

A Global Nomad Finds a Home in Greater KL

We recently caught up with an expat from India who has lived in Greater KL with his family for about four years, and talked with him about his thoughts on working and living in the Malaysian capital.

Can you provide a bit of background of yourself?

I am Thiyyagathuraivan Sankar Narayanan; since my name is quite a mouthful, to most I am called 'Thiagu'. My roots are still strongly grounded in India, though I have been living outside my homeland for almost 22 years but for a small stint in India in-between. Having joined Cargill around 11 years ago in Papua New Guinea and after making a couple of regional moves, I am currently the Regional Financial Controller – Asia Pacific for Cargill's Cocoa & Chocolate business.

I am married with one son who is turning 14 soon. Happily, my wife and son both share my nomadic streak!

When did you move to Malaysia?

I moved to Malaysia four years ago from Singapore to be part of a small, core team that set-up the Cocoa & Chocolate business in Asia Pacific.

Where in the city do you live and work?

We live in the super-quiet Seputeh neighbourhood on the edge of a small forest area; it takes just 10 minutes to reach the Cargill Office in Jalan Pantai Baru. We were lucky to find an apartment in this area which is just a stone's throw away from Mid Valley and Little India yet so nicely tucked away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

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

When we were invited to set up our regional base in Greater KL, we had concerns around ease-of-doing-business here; it is in Cargill's DNA to strictly abide by our Guiding Principles; accordingly, we agreed to set up our regional base in KL after InvestKL explained to us the various measures the government is taking to improve

the ease-of-doing-business in Greater KL and assured us of their continuous support in ensuring no compromises will have to be made on our Guiding Principles.

Having been in KL for the past four years, I can say that the ease-of-doing-business has considerably improved. Whenever the government announces a change in policy and when such change creates discomfort or warrants an adjustment in our business, we are given a patient and objective audience by the relevant government authority and viable alternatives are looked at – thanks to the role InvestKL plays in facilitating these meetings, discussions, and most importantly, following through.

What advantages do you think Greater KL provides companies over other Asian capital cities?

Greater KL provides excellent multi-lingual, capable, and competitive talent that suits our business related to manufacturing, processing, sales, and marketing. Ease-of-doing-business is definitely better than most other Asian capital cities; infrastructure and connectivity is good, but sometimes, I feel more can be done about the traffic – no other capital city in the region has escaped this bane, though.

Have you found expat lifestyle in Greater KL to be satisfactory?

To answer the question briefly: yes, I am completely satisfied with the lifestyle in Greater KL! We move every few years and it normally takes us a month or two to adjust to a new place. We didn't have to go through the adjustment phase in KL, though. It was an instant adjustment due to the warm and friendly nature of the people here. Greater KL has the best of both worlds – a nice blend of rich, multicultural heritage and the facilities, amenities, and comforts that a modern city offers.

Though we are far away from home, we are still able to be in touch with our culture – thanks to institutes like the Temple of Fine Arts, where my Son



goes for classical vocal lessons. Once a month or so, we end up having impromptu jam sessions, with him as the vocalist and me playing percussion instruments – good for the soul!

We try not to eat at the same restaurant more than once in a quarter; every nook and corner of Greater KL is so full of surprises on the food front. We randomly select an area and drive around looking for places to eat. When we see a place which we think should be good enough, we just have our food there. I must say, we very rarely come out of a restaurant in Greater KL unsatisfied. Also, being from India, we are huge fans of the banana leaf rice.

We also do a decent bit of socializing with our friends (a mix of Malaysians and expats) or visit one of the many multiplexes in the city for a movie – whenever we get a chance. Visiting public libraries once a month is also something we like doing as a family. Greater KL has lots of avenues for expats here to unwind over the weekend: public parks, zoo, multiplexes, malls, and very good restaurants serving all culinary varieties. ■



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.