

Expats Praise Greater KL's Liveability

For many expats, an assignment in Malaysia stands out as a most enjoyable station on a globe-trotting career path. Much of that is attributable to the comfort and enjoyment of living in Greater KL, the country's capital city that blends ease of doing business with a liveability that seems to get better with each passing year.

It's no secret that a lot of expats find themselves stationed overseas for purely job-related reasons. The company tells them where to go, and they do so. Sometimes those assignments are favourable; other times, far less so. But overwhelmingly, when we talk to expats, they express a real sense of delight and appreciation for their lives in Greater KL. Part of it is down to the city's support for business – from a deep and accessible pool of talent to its ideal location in the region to an ease of conducting business in English, Kuala Lumpur really is one of Asia's best places for business. But for many expats, the x-factor in why they relish their lives here so much is that KL is a liveable, enjoyable city for them. It's a big reason why plenty of expats find a way to stay here once their assignment has ended!

Sure, the city has its traffic jams during peak hours, and there are still areas where it's always hard to get a good parking spot, but Greater KL's liveability has gotten consistently better and better in the last several years. International dining, great grocery stores, nightlife, cultural events, public transportation, and travel opportunities are all on the rise in Malaysia's capital city. The impressive River of Life project is now well underway, too, which is transforming the Klang and Gombak rivers (and their confluence that gave KL its name) into a vibrant riverfront, further enhancing the city's liveability.

We spoke with two expats on assignment here with multinational companies to get their thoughts on life



Noriko Kirisawa Matsumoto

in Greater KL, and what the city's liveability has meant for them.

A JAPANESE EXPAT IN MALAYSIA

Noriko Kirisawa Matsumoto, from Tokyo, is the COO of KADOKAWA GEMPAK STARZ. She says, "Our company is a publisher. After publishing countless comics and magazine in Malaysia for over 20 years, the local company was bought by KADOKAWA, the biggest publisher in Japan, in 2015. My job here is mainly to boost sales and profit of our existing business and explore the possibilities for new business."

Noriko moved to Malaysia in April 2017 with her husband and 11-year-old daughter and told us that as her family approach the one-year mark living in KL, they've really enjoyed it here. "Before moving to Malaysia," she said, "I had come here before for business trips several times, and developed a good impression of KL, its people, and of course its food. But of course visiting

a place and living there are quite different! I've learned a lot in my time here so far."

KL MAKES EXPAT LIVING EASIER

We asked Noriko what she felt one of the challenges of being an expat was, and how she felt KL helps her to meet that challenge. "Well, I think being an expat requires a certain toughness," she replied. "It demands an ability to accept the culture gap and to adjust to it, all while maintaining your own identity. For me, KL's diversity helps with that, because there are many cultures living side-by-side here. There's a permissiveness towards and acceptance of the differences that exist between various races and cultures. That has made the adjustment easier, and I think this generally helps KL to be a more liveable city for expats."

Hailing from Tokyo, well-known as one of the most expensive cities in Asia, Noriko praised Greater KL for its reasonable cost of living. "We have found that living here is relatively cheap, which makes it easier to have a good lifestyle. When it comes to things like transportation and eating out, especially the local foods, Greater KL is much cheaper."

The wide range of cuisines available in the Malaysian capital – including plenty of restaurants serving her native Japanese favourites – featured high on Noriko's list of things she enjoyed about living in Greater KL. "The food here is delicious," she remarked. "And there's so much variety! We enjoy eating out and discovering new places.

I also like window shopping in the different malls and shopping centres around the city, reading books, listening to music while I'm driving around, and – one of my favourites – swimming at night, which I'm able to do year-round!"

Noriko wrapped things up by saying, "When it comes to liveability, I think Greater KL is certainly on the right track and is doing the things that will make the city more enjoyable. The work aspect of KL is good, but when it comes to the lifestyle that's offered here, I definitely consider KL a good place to live."

FROM PERTH TO KL

Also with a focus on liveability, we talked to Australian native Aaron Fowler, who, like Noriko, moved to KL in April of last year. He noted that prior to the official move, he had been traveling back and forth between KL and his hometown of Perth quite frequently in the year before relocating, so had a decent grasp on the city and what it offered. But also like Noriko, Aaron found that moving here really opened things up.

"Like many new arrivals, I grabbed as many guide books as possible to quickly establish a good selection of cafés and restaurants to visit," he laughed. "It didn't take me long to sort out that Kuala Lumpur was a city with an endless supply of talented chefs, baristas, and mixologists. After nearly a year of being here, I still enjoy exploring the city's incredible selection of restaurants and cafés."

Aaron has spent 11 years working with KBR in Western Australia, and now as the Country Manager for Malaysia here in Greater KL. "I also wear a second hat as the Commercial Manager for Southeast Asia and look after KBR's commercial interests across the region," he explained, as he segued into what he looks for in a city's liveability. "I guess everyone has their own interpretation of what 'liveability'



Aaron Fowler

is, but for me, a liveable city is one that has a good balance of cultural and sporting opportunities in addition to being a bustling commercial hub where hard work and persistence is rewarded."

And does Aaron feel that Greater KL fits the bill? "I do. In addition to the diverse range of restaurants and cafés I mentioned, KL has a huge number of sporting and fitness clubs. If you're looking to expand your social network and keep fit at the same time, I'd recommend pushing the boundaries and join some of the running, cycling, or swimming clubs – or all three! I've made most of my friends this way; both locals and other expats. Given KL's strategic location, some of Southeast Asia's more well-known holiday destinations are only a short flight away – and even some unexplored beaches! Fortunately there are many public holidays here throughout the year, so it gives new arrivals ample time to explore."

Though he feels Greater KL excels at providing expats with a liveable city, Aaron noted that there's room for improvement in at least one area. "If there was an opportunity to improve pedestrian pavements or bicycle paths, I think it would be a great way to reduce traffic congestion and keep the population active," he explained. "But this problem isn't unique to KL. Cities all over the world are working to find the right balance. There is a 'car-free morning' in KL on Sundays, which is a great initiative and more and more people are participating."

MONEY MATTERS, LIFESTYLE OFFERINGS

We asked Aaron about his thoughts on the cost of living in Greater KL, and he heartily agreed with the assessment of the Malaysian capital as one of the most 'value-for-money' expat cities in

the world. "Compared to many other regional cities, KL is very affordable! It is possible to eat out most nights without breaking the bank. The wide selection of street food is not only delicious, but very inexpensive. It's often cheaper to eat out than it is to cook at home. And with the expansion of low cost airline routes, it is also very affordable to explore the Southeast Asian region from KL and be back in time for work on Monday mornings!"

So when looking primarily at the lifestyle offered to expats living in Greater KL, what did Aaron have to say? "I absolutely 100% consider KL a good place to live. The people here are open and embracing, and it's a place where a newcomer can quickly make friends. I'm keen on fitness and sporting pursuits, and there's plenty to do here in that regard – and places to explore, too. And I don't think I'll ever run out of restaurants to explore any time soon! Thankfully there are enough sporting activities to ensure I stay healthy while enjoying all the culinary delights." ■



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.