should take additional steps to improve the visa processing process to ensure the application process progress more smoothly.

What about the expat lifestyle in Greater KL? Have you found it to be satisfactory?

The expat lifestyle here is definitely acceptable. However, there is a lack of plentiful cultural activities such as orchestras, stage plays, musicals and so on. I feel that these activities can provide expats like me with a better understanding of Malaysian culture and identity, which will help expats to blend into the society more easily.

What do you miss most about Japan?

Perhaps like many other expats from northern latitudes, I miss the four seasons. In Japan, each season has its own unique

character. For example, during spring time, there will be a lot of sakura (cherry blossoms), and I love our hanami tradition (flower viewing). It is very beautiful!

I'm sure readers would like to know if you have any favourite Japanese restaurants in KL?

Chiyo Sushi in EGG, Bandar Sunway is one of my favourite Japanese restaurants. They import fish and shellfish from Japan twice a week, and so their food is fresh and delicious. ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Senses of Malaysia* extends a special thanks to Keigo Iechika for talking with us. We are happy to report that much effort has recently been put into addressing a couple of Keigo-san's specific observations here. For example, the visa application process has been significantly streamlined by the efforts of the Malaysian government. Also, for those seeking more cultural activities, particularly those highlighting Malaysian culture, we would recommend going to see the excellent musical *MUD: Our Story of Kuala Lumpur* at KL's historic city theatre, or taking in a concert by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra at the Petronas Towers.



Tasked by the Malaysian government to attract and facilitate large global multinationals to set up their regional business, innovation, and talent hubs in Greater Kuala Lumpur and strategically grow their business in Asia, **InvestKL** works with other government ministries, entities, and agencies to formulate attractive fiscal packages and help corporations identify business opportunities while strengthening their competitiveness regionally and globally.