

International SOS makes Greater KL its regional hub for medical services

Greater Kuala Lumpur (KL) has maintained its status as the city of choice by many global multinational corporations looking to set up their regional headquarters. The city's success comes from its many advantages, which includes its business friendly policies, well-developed infrastructure, quality of life and robust talent pool. The capital has a strategic location in Southeast Asia both geographically and economically, with economic growth hovering around 5% annually. One such corporation that has chosen Greater KL is International SOS – the world's largest and leading international medical assistance and travel security risk services company. International SOS serves about 10,000 clients globally, 70 percent of which are the Fortune Global 500 companies.

International SOS has called Greater KL its home in this region for the past 18 years with two set-ups, a South and South East Asia (SSEA) Medical Services Operational Headquarters (OHQ) and a recently established Regional Centre of Excellence MSC. Nigel Pool, Group Chief Financial Officer and David Ng, General Manager tell The Edge what keeps bringing the company back to Greater KL.

"The same three things bring us back to Greater KL. First of all, the infrastructure here is first class with a complete ecosystem and that makes a big difference. Talent is our second. The knowledge, the drive and the enthusiasm from what we see of the Malaysian talent is one of the reasons we come here. Last is the welcome and facilitation provided by InvestKL and the Malaysian government. That's three compelling reasons to come back," said Pool.

With a strong client base and many active high-risk operations in the energy, mining and infrastructure sectors in Southeast Asia, such integrated medical and security services are a growing necessity for such high-risk operations and activities. The oil and gas sector is a major driver of the Malaysian economy and home to energy multinational giants such as Shell and Schlumberger, whereby many offshore oil & gas exploration and production activities and operators are required to manage the related risks including ensuring provision of appropriate medical emergency care.

"Malaysia's diverse economic activities also include high-value service industries such as oil and gas, mining and infrastructure, telecommunications, banking, education, tourism and real estate," said Ng. "The medical needs of these activities are met through our services which include a 24/7 medical and security assistance platform for business travelers and expatriates, medical services for clients in remote locations (for example, those involved in the oil and gas and construction sectors) and our medical clinics in strategic locations," added Ng.

International SOS also places its doctors and paramedics on-site in the location, which it deems its staffing service.

A competitive business ecosystem

According to Pool, Greater KL has significant advantages over its neighboring cities. "Here we are getting close to the clients we service in terms of what we're doing and we can find the talent, the most important thing is the people". Among them is its affordability, added Ng.

“We’ve done a massive recruitment drive — we are very pleased and encouraged by what we’ve found. The talent pool here is very good.” — Pool

“Greater KL is a top choice in terms of cost competitiveness, well-developed infrastructure, abundant talent, flexible regulation and available incentives for foreign companies to set up business and operations in the region.” — Ng



Group chief financial officer Nigel Pool (right) and general manager David Ng



International SOS' core services include medical and travel security assistance, medical consulting, integrated medical services, and information and tracking services. Staff are highly trained to execute emergency assistance services such as an air ambulance evacuation.

"In terms of liveability, Greater KL remains one of the more affordable cities compared to others in Southeast Asia. Overall, Greater KL is a top choice in terms of cost-competitiveness, well-developed infrastructure, abundance of talents, flexible regulatory and available incentives for foreign companies to set up business and operations in the region.

In fact, Pool and Ng believe that International SOS's presence in Greater KL will greatly benefit local vendors (especially in the healthcare sector) and the economy of Malaysia. "Our role in the healthcare sector is unique," Ng said. "We work with medical facilities, health advisory agencies and other healthcare-related industries such as pharmaceutical, insurance, medical transport providers and many more [in Greater KL]," he added. "In line with Malaysia's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), International SOS will continue to focus on its operations in the country and chart its growth over the next three years."

High skilled talent pool that meets the demands of MNCs

International SOS's successful set-ups have created numerous employment opportunities for the local talents. The South and South East Asia (SSEA) Medical Services Operational Headquarter (OHQ) is staffed by at least 60 percent of Malaysians, while the newly set up Regional Centre of Excellence (MSC) has recruited 70 Malaysians so far. "We are currently recruiting 70 people for our Centre of Excellence and we've done massive recruitment drive in the last few weeks. We are very pleased and encouraged with what we've found. The talent pool here is very good," said Pool.

IMD, a global business school based in Switzerland has recently released its first annual World Talent Ranking report 2014. Supporting Greater KL's availability of talent, the report which assesses a country's ability to develop, attract and retain talent for companies ranks Malaysia as the top five among 60 countries. Inadvertently, with International SOS's presence in Greater KL, there will also be a transfer of international, medical services knowledge which will enrich the country's expertise in healthcare.

A strong partnership with Malaysian agencies

Its presence in Greater KL is owed greatly to the efforts of InvestKL, the agency mandated by the Malaysian Government to attract and facilitate large global multinationals to set up their businesses in Greater KL. InvestKL has played a major part in ensuring that International SOS settles down quickly in the country. "A partnership with InvestKL made the journey to Greater KL easier. You can see so many multinationals who've come here and that encourages [us]. When you see that as an investor, and you see those big names of multinationals, you [would] obviously go. You are attracted by the big companies that are already here. That is the magnet, that's pulling you into Greater KL," said Pool.

"InvestKL has been a key and supportive partner in helping us with our setup," said Ng. "They have bridged us with various government agencies and departments to enable us to tap into various business incentives and facilitate regulatory approvals, and they have also been very supportive in helping us identify and recruit the specific talents which are crucial to our business."

Pool also talks about the company's expansion plans in Greater KL. "We've got many many plans. There are many things we can bring to Greater KL. We've done two and we've got a few more up our sleeves".

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InvestKL is a government initiative to attract and facilitate global multinationals investment into Greater Kuala Lumpur