

# Expats Living in the Malaysian Capital

When the workday is over and business no longer distracts, expats are faced with living in a foreign land. On that front, Greater KL offers an appealing lifestyle to those posted here, and Editor **Chad Merchant** talked with one such expat who was happy to elaborate.



**W**hen a multinational company is looking to expand into a new region, or considering increasing its foothold to a more prominent position through expansion and development, a number of factors come into play. Many of these are business-oriented in nature: What tax incentives are offered? Will the location significantly improve distribution? What sort of market share can be gained? Is there sufficient talent on hand to adequately staff the new locations?

One company, InvestKL, has been created by the Malaysian government to facilitate and oversee the task of not only attracting MNCs to Greater KL, but to effectively be a single resource for these companies, acting as a trusted adviser, local facilitator, and experienced guide for companies choosing Greater KL as a new regional base. However, one thing they cannot do is control or influence the day-to-day lifestyle KL offers to expats who have relocated.

For that, it's best to talk directly to the expats themselves. Some have been sent around the world in the course of their jobs; for others, Greater KL is their first experience in a foreign country. We recently caught up with Martin Thacker, Head of Finance – Malaysia, Brunei, and the Philippines for Rentokil Initial. The British multinational, with over a century of service in pest control and hygiene back home, has been established in Malaysia for almost 50 years and is currently developing the role of the KL-based offices to offer more regional-based support services to its Asia business.

Having visited Malaysia several times before, Martin already had a familiarity with the country before moving here, so the prospect of a job posting in the capital city was one he found quite appealing. "I like Malaysia, and I already had friends here in KL," he explained, "so when the opportunity to relocate with a great company like Rentokil Initial, one which already had a solid presence here, I of course pursued it."

Part of Rentokil Initial's country senior management team, Martin arrived on the scene in KL in January 2013, settled in Bangsar, and has scarcely looked back. "It's been a great experience," he enthused. "It's quite easy living here as an English-speaking expat simply because most Malaysians already speak the language. It's a fast-developing city, too. KL has really evolved in a short time, and it manages to nicely balance the modern with the traditional, which is one of its great appeals for me."

When asked about the lifestyle for expats living in Greater KL, Martin was exceptionally bullish on the city. "It's brilliant," he said with nary a pause. "In KL, it's easy to socialize and meet people. There are endless cafés, pubs, restaurants... so many places to meet friends and colleagues. Of course, the food here is legendary, from simple *mamak* stalls to elegant fine dining in world-class hotels and restaurants. Eating in KL is never boring."

Beyond the social scene and parade of culinary adventures, Martin noted that even KL's geographic location plays a significant role in the city's liveability. "In Malaysia, there are many places to visit," he began. "I especially like Melaka, Kota Bharu, and Penang. Of course, any of the well-known islands are fantastic, too – Langkawi, Redang, Tioman, Perhentian. And over in Sabah, Sandakan is terrific, especially the orang utan centre there, which I loved. And it's so easy to get to these places from KL since it's a true transportation hub for the country."

Martin continued this theme, mentioning the travel opportunities beyond Malaysia. "Greater KL is well-positioned for the expat who likes to explore and take weekend trips. There are many terrific locations in Southeast Asia that are just a short hop away from KL by plane."

From a more work-oriented perspective, Martin also had praise for Greater KL. "Well,

I think it's a great hub for companies to operate from," he pointed out. "And the fact that the government has an openly stated desire to attract MNCs – and has even set forth a company like InvestKL to 'grease the wheels' and make it even easier – really puts KL on a very short list for companies looking to expand in this region."

He continued, "The city is welcoming to expats, there's a good pool of local talent, and the people here are keen to learn and contribute. There are certainly cost benefits to being located here, and the country has, through its various transformation programmes and initiatives, shown a very real willingness to strengthen its position."

Unsurprisingly, Martin had nothing but good words for InvestKL. "They prefer to do their part behind the scenes," he laughed, "but they do their jobs well. They opened so many doors for us, gave us tax guidance, introduced us to other agencies and government-linked companies like TalentCorp, and really helped us sort through all our options here. Very simply put, they just made it easier."

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.