

HEALTH AND TRAVEL SAFETY PROGRAMMES

The preferred gateway to Asean

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MALAYSIA, being strategically located in the heart of Southeast Asia, is the preferred gateway to Asean, which has a population of 630 million and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$2.5 trillion (RM10.59 trillion).

Multinational companies (MNCs) like International SOS have been investing in Malaysia for more than a decade and they are considering expanding here and serving more clients in the region.

International SOS is the world's leading medical and travel security risk services group involved in the business of saving and protecting lives. It grew from a US\$500,000 company with 70 employees in 1985 to US\$1.5 billion with 11,000 employees today in more than 1,000 locations across 90 countries.

The group is led by 5,200 medical professionals and 200 security specialists, and handles close to five million assistance calls per annum from 26 assistance centres globally.

International SOS Malaysia (Intl.SOS Malaysia) was established in 1996 and employs around 400 people and more than half are medical professionals.

According to Intl.SOS Malaysia general manager David Ng, Malaysia is an important hub for the International SOS business as more MNCs are setting up their regional offices in the country while Malaysian firms are also venturing overseas.

Within Southeast Asia, International SOS has the second

largest headcounts in Malaysia after Singapore.

"Malaysia and Asean are key markets for majority of our clients. The International SOS group's operations in Malaysia are critical to our network and its capability to serve these clients. Companies are increasingly sending employees on global assignments.

"What we do is we provide a range of health and travel safety programmes to mitigate risks to those employees. We assist companies to meet their Duty of Care responsibility with our integrated travel, project and site risk management solutions which help ensure that their employees are always safe and healthy whether they are travelling or working in remote sites.

"Our approach is consultative, we help businesses to assess the risks associated with every working environment and design appropriate preventive programmes — including training, procedures and policies — to protect the company and their people at all times. Our services have proven to deliver tangible financial benefits to the companies that employ them successfully," Ng told NST Business.

MALAYSIA AN ATTRACTIVE MARKET

Ng said the key attractions in Malaysia for International SOS is the developed infrastructure, especially in Greater Kuala Lumpur, the legal system, supportive government policies and legislations,

attractive financial and tax incentives and an educated multi-lingual and multi-talent workforce.

He said the continuous economic growth as well as its diverse economic activities, that includes high-value service industries such as oil and gas, mining and infrastructure, telecommunications, banking, education, tourism and real estate provide organisations with a great business eco-system to operate from.

In addition to the availability of modern conveniences and amenities in the city, Kuala Lumpur remains one of the more affordable cities in terms of liveability compared to the other cities in Southeast Asia, he said.

"We are also encouraged by Malaysia's market-oriented economy and pro-business government policies. Malaysia offers investors a dynamic and vibrant business environment. It is a relatively politically stable country with well-developed infrastructure and legal system," Ng said.

"Our relationship with InvestKL is one of partnership that adds tremendous value to our business in Malaysia. InvestKL understands the needs of investors and is always there to support and guide. It has a team of professionals who are dedicated and passionate with the Can Do attitude. It is truly a one stop shop for investors which makes investment in Malaysia such a natural choice."

Benchmarked against other countries in Asia, Malaysia ranked 9th in Cost of Living Index and it stands out as highly competitive on living cost.

Malaysia also ranked at 18th place in World Bank Ease of Doing Business 2015.

Ng also pointed out that Malaysia's unique diversity of culture, background and language provides the country, particularly Kuala Lumpur with the significant competitive advantage of having an educated and multi-lingual workforce, making the city a great draw for international investors and companies looking to set up in the region.

He said overall, Intl.SOS Malaysia



A International SOS Malaysia medical team on standby. PIX COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL SOS MALAYSIA

has seen positive return on its investment in Malaysia due to its cost competitive environment, growing economy, as well as talented and productive workforce.

"As a service oriented company, the overall investment has been in human capital and technology. We continue to invest in our talents in Malaysia and we are proud that many of these talents have been able to work overseas to support our network. We want our employees to have greater exposure to other countries as this will further enhance their ability to serve our clients who operate globally," said Ng.

He pointed out that over the last 30 years the world has changed dramatically and throughout, the International SOS group has handled everything from tsunamis, earthquakes, civil unrests, epidemics such and SARS and the Ebola outbreak.

More recently, Intl.SOS Malaysia was involved in the rescue after the Sabah earthquake where it dispatched a multi-skilled team at the earliest stage. The team comprised medical and security personnel as well as communications and logistics specialists, and created an assistance capability centre on the field.

"The rescue team evacuated and transported people outside of the location of the accident within hours. Our intervention speed is recognised in the industry as we utilise our expertise, global infrastructure and network to activate deployment immediately," he said.

Meanwhile, Ng considers Intl.SOS Malaysia as an enabler to Malaysia's economy.

He said globalisation, political instability, fear of terrorism in

places previously thought safe and pandemic outbreaks are risks posed to organisations in today's world.

"The need to travel has become part of work for many employees and the workplace is no longer static for these employees. Businesses are therefore facing increasing medical and travel security risks in a globalised and rapidly mobile generation. This presents opportunities for us to help companies to mitigate these risks and indirectly we are like an enabler to Malaysia's economy."

Ng said the International SOS group is dedicated to improve health, safety and travel security of mobile workers around the world.

"We believe in making it easier for organisations to work and grow on an international scale. We help to keep business travellers healthy and safe, so businesses can focus on their core business activities. The best way to ensure that business travellers stay healthy and safe is to establish robust preventive programmes, catered specifically for the environments they are in.

"In the instance that prevention is not possible, immediate and effective assistance is fundamental. We provide companies and their workforce with access to a first class assistance service, available 24/7 — the necessary assurance to keep business travellers healthy, safe and productive."

Ng noted that a healthy and safe business environment attracts investors while businesses get to enjoy greater productivity with fewer injuries, enhanced corporate reputation in the employee market," he said.



Intl.SOS Malaysia general manager David Ng



An operation carried out by Intl.SOS Malaysia.