



Greater KL Offers Expats the Best of Southeast Asia

We recently caught up with busy expat husband, dad, and MNC VP Brett Smythe to get his thoughts on living and working in Greater KL. Here's what he had to say.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your company?

My name Brett Smythe and I work for AECOM, which is the world's largest multi-disciplinary engineering firm. My role is Vice President, Construction Services Southeast Asia. In this role I have staff spread over eight countries across Southeast Asia. Malaysia is a significant part of this business line for AECOM. My home country is Australia.

Are you here with your family?

Yes, I moved here with my family in February 2014. My wife, Merel, is Dutch and we have two children, Beau and Sienna. We had previously lived in Indonesia and Australia. The thought of moving back to Southeast Asia was a big driver for us, and we had a good understanding of what a great place KL is to live in.

What were your initial impressions of the country after arriving?

Apart from the humidity, the food stands out – the amazing selection of different food, both local and international; the level of ease in communicating – making work interactions efficient; the openness to people from all over the world to live and work in Malaysia.

Had you visited Malaysia prior to relocating here? Did you have any preconceptions about the country?

Yes, the Southeast Asian headquarters of my previous company was in KL. I regularly visited for work so I understood the culture, the people, the food, how business operated, and the lifestyle. Because of that, it was a pretty soft landing to commence living here.

Also, I actually worked for one year in Malaysia way back in 1995. I was living in the Kampung of Jeli in Kelantan while working on the Pergau

Hydroelectric project. It was a great experience and gave me a really good understanding on Malaysian life outside of the larger populated areas.

Do you think Greater KL provides a good environment for MNCs?

Absolutely. Overall, Malaysia has extremely attractive business drivers to entice international companies to establish themselves here. Greater KL is the nerve centre of the business community; it is well-connected; has strong, high-tech hubs and is home to the skills, experience, and growth capability of a rapidly expanding professional workforce. It is extremely cost-competitive in comparison to the likes of Singapore, but has the security, resilience, capabilities, and capacity for supporting international business.

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

Apart from that cost-competitive advantage, KL is a transport hub geographically located in the heart of Southeast Asia. It has a skilled workforce that operates in English, which is highly advantageous compared to developing countries in the region. The ease of doing business is also highly sought after. So as a capital city, Greater KL provides a unique mix of the requirements that international companies seek in their growth strategy in highly competitive markets.

What about the expat lifestyle in Greater KL? Have you found it to be satisfactory?

The lifestyle in Greater KL is fantastic. As a family, we have access to everything we are interested in – from outdoor sports for kids (and kids at heart) to visiting beautiful islands; and from socialising to travel – whether for work or play. Things are quite easy here – very relaxed, lah! It is a great environment and I consider myself fortunate to be here.

What are some of your favourite ways to spend your leisure time?

I am a keen touch footy player (having retired from the pump and grind of rugby). Merel and I also love to explore some of the lesser-known dining establishments and experiences around the city. Of course, as I'm Australian, regularly throwing a good BBQ at home is up there on the must-do list.

Have you travelled around Malaysia? Any favourite destinations?

While working in Kelantan in 1995, I had the opportunity to visit the Perhentian Islands regularly, back when they weren't very developed. My memories of diving there are special. For long weekends, our family do like to explore different islands off the East Coast from JB up to Kelantan – visiting new islands along that stretch of coast is always an adventure.

Would you recommend an posting in Greater KL to other expats? Why?

Yes. For all of the reasons I mention above: Ease of doing business, great facilities and environment for working expats and their families, and easy and inexpensive reach to the rest of Southeast Asia. ■



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.