

HERE OR ABROAD?

DECIDING WHERE TO BUILD YOUR CAREER



CAREER ADVICE

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It is a tough choice deciding whether you should start and continue building your career in Malaysia or relocate and do so in another country.

Aside from the personal reasons that are likely to influence such a decision, the career implications can also be immense.

Many people believe that building a career abroad, especially within particular sectors such as technology, is better because of greater level of exposure and sophistication.

While some of these beliefs may be true, a decision to relocate for work needs to be based more than on hearsays and assumptions.

And even though this article is by no means sufficient to guide you towards such an important decision, we hope it gets you started on thinking about the different areas that you should consider before making up your mind on such a life-changing decision.

EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS

The *Malaysia 2012 Michael Page Employee Intentions Report* found that employees' confidence in Malaysia's job market has soared.

The study was based on an online survey sent to nearly 2,000 white collar professionals in Malaysia from a variety of occupation groups and positions from entry level to senior management.

The study found employee confidence in the job market to be high, with 67% of respondents describing the Malaysian job market as strong, or very strong.

However, the same group of respondents also indicated that despite their belief that the job market was strong, 58% intended to look for job opportunities outside the country, focusing mostly on Asian neighbours (67%), followed by Australia/New Zealand (22%), and Europe (6%).

The top five countries that the respondents were thinking of exploring for employment were Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia and Thailand.

The same report includes the results of a study conducted on Malaysians living abroad, to gauge their perceptions on the Malaysian

job market.

This was based on an online survey of 5,600 Malaysian expatriates, representing a variety of occupational groups and positions.

It aimed to assess their confidence in the current Malaysian job market, predicted employment outlook, and the possibility of returning to live and work in Malaysia.

Malaysian expatriates, primarily located in Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Australia and Japan, indicated that they believe the job market would have improved (55%) in 2012 from the year before.

Their intention to return to Malaysia for work was primarily due to family commitments (59%), followed by career progression (23%), international opportunities (12%), salary (11%), culture (3%), and company reputation (2%).

The majority of Malaysian expatriates had plans to return after a period of one year or longer (48%), whereas 24% were planning to return within an even shorter period. Twenty-nine per cent of the respondents had stated that they had no plans to return.

The study also found that those aged 29 and below were more likely to return (48%) followed by those between 30 and 39 (38%).

Older Malaysian expatriates were less likely to return, with only 14% of them indicating that they would return to Malaysia for employment.

The respondents indicated that the top areas in which returning Malaysian expatriates look for jobs are:

- > Accounting and finance.
- > Banking and financial services.
- > Engineering and manufacturing.
- > Procurement and supply chain.
- > Marketing.

MALAYSIAN ECONOMY AND THE JOB MARKET

The *Kelly Services Malaysia Employment Outlook and Salary Guide 2012/13* has found a number of interesting industry-related milestones.

The study reports that:

- > The Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

sector will become a key contributor in Malaysia's aim of achieving a developed, high-income economy by 2020.

The ICT sector is expected to contribute 10.2% to the national gross domestic product by 2015.

> Entry Point Projects (EPPs) that come under the Government's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) in the Klang Valley aim to generate 1.7 million incremental employment, attracting 2.5 million immigrants in the region by 2020. Twenty per cent of this number is expected to come from overseas, either in the form of foreign expatriates, or returning expatriate Malaysians.

Activities under the EPPs in this region alone will be contributing RM190bil towards the gross national income over the next 10 years, and will create over 300,000 jobs.

> There seems to be an optimistic outlook in human capital development in the following five sectors

– oil, gas and energy, tourism, electrical and electronics, communications content and infrastructure, and business services.

> The study identified a 32% growth in the shared services and outsourcing sector, up from 23% two years ago.

The main contributors towards this are the financial services, oil and gas, logistics and transportation sectors.

Furthermore, the shared services sector has a total of 2,210 new jobs created, representing a 50.2% jump in jobs.

There was also growth in the number of domestic players securing more global work, re-investment from existing multinationals, and attraction of new ones.

> The financial sector is expected to contribute RM121.5bil in GNI and create 45,000 jobs.

The new *Financial Sector Blueprint* provides direction to the sector for the next decade, placing strong emphasis on the four core sectors in Islamic finance:

- > Islamic banking.
- > Takaful.
- > Islamic capital market.
- > Islamic money market.

As demand for talent continues to exceed supply in this sector, talent development continues with substantial challenges.

However, considerable invest-

ments have been made by Bank Negara to support the development of talent across all levels in the industry.

> The study also found that there is a strong demand for engineering and technical positions in the oil, gas and energy industry.

Various specialisations are required. Electrical, civil and structural, mechanical and instrumentation and chemical specialisations are highly valued.

Geologists, petroleum and well engineers are also sought after.

> As for human resources strategies, the study found that the demand for skilled talent continues to be high in the country.

In the human resources area, professionals that focus on compensation and benefits, learning and development, and talent acquisition and retention are in demand.

MOVING ABROAD

Moving abroad for a career is an opportunity that many would look forward to.

At the end of the day, experiencing a new environment can be beneficial not just in terms of your career, but also personally.

Going abroad may also develop your career faster by widening your skillset as well as improving your cultural awareness.

The experience could make you a rounded individual, which can translate into faster career progression.

In addition, working abroad will bring about a higher pay package although this is dependent on the country and profession, as well as

the cost of living. Further benefits are country-specific as well as subjective.

So consider making your own list of advantages given your circumstances.

However, being far away from family is a factor that always weighs against moving overseas.

Furthermore, bear in mind that if you are moving abroad at the beginning of your career, it may be hard to secure a job as you will have little or no work experience.

This puts you on the same level with fresh graduates from the country you are planning to go to, except that you will also have the disadvantage of a costly and strenuous work permit application process. This may put employers off.

MAKING THE CHOICE

There is no universal answer as to whether it is best to build a career in Malaysia or to go abroad. The answer is dependent on the circumstances of each individual.

Just as there are many advantages in working overseas, there are also countless opportunities here in Malaysia. The pros and cons are for you to analyse.

Awareness of the state and potential of the Malaysian job market, proper consideration of circumstances, as well as consultation of those whose opinions you value, will help guide you in your decision.

We have interviewed some leaders who have made geographical moves in their career.

Stuart Dean, CEO of GE Asean and Sanjeev Nanavati, CEO of Citibank Malaysia, are expatriates who have come to cherish their working experiences in Malaysia.

Datuk Devinder Kumar, senior vice-president and chief financial officer of AMD Inc, a Malaysian who has chosen to build his career abroad, and Jamal A. Ainul, chairman of Schlumberger Group of Companies, Asia Pacific, a Malaysian who has returned to the country after years abroad, also share the reasons behind their career choices.

STUART DEAN, CEO, GENERAL ELECTRIC ASEAN

I was already working for GE when they offered me the Asean role in 2002. GE gave me the choice of where we should locate our HQ in Asean.

What made you decide to come to Malaysia?

I concluded that Kuala Lumpur made the most sense from market, regional access, cost and liveability points of view. In particular, KL Sentral is ideal for a large regional office like what we have now.

How would you compare working here and abroad? What are the challenges and advantages?

The key to making the most out of an overseas environment is to focus on the positives of your new location.

If you focus on the negatives, you will



never be successful. Therefore, I have enjoyed all three of my non-US assignments. Most countries have unique cultures and languages.

No country's culture is better than the

others, just different.

I love the diversity of Malaysia and I am optimistic about being based here as the country offers a world-class environment that is conducive for business.

Malaysia offers an advantage to an American company like GE because most people speak English and its developed infrastructure makes KL an easy place to attract both great Malaysian and global talent.

Further, Malaysia has a significant middle-class who want to see improved infrastructure and greater transparency, both of which are positive for GE.

Do you feel that Malaysia can offer similar career opportunities in your field as other countries?

We have been very successful in attracting great Malaysian talent to GE here as we grow our regional presence. We have seen Malaysians who work for

GE elsewhere return to Malaysia.

After working outside their home country, they have a much greater global perspective and are capable of taking on global roles.

Furthermore, I am very encouraged by the promotion of talent and pro-growth policies under government initiatives such as the Economic Transformation Programme and TalentCorp in sectors relevant to GE such as Oil and Gas, Aviation and Healthcare.

Would you recommend building a career here or abroad?

I recommend that, if personal situation permits, everyone should seriously consider an overseas assignment.

It broadens a person's perspective, develops his or her ability to manage cross-cultural teams and stretches leadership skills. If the individual brings his or her family, it also enriches their lives.



DATUK DEVINDER KUMAR, SENIOR VICE-PRESIDENT AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, AMD INC

I started my career as a financial analyst at AMD, Sunnyvale, California in 1984. I returned to Malaysia in 1989 and worked in Malaysia for 10 years taking on regional finance roles covering China, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia.

In 1997 I took on some corporate roles and, as part of career progression at the corporate headquarters, I moved to the US and assumed several corporate roles there before being appointed chief financial officer in January 2013.

What made you decide to move out of Malaysia?

I was given the opportunity for career progression at a Fortune 500 company and to work in a corporate environment for a global multinational.

The jobs I have had since that time have allowed me to further develop my skills and thought-processes from a professional and personal perspective.

How would you compare working here and abroad? What are the challenges and advantages?

Working in Malaysia established a good foundation for dealing with and overcoming the challenges of various languages, cultures and outlook.

There is no right or wrong way to deal with a diverse workforce except that you must encourage and embrace diversity of thought and viewpoints.

There isn't a single global template which can be adopted but working in different parts of the world provides an incredible perspective to succeed in a global company and the global business environment that we live in.

As a result of the diverse work environment in Malaysia, executives in Malaysia who are open and tolerant to diversity have a unique advantage over others in managing a global workforce.

Do you feel that Malaysia can offer similar career opportunities in your field as other countries?

Yes and no. Malaysia has the type of companies that are themselves global and have invested or have operations in other regions of the world.

However, at the highest executive levels of large global enterprises, the number of opportunities is limited.

Also for a Malaysian to succeed at the highest levels, it takes a certain determination, career progression and skills that have to be developed over time. For Malaysians to succeed outside Malaysia, whether or not they are based in Malaysia, requires excellent command of the language of business – English.

Thus I would encourage anyone seeking that type of role or career to focus diligently on all aspects of communication – written, spoken and presentation. Malaysian educational institutions and graduates must have the ability to communicate fluently in global business languages, in particular English.

Having the right infrastructure – both physical and human capital – and the right cost makes it attractive for value-added jobs to be based in Malaysia.

What is needed is a multi-skilled workforce; one that is capable of tackling global requirements and delivering global solutions.

To other Malaysians, would you recommend building a career here or abroad?

I would tell every Malaysian, beyond a college education, to ensure continuous training and learning throughout their career. It is equally important to get exposure to global values, processes and solutions.

Every employee, even those working for Malaysian companies, should become part of a system that adds value on a global scale.

Never be afraid to try and learn new skills and continue to improve yourself – especially by focussing on your weaknesses to develop yourself. Invest in yourself!

SANJEEV NANAVATI, CEO, CITIBANK MALAYSIA

I was offered a role in Malaysia by my company. My boss at that time described Kuala Lumpur as the "hidden jewel of Asia" to live and work. Having lived here for a number of years, I would endorse what I was told at the time I was asked to come to Malaysia.

What made you decide to come to Malaysia?

Primarily it was the role that my bank had offered. The fact that KL was and continues to be an exceptionally attractive place to live and work was an added bonus.

How would you compare working here and abroad? What are the challenges and advantages?

It depends which place abroad one is comparing Malaysia with. Since I work for a multinational company, our internal working environment is relatively the same across the world in terms of culture and work practice.

Malaysia, however, is relatively an easy place to adjust to, both personally and professionally. No place is perfect but Malaysia has a lot going for it, at least from an expatriate's perspective.

JAMAL A. AINUL, CHAIRMAN, SCHLUMBERGER GROUP OF COMPANIES, ASIA PACIFIC

I initially went abroad due to work commitments and personal development opportunities offered by my employer, but also to broaden my experience and outlook. I am interested in working overseas for my personal career goals.

What made you decide to come home?

My parents were getting older and weaker, but also I felt I was in a position to make an impact both for the country and my employer. Hence, I am actively setting up regional centres in Malaysia for Schlumberger.

How would you compare working here and abroad? What are challenges and advantages?

In my opinion, they are different environments, but most important of all is the existence of good succession planning in the organisation you work for.

Clearly, exposure to different markets overseas will put you at an advantage when promotions are considered, but you will also be better prepared for the challenges that come with added responsibilities when your experience is very broad.



Do you feel that Malaysia can offer similar career opportunities in your field as other countries?

Generally, Malaysia offers attractive career opportunities for Malaysians. However, I am not sure how receptive the government-linked companies and other major local companies are to expatriate talent at the CEO or similar level.

Would you recommend building a career here or abroad?

This is a very personal choice. It depends on the person and the field of work. My view is that diversity of experience will always hold you in good stead.



Do you feel that Malaysia can offer similar career opportunities in your field as other countries?

There is progress here in Malaysia but it is definitely not similar to those in developed countries.

One can have a long debate as to why and why not, but perhaps that would need another, more extended forum.

Would you recommend building a career here or abroad?

I think having both is a necessity; not an option.