

Why Is Greater KL Asia's Best Expat City?

Kuala Lumpur is increasingly making itself known as a top choice for expats in Southeast Asia. When taking everything from liveability to leisure opportunities to cost of living into account, the city that consistently rises to the top is the one you already know.

Millions of people have discovered Kuala Lumpur's travel appeal. The Malaysian capital welcomes plane loads of visitors on a daily basis, and the city is an ideal base for tourists wishing to explore the country. But when it comes to living somewhere, or setting up a company, people tend to look at different things. Sure, some factors are the same – whether you're a visitor or a resident, you probably look for good leisure, shopping, and dining opportunities, and it's safe to say that Greater Kuala Lumpur excels for the pursuits we all enjoy: the city is renowned for its culinary offerings, ranging from tasty street food to numerous fine dining options, the shopping is legitimately world-class, and there's always plenty to see and do. But when you look at a city and consider it as a place to call home, a lot more comes into play.

So how does Greater KL stack up when it comes to residing here? We considered six factors that impact residents of any city, for better or worse, and look at how Malaysia's capital city delivers.

1. LIVEABILITY

What makes a city liveable? Part of it falls on the things we've already mentioned – those pursuits that residents and visitors alike look for. Things to do, places to visit, restaurants and cinemas, parks and natural elements, and KL really excels here. And, with its tropical latitude and near-total freedom from any natural disasters, Greater KL offers residents great liveability. Year-round warm

weather, located in an expansive valley ringed by distant forested mountain ranges, KL is as pretty as it is pleasant. Yes, it's a big city, and has those elements, too – loads of concrete, steel, and glass. But KL is awash in greenery, with tropical trees and plants seemingly at every turn. The city's skyline is beautiful, and it's easy to feel a sense of civic pride when looking out on the many skyscrapers and buildings from a good vantage point. A modern network of roads and highways attract a lot of traffic, but they also serve to make transportation smooth and convenient. The culinary scene in Greater KL has grown tremendously in recent years, with the city attracting more and more top chefs and diverse restaurants. Modern, well-stocked, Western-style grocery stores abound, alongside more traditional shops and wet markets, and when it comes to retail therapy, few cities in the region can compete with KL. In fact, CNN Travel named KL the fourth-best shopping city in the world, bested only by global titans New York, London, and Tokyo. There are also scores of leisurely outings and cultural pursuits on offer, from urban parks and forest areas to cultural pursuits like museums, live theatre, symphonic orchestras, and a city opera.

2. EDUCATION

Malaysia in general has made enormous strides in both international and tertiary education in the last decade, and nowhere is this more keenly felt than in Greater KL. With dozens of international schools – among them some of the most acclaimed and highly rated in the



region – and numerous institutions of higher learning, expats can be confident their children will have access to a world-class education, all while enjoying exposure to a healthy dose of multicultural experiences, too. With over 180 international schools currently serving more than 75,000 students in Malaysia, some of the top curricula offered include British, American, and Australian, with some schools even offering specialised instruction in French or Japanese. Indeed, Malaysia's approach to international education over the last decade has yielded such impressive results, other countries in the region are mirroring Malaysia's efforts.

3. HEALTHCARE

If education in Malaysia has made amazing strides in recent years, it's surpassed perhaps only by the leaps made in the field of healthcare. With renowned hospitals and medical centres easily at hand, Greater KL offers its residents access to a superb standard of medical care. In fact, from 2015 to 2017, Malaysia earned the prestigious "Destination of the Year" by the International Medical Travel Journal for three consecutive years. In that same period, the country was also recognised for three years in a row by International Living as the country with

the "Best Healthcare System in the World". Healthcare in Greater KL is not only outstanding, but it's affordable and accessible, too, which is why the city – and indeed the whole of Malaysia – is getting so much positive attention on the global medical travel stage. And with Malaysia setting a goal of exceeding RM2.8 billion in medical travel revenue by 2020, the potential for Greater KL as the Asian hub for healthcare tourism is only set to grow.

4. COST OF LIVING

It's great to have access to good education, top-notch healthcare, and plenty of activities to enjoy along the way. But if it costs a fortune, it diminishes the overall appeal. Fortunately, Greater KL offers expats one of the most affordable costs of living in the region. It's usually not good to come in 412th place out of 562 cities, but when it's a ranking of cost of living, the lower down the list you are, the better! Indeed, Kuala Lumpur notched the 412th slot in the Numbeo 2018 Cost of Living Index for 562 cities worldwide, with a score of 46.78, using New York at 100.0 as the benchmark. For regional comparison, Singapore scored a 93.26 on the index, while Hong Kong came in at 79.08. Even Bangkok came in with a higher cost of living than Kuala Lumpur. The

metropolitan sibling of KL, Petaling Jaya, nearly matched KL's affordability, with an index score of 48.09. The Cost of Living Index takes into account rent, groceries, dining out, and overall local purchasing power.

5. TRAVEL AND LEISURE

Greater KL is hard to beat when it comes to delivering outstanding opportunities for travel and leisure. With a modern system of highways and byways throughout Peninsular Malaysia, residents have a treasure trove of destinations close at hand, from jungle retreats to island escapes, from urban food trails to eco-resort getaways. And if it's the broader Southeast Asian region you want to explore, nobody can deliver that better, more conveniently, and more affordably than Greater KL. With easy, direct flights to dozens of regional destinations large and small, Malaysia not only makes getting there convenient, it makes it downright cheap, too. Last year, the travel research site Kiwi.com completed a comprehensive study and found that Malaysia offers travellers, on average, the cheapest airfares in the world! So if you're living in Greater KL, it's not only easy to escape for a long weekend and explore the wider region, it's ultra-affordable, too!

6. SUSTAINABILITY

Greater KL has taken significant steps towards improving its long-term sustainability as a city of the future, not least of which is the huge railway improvement programme that began a few years ago and saw in 2017 the opening of the first new MRT line, which covers over 50km. Two more lines are planned, with the first of these under construction now. The government has repeatedly backed up its desire to increase public transportation ridership. A massive tree-planting campaign in Kuala Lumpur was also initiated as part of Malaysia's Economic Transformation Programme, with the aim of planting tens of thousands of new trees citywide by 2020. The initiative exceeded its long-term goals within the first few years, with hundreds of trees even boasting RFID tags so their health and progress can be monitored. The ambitious River of Life project, which will transform the city's Klang and Gombak waterways into a rich, vibrant waterfront, is well underway, and more initiatives are coming online every year to ensure Greater KL has a cleaner, greener future. ■



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.