

Internship in Kuala Lumpur - A lifetime experience

Kuala Lumpur. In recent years Kuala Lumpur (KL) has grown from nothing to a bustling city including one of the world's tallest buildings. But still you can explore traditional culture in the back lanes of Chinatown.

KL is easily the largest city in the nation, possessing a population of over one and a half million people drawn from all of Malaysia's many ethnic groups. It's a modern Asian city of gleaming skyscrapers, but it retains much of the local color that has been wiped out in other Asian boom-cities such as Singapore. There are still plenty of colonial buildings in its centre, as well a vibrant Chinatown with street vendors and night markets, and a bustling Little India, which shows the great variety the city offers.

Kuala Lumpur is a paradise for shoppers. With a very international and bustling atmosphere, Bukit Bintang is one of the busiest areas for shopping, dining and entertainment; think of it as Kuala Lumpur's version of New York's Fifth Avenue. There are numerous shopping malls from Starhill Gallery with a luxurious range of products to Times Square with an inside theme park! These are great places to shop for affordable clothing, among other things, especially for the National Anniversary Sales which took place in autumn 2006. This is also a neighborhood with luxury hotels like the Shangri La and Ritz-Carlton we got to know during our work with AOS. If we are looking for local food, there are food hawkers just around the corner. Having been there during the Arab season from late July until early October the city seems to be more Islamic in this region because of the presence of tourists from the Arab world.

Cultural Diversity. Cultures have been meeting and mixing in Malaysia since the very beginning of its history. Malaysia's cultural mosaic is marked by many different cultures, but several in particular have had especially lasting influence on the country. Chief among these are the ancient Malay culture, and the cultures of Malaysia's two most prominent trading partners throughout history: the Chinese and the Indians. Although each of these cultures has vigorously maintained its traditions and community structures, they have also blended together to create contemporary Malaysia's uniquely diverse

heritage. In Kuala Lumpur, we found everyone in a grand and very exciting mélange: In one house, you could listen to a Chinese opera which was played on the radio; in another they're preparing for Muslim prayers; in the next, the daughter of the household readies herself for classical Indian dance lessons.

Perhaps the easiest way to begin to understand the highly complex cultural interaction which is Malaysia is to look at the open door policy maintained during religious festivals. Although Malaysia's different cultural traditions are frequently maintained by seemingly self-contained ethnic communities, all of Malaysia's communities open their doors to members of other cultures during a religious festival, including tourists as well as neighbors or interns. Such inclusiveness is more than just a way to break down cultural barriers and foster understanding. It is a positive celebration of a tradition of tolerance that has for millennia formed the basis of Malaysia's progress.

In more liberal KL, Ramadan doesn't pose the same 'where to eat?' problems that affect the more devout Muslim areas on the east coast. We were always integrated in dinners and get-togethers of our colleagues which was an unforgettable experience for us.

But there are also negative aspects to mention. KL's wide ethnic diversity means that celebrations of one kind or another are usually going on somewhere around the city. These can make traffic and transport in general more crowded than usual. In Kuala Lumpur, like any fast growing city, the traffic situation can be painful. Mass transit in Kuala Lumpur is less developed than in, for instance, Singapore or Hong Kong. However, there is an extensive rail network to suburbs of the city, also to Ampang where we stayed.

Working with Asian Overland. Experiencing the daily work life in Malaysia is a true difference from the European way. The week has 5.5 working days, meaning Saturday is a half day of work, which makes traveling around and exploring the country more difficult.

Being a part of the MICE department and participating in organizing and executing events or conferences gave us outstanding first-hand knowledge about challenges and difficulties in an upcoming Asian metropolis. We felt as though our ability to contribute our typical European way of analytic thinking and our knowledge of other languages such as German, French and Italian was a big advantage.

The way to address supervisors is totally different in terms of hierarchy. Subordinated employees have to follow the hierarchical structure and it is not as easy to express your personal opinion and to be recognized like in Germany. Nonetheless everybody took good care of us and was more than understanding, especially the human resource department and our supervisors in the different teams we joined.

Summarizing our three months working in Kuala Lumpur with Asian Overland experiences I wish to mention the newly gained knowledge about the Malaysian MICE and travel industry. It was more than a pleasure to take the unique opportunity to experience Kuala Lumpur with all its exciting aspects. We were amazed by the friendliness and cooperativeness of our colleagues who became friends for lifetime. It was really not easy to return back to Europe...

Thanks to IMEX, MPI and AOS for the great opportunity!

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