



Welcome

Welcome to the September 2005 Newsletter from Reloc8 Asia Pacific Group.

Reloc8 Asia Pacific is a Regional Relocation Resource –and a joint venture between leading owner-managed relocation services organizations in the region.

Asia Pacific Briefing at ERC in Chicago

For those of you attending the ERC International Symposium in Chicago – we look forward to seeing you there – please visit our booth.

As you may know Reloc8 Asia Pacific is running a 1 hour Asia Pacific Briefing at ERC on Wednesday September 28 from 3.30 – 4.30 pm. If you have not registered and would like to attend please email us at info@reloc8asia.com.

Schooling in the Asia Pacific

In this issue we take a look at schooling – a make or break issue for families, but a high cost element of international assignments.

Some of the issues parents worry about include:

- What is the quality of education in the host country ?
- What are the options – local schools, international schools, home country schools ?
- What is the availability of places ?
- At what cost ?

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- How does the syllabus compare with home ?
- How does the school year compare to home ?

We look at these questions country by country, and some surprising differences emerge.

“Short-term accommodation” in the Asia Pacific Region

- What are the costs ?
- How do they compare across the region ?
- What is the minimum stay ?
- What is the availability ?
- What are the quirks of each market ?

Lee Wong and her team at Asian Welcome in Singapore have just completed a research study of Short - Term Accommodation across the region.

To learn more, contact Lee at info@reloc8asia.com or come to our booth at ERC in Chicago

Services available from the Partners of Reloc8 Asia Pacific

For a description of services please visit our website at www.reloc8asia.com

If you would like to know more about anything in this newsletter please email Susie Hart at info@reloc8asia.com

Schooling in Australia

The schooling system in Australia has government schools and private, independently-run schools. Many private schools have an affiliation with a religious faith such as Catholic, Anglican etc. A few schools cater for nationals from particular countries e.g. American, French, German and Japanese, but the majority of schools are Australian and attended mostly by Australian students. Most expatriates attend either a government school or a private school.

The curriculum at all schools is Australian (except for the foreign national schools) and varies between states. An increasing number of private schools offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma.

The Australian school year commences in late January and concludes in early December. The year is divided into four school terms of approximately ten weeks. The main summer holiday break is from early/mid December until the end of January and in June/July the holiday period is three to four weeks.

Children commence school at age five and stay in Primary school for seven years and Secondary school is from age twelve for a further six years.

Government schools in Sydney charge a fee for international students but in the other states government education is free. Private school fees range from AU\$6,000 - AU\$17,000 per annum.

Nearly all the private schools have a waiting list for places with the most popular entry years of Kindergarten and Grade 7 being the most difficult to gain entry. Government schools accept all children living in the local school zone so entry to these schools is easier. Many expatriates find the local government schools meet the academic and social requirements for their children at a primary level and select private schools for secondary level.

Nearly all schools, government and private wear school uniform.

Snapshot of Schooling in Australia (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Sydney		Melbourne	
	State	Private / International	State	Private / International
Enrolment fee (average)	Nil	1,600	Nil	1,200
Average Annual Schooling fee Primary/Elementary	3,500	6,000	300	5,500
Average Annual Schooling fee Middle/High School	4,000	12,000	400	11,000
Miscellaneous fees (Uniforms, books, excursions)	500 - 1,000	1,000 - 2,000	500 - 1,000	1,000 - 2,000
Curriculum	Local Australian	Local Australian, IB	Local Australian	Local Australian, IB
Main teaching language	English	English	English	English

Expat Schooling Options in China

In China, cities like Beijing and Shanghai have many schooling options available to expatriate children. Other cities, such as, Guangzhou, Tianjin and Shenzhen also have international schools; however, the choices are more limited. Foreign investment has been heavily concentrated in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, so the schooling options in those cities are much more numerous. However, as foreign investment grows

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Spotlight on Korea

The Korean peninsula is located between the Chinese mainland and Japan. It is 1,000 km from North to South and 216 Km from East to West with a total population of over 50 million.

The Korean Peninsula is divided slightly north of the 38th parallel as democratic Republic of Korea (South) and communist North Korea. In South Korea, Seoul is the capital with a population of 10 million. Other big cities in Korea are Pusan, Daejeon, Daegu, and Incheon.

The currency is Korean Won (1 US\$ = approx 1,050 KRW as at Sept 2005) and coins have the value of 10, 50, 100, 500 Won while notes have value of 1000, 5000, 10000, For higher values, no personal cheques but "bank cheques" of 100,000 value are commonly used.

The national language is Korean and the written Korean alphabet is different from any other language.

Korea has 4 different seasons (spring, summer, fall and winter). Spring and fall are the best seasons to visit Korea, while summer is sticky and hot with monsoons, and winter is dry and cold.

Korean food is very nutritious and low in calories.

Most Koreans are either Buddhist, Christian or Confucian with the cultural background of traditional Shamanism.

Interesting facts about the Philippines

Filipinos use their eyebrows when they say "yes" or when they agree with something.

To express respect or greeting, Filipinos bend down to press the right-hand knuckle of older people upon their foreheads. They normally bow their heads and lower their eyes when facing someone in authority.

When embarrassed, Filipinos typically scratch their head and giggle nervously.

To cross a room or pass between people, Filipinos bow their heads and extend their arms implying "excuse me".

To point out something, Filipinos usually motion with their lips pointed in the right direction.

Expat Schooling Options in China (continued...)

in other Chinese cities, schools that cater to expatriate children's different needs will most definitely increase.

Depending on what type of school is right for one's family, Beijing and Shanghai have a variety of options available. Beijing, for example, has several high-quality international schools to choose from, with state-of-the-art facilities, including The Western Academy of Beijing (WAB) and The International School of Beijing (ISB). The curriculum is taught in English with elective language courses in Chinese. International schools in China generally follow the Northern-hemisphere Western school Calendar, offering breaks for summer and Christmas.

In addition to international schools, there are "embassy schools," run expressly for the purpose of educating their nationals (Japanese School, German School, Pakistani School, French School, for example). The curriculum followed is usually identical to the curriculum in the student's home country. Besides those options, recent laws have changed so that expat children also have the option to consider local schooling as well. The expat children who attend local schools are immersed in Chinese culture and language. Beijing, in particular, has "name brand" Chinese schools such as Fang Cao Di (elementary school) and #55 Middle School (middle and high-school), which have a separate section for expat children.



In other key cities in China, the choice of international schools is not as readily available as Beijing and Shanghai; however, as demand grows, more schools will become available. It's important to note that international schools and schools for particular nationals are only permitted to admit students who are holders of foreign passports. In addition, sometimes space is not readily available for new entrants in certain international schools as space is limited.

Generally, prices for international schools in China are much more costly than either local schools or schools for particular nationalities. Whichever school parents choose for their children, each school has its pros and cons. It's important for each family to ask themselves what their main priorities are for their children while in China, whether it be language opportunities, teacher to student ratio, affordability, academic curriculum exposure to host country, sports facilities, etc. An experienced relocation counsellor can help find the right school for your child.

Snapshot of Schooling in China (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Beijing		Shanghai	Guangzhou
	Local	International	International	International
Average Enrolment Fee	n/a	200	200	500
Average Annual Schooling fee for Primary/Elementary	800 - 6,000	13,600 - 18,000	10,000 - 18,500	5,000 - 9,200
Average Annual Schooling fee for Middle/High School	800 - 6,000	14,000 - 19,000	13,000 - 20,000	7,000 - 13,600
Miscellaneous fees	Materials fee 60 Capital Levy 2,470	Bus fees 580 - 980 Capital levy 1,200 - 4,000	Bus fees 980	-
Curriculum	Chinese National	IB / National curriculum (British, Australia, Montessori etc)	IB / National curriculum (American, Australian, etc)	IB / National curriculum (British, Japanese, etc)
Main teaching language	Chinese / English	English (unless national school e.g French) / Bilingual	English (unless national school e.g German) / Bilingual	English (unless national school e.g Japanese) / Bilingual
Location	downtown	suburbs and downtown	Inner city - suburbs	Er-Sha Island / Dong Shan

Schooling in India

Delhi has far more options of schools for expatriate children than any other city in India. The most frequented in Delhi are The American Embassy School (AES), The British School, The German School, The French School and the Japanese School. In Mumbai there is the Deutsche School Bombay International, L'Ecole Francaise Internationale de Bombay and the American School of Bombay.

Bangalore has The Indus School, The International School of Bangalore and the Canadian school. All these schools are located in the city centre and close to expat-preferred housing areas.

Most of the schools offer curriculum that are internationally recognized like the ICSE, IGCSE and the IB program, though the language of instruction may differ

from school to school, (i.e. classes at the German School are in German, the French School in French and the AES in English).

The AES, which is the most popular choice for Expats in both Delhi and Mumbai, has a US-based curriculum, though it offers a choice of International

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Schooling in India (continued...)

Baccalaureate (IB) at high school level. However the admission policy for AES requires that the child and at least one parents is a US citizen.



The American Embassy School, New Delhi

The majority of schools across all cities follow a similar school calendar. The school year is divided into three terms, with the first term beginning in August and ending in October (following the Fall Break which coincides with the Diwali celebrations in India). The second term ends in December with the Winter break coinciding with the Christmas break of about three weeks. The final term ends in May when the school closes for the summer for about two months.

Despite using a US-based curriculum, AES incorporates the Indian Culture in a unique way, by holding dramas, fetes and festival celebrations on the school premises at different times throughout the year.

Though Bangalore does not have schools which specifically target children from the expatriate community, the curriculum that is offered in these schools are generally internationally-recognised. These schools provide a greater challenge to

the expat children as they get to mingle with Indian children and get a better chance to integrate and experience Indian culture.

Snapshot of Schooling in India (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Delhi		Mumbai		Bangalore	
	Local	International	Local	International	Local	International
Average Annual Schooling fee - Primary/Elementary	500	15,000 - 20,000	600	15,000 - 20,000	400	5000
Average Annual Schooling fee - Middle/High School	600	17,000 - 23,000	700	17,000 - 23,000	500	6000
Curriculum	CBSE	British, American, IB		British, American, IB	ICSE	IB, ICSE, IGCSE
Main teaching language	English	English, French, German		English, French, German	English	English
Location	Inner City	Inner City	Inner City	Inner City	Inner City	Suburbs

Schooling for Expats in Japan

Except for those adventurous enough to put their children in the local Japanese system, international schools are the only real educational option for most expatriates moving to Japan. Fortunately, there are very good quality schools in this country of which to take advantage. The issues for most expatriates are mainly which school will take all their children, whether they need a co-ed environment or not, and whether they are willing to have their children travel by bus to school. Also while some schools like St Mary's or the International School of the Sacred Heart have an obvious religious affiliation, the schools themselves profess strongly to be non-

denominational and are open to all.

Tokyo, for example, has a variety of suburban as well as centrally located international schools. Of these probably 5 or 6 are more established and can be considered the first tier. The effort is usually to try to enter ones' children into these schools first, though the first tier schools are often at, or close to, full capacity especially in the lower grades. If entrance into these schools proves difficult there are a number of other options, and it is hard to argue that these schools are lower quality – at least in terms of the calibre of education. Usually it's a matter of where they are

located and the facilities (swimming pools, large campus etc.) they offer.

None of the schools, however, in any of the major Japanese cities, are inexpensive. Tuition, not counting bussing or initial registration fees, is usually around US\$18,500 per year. The school year begins late August and ends mid-June. Of the English-speaking schools most follow a US-style curriculum except for the British School and for the IB option at Seisen International. While not all schools offer ESL programs for non-native speakers of English, there are also good French and German school options.

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Schooling for Expats in Japan (continued...)

Snapshot of Schooling in Japan (Prices are in US Dollars)

	International Schools		
	Tokyo	Yokohama	Kobe
Average Enrolment Fee	2,700	2,700	1,800
Average Annual Schooling fee for Primary/Elementary	18,000	18,000	13,500
Average Annual Schooling fee for Middle/High School	18,000	18,000	13,500
Miscellaneous fees			
• Building Maintenance Fees (Once-off fee)	3,600	2,700	1,350
• ESL	900		
• Bus fees	2,700		900
Curriculum	American	American	American
Main teaching language	English	English	English
Location	Same for both urban and suburban locations		

Schooling in Korea

There are many Korean schools but mainly due to difference of curriculum and language, most expatriates choose to send their children to foreign schools. Out of several foreign schools present in Seoul, the most popular foreign school offers both US and UK curriculum (Seoul Foreign School (SFS) where the British School is located inside the US school), as well as IB option.

In terms of the difference in choice of school curriculum, the advantage of a US curriculum is said to be its interdisciplinary curriculum, while the British curriculum is seen to focus on

giving students a supportive environment where they can fulfil their academic potential. IB programs are widely recognised in many countries and allow access to the world's leading universities, however, the students may be placed under greater pressure by the added requirements of this course.

Around Seoul, foreign schools also offer either international (US) curriculum, or other country-specific curricula such as at the French, German, Japanese, and Chinese schools. Most schools have places available but the popular ones have at least 3-4 students in the waiting

list at all time.

Generally, the school year starts around mid to late August, with 185 – 192 school-days. Winter break of 3 – 4 weeks and summer break of about 2 months are given. The Seoul's largest international school is set to open in summer 2006 in Itaewon-Hannam area, nearby Seoul's largest expat community. This school will include a British school, a German School and a French School. In other areas than Seoul, there are also several international schools in big cities such as Pusan and Daejeon but on a smaller scale.

Snapshot of Schooling in Korea (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Seoul		Busan		Kwangju	
	Local	International	Local	International	Local	International
Average Enrolment Fee	13 (High school)	230	17 (High school)	250	17 (High school)	250
Average Annual Schooling fee for Primary/Elementary	free	P - 6,750 E - 16,500	free	P - 9,000 E - 14,300 (incl lunch and bus fee)	free	P - 8,500 E - 9,650 (incl lunch and bus fee)
Average Annual Schooling fee for Middle/High School	M - free H - 1,320	M - 17,500 H - 21,500	M - free H - 1,300	M - 15,000 H - 15,000 (incl lunch and bus fee)	M - free H - 1,200	M - 10,540 H - 11,200 (incl lunch and bus fee)
Miscellaneous fees	M - 216 H - 292	approx 3,000	M - 160 H - 190	approx 750	M - 180 H - 260	approx 730
	(Annual bus fee, test fee, curriculum fee ,high school senior fee, capital fee etc.)					
Curriculum	Local	British, American, IB	Local	American	Local	American
Main teaching language	Korean	English	Korean	English	Korean	English
Location		Near downtown		In central area		In central area

Malaysia's School System

Most expatriate children attend private schools, which cater to their educational needs. It is highly recommended however, that serious consideration be given to each individual child's continuing education, especially when reaching high school. If your child intends to attend a University in their home country, you should enquire as to what curriculum or standard of education will be required for entry into the University of their choice.

This is by no means undermining the education offered in Malaysia. For those of primary age or kindergarten the standard of education offered is very good and certainly recommended.

An introduction to international, bilingual and multi cultural educational system is a good start to any child's life and an important question to raise is – in which language would the parents want their child to be taught in.

Most of the private schools in Malaysia are bilingual with English as the main medium of instruction.

Snapshot of Schooling in Malaysia
(Prices are in US Dollars)

	Kuala Lumpur	Penang	Kuantan
	International	International	International
Average Enrolment Fee	950 - 2764	400 - 2200	2800
Average Annual Schooling fee for Primary/Elementary	596 - 6545	3395 - 5500	2182
Average Annual Schooling fee for Middle/High School	800 - 11894	4050 - 9650	8824
ESL fees	1510 - 8842	500	7200

Schooling Options in New Zealand

There are no international schools, as such, in New Zealand. Expatriate children have the same choice of schools as a New Zealander, including fee-paying independent schools, free state run schools, integrated schools, which are government-funded but incur a cost for up keep of buildings and other similar, non-teaching related expenses, and church schools which are predominantly catholic. Private, independent schools incur the highest and only significant school fees. These vary but are generally around 8,500 per annum. State schools ask for a minimal voluntary donation.

The New Zealand national qualification of NCEA Levels 1, 2 & 3 has been recently introduced to replace the previous examination system. It is a mix of internal assessment and external examinations. There are, however, some serious issues with this newly introduced nationwide course, which will not be

rectified easily or quickly. As a result, many schools, particularly private independent schools, have, or are considering, the introduction of the IB Programme or the British based Cambridge International Examination.

Entry places to schools can be difficult to gain for local and expatriate children alike. There is a lot of pressure on private schools, some schools will keep places for expatriate children, but many will not and it is up to the individual school. The best and most popular state run schools are zoned to come within a set residential housing area, with proof of residence either by owning or renting a home being required for the school to allow entry. However, once a family has this proof of residence the school is required to admit the children.

The school year is broken into four terms with the longer summer break at

'Entry places to schools can be difficult to gain for local and expatriate children alike'

Christmas from mid-December though until mid-January. Children start school on their fifth birthday in primary school at Year 1, going through to Year 8. Some primary schools only go up to Year 6, in which case children got to an Intermediate School for Years 7–8. Secondary school is attended from Year 9–Year 13, generally from about 13 years of age until 17. The national curriculum is broad-based and includes sports, culture and the arts. Schools also provide a range of extra curricular activities for students.

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Schooling Options in New Zealand (continued...)

Snapshot of Schooling in New Zealand (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Auckland		Wellington		Christchurch	
	Local	Private	Local	Integrated	Local	Catholic
Average Enrolment Fee	free	800	free	free	free	free
Average Annual Schooling fee for Primary/Elementary	donation only	7,650	donation only	3,000	donation only	150
Average Annual Schooling fee for Middle/High School	donation only	8,100	donation only	3,000	donation only	240
Miscellaneous fees	Trips, uniform, sports, extra curricular activities					
Curriculum	NZ-NCEA Cambridge Int'l exams	NZ-NCEA IB	NZ-NCEA	NZ-NCEA	NZ-NCEA	NZ-NCEA
Main teaching language	English	English	English	English	English	English
Location	City suburbs	North Shore - semi rural	Inner City	Suburban	Suburban	City

Local: State run government schools

Private: Privately owned independent schools

Integrated: Partial fee paying, government funded

Catholic: Government funded religious based schools

Schooling in the Philippines

Here in the Philippines, the top three schools recommended for most Expats are: The British School Manila (BSM), Brent International School (BISM) and International School Manila (ISM). These schools provide the highest quality of education and are fully committed to the goal of delivering highest quality of education and a superior international school program.

BSM upholds the high standard of the British education system. BSM follows the English National curriculum from Nursery to year 13. BISM is one school grounded with Christian ethos which strives to develop the talents and interests of its students as well as instil a strong sense of individual values. ISM incorporates a holistic approach in teaching and guiding the child's mental, emotional and physical development. It was the first school in the Philippines to receive accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

These schools usually contain International Baccalaureate (IB) option in their curriculum as well as ESL (English as a Second Language) Programs for non-native speakers of English. Class sizes are relatively small to maximize learning and interaction between students and teachers.

The general process of admission includes: submission of required documents, entrance test and interview with the applicant. Accepted students are approved for admission and the parents/guardians sign the enrolment agreement and pay the reservation deposit in order to reserve a place for their child. Waitlist students are approved for admission however, places in a filled class are not guaranteed. The application file of waitlisted students will be considered when a place becomes available.

The school year usually starts in August and ends in June. School terms vary from semester to quarterly. Legal holidays posted on the Philippine calendar are usually celebrated and students are usually given Christmas and Spring break vacations.

Moving to New Zealand

Interview with recently-arrived expat from the UK (Name & company confidential)

R8: How did you feel about moving to NZ?

"Rather nervous, we hadn't moved before and knew nothing about NZ. Getting an Information/ Welcome Pack in the post while we were still in the UK was wonderful and answered so many of our questions."

R8: What were your main concerns when you arrived in NZ?

"Finding an area and home that we would feel comfortable in but mainly finding a good school for our three children. Although, it was very reassuring to have had contact with the relocation company before we left home and to know they were there to help us when we arrived in Auckland. They had already given us so much really useful information and been great at quickly responding to our many questions"

R8: Was it easy to find a home to rent in a nice area?

"We are really delighted with the house

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Snapshot of Schooling in the Philippines (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Brent International School	The British School Manila	International School Manila
Average Enrolment Fee	600	approx 660 + Php 11,140	1,000
Average Annual Schooling fee	Nursery/Kinder (half-day) 4,536 Kinder (full-day), Grades 1-5 8,632 Grades 6-8 9,792 Grades 9-12 10,764	Nursery 3,946+Php 66,840 Reception - Grade 6 7,892+Php 133,680 Grade 7-9 8,850+Php 151,320 Grade 10-11 9,301+Php 161,670 Grade 12-13 5,340+Php 171,912	Preschool 3 - 2,405 Preschool 4 - 3,480 Grade 1-5 - 4,990 Grade 6-8 - 5,500 Grade 9-10 - 5,935 Grade 11-12 - 6,755
Application/Testing fee	100	approx 1600	130
Curriculum	IB, Upper school: College Preparatory Curriculum	IB	American, IB
Main teaching language	French, English, Mandarin, Filipino, Korean	English, French	French, German, Spanish, Mandarin, Filipino
Location	Inner City	Inner City	Inner City

1 Php = 0.0177722 USD, 1 USD = 56.2675 Php (as at September 20, 2005)

Moving to New Zealand (continued...)

we have got, it's great. It was difficult because there weren't many to choose from. We had to act quickly once we had decided on this house but felt we could make this decision having got a pretty good understanding of the Auckland rental market from our relocation consultant. In fact, we couldn't have managed without her help, she knew exactly how to manage the agents and made sure we didn't miss out on the house. We were very grateful, as we knew that other people wanted to rent it too."

R8: Are you happy with the school your children are attending?

"Yes, very. With three children we didn't want to pay school fees, and soon realised we had to live in an area with a good school, so the children could go there. With our relocation consultant's help we chose a few schools that we really liked and then she found us our house in the zone for one of these schools. I think this could be quite hard for other newcomers to understand, if they didn't have anyone to help them and explain how the system works in NZ.

R8: How easy or difficult was it to feel settled and at home in NZ.

"Well, it was much easier than we expected in the end and I think this was largely because of our relocation consultant. She was great and did so much for us, nothing was too much trouble and she always here to help. We felt that she really cared and understood our needs."

Schooling in Singapore

Depending on how long the assignees will be stationed in Singapore and the age of the children, students are generally advised to try and enter a school with a curriculum similar to their home country. This is especially so when the child is at the crucial age with important exams coming up.

Most international schools in Singapore offer Mandarin classes as a second or third language. Fees range between USD6,700 – USD15,400 per year, depending on the school and grade level. Tanglin Trust School and United World College have waiting lists of one year for their entry level classes, i.e. Pre-School and K1.

In a situation where students are placed on the waiting list, The Singapore American School gives preference to American and Canadian passport holders and The Tanglin Trust School gives preference to Commonwealth passport holders.

The International School year usually starts around mid-August to early September, except for the Australian International School, whose school year starts in January. The international schools in Singapore have generally all been growing steadily in size and school population over recent years. The Singapore American School, Australian International School and the French School have recently moved to larger premises to accommodate their growing needs.

Singapore also has schools designed to meet the needs of citizens outside the Commonwealth or America or Canada. There are schools in German, French, Dutch, Swiss, Japanese and Indian. The German school has recently introduced an international curriculum. The Indian Schools have grown in size and number in the last five years.



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Snapshot of Schooling in Singapore (Prices are in US Dollars)

	Singapore American School	Australian International School	Canadian International School	Tanglin Trust School	United World College	Overseas Family School
Average Enrolment Fee	1,000 - 2,000	1,050	734	1,667	1,400	-
Average Annual Schooling fee for Primary/Elementary	13,000	10,600	10,000	10,700	11,340	11,300
Average Annual Schooling fee for Middle/High School	15,400	14,160	12,500	14,000	13,450	14,000
Miscellaneous fees	2,000	1,400	-	1,300	1,785	-
Curriculum	American	Australian	Canadian	British - GCSE	British - IB	British - IB / American
Main teaching language	English	English	English	English	English	English
Location	Suburbs	Suburbs	Suburbs	Suburbs	Suburbs	Inner-city

Life Outside the Office in Malaysia

Malaysia being a country that straddles the South China Sea (literally), has more than just cityscapes and cosmopolitan leisure past-times.

If you are working in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, just literally visiting every popular restaurant, pub, entertainment outlet would take your breath away. From the local cuisines of the Malay, Indian, Chinese cultures, to the vast imported Asian cuisines from Thailand, Korea, Japan and also the long established Western cuisines, it is a formidable task to eat one's way through Malaysia's offerings.

Malaysians are renowned for their penchant for food, and it is not surprising to note the plethora of cuisines available, not only in the cosmopolitan cities of Kuala Lumpur and Penang, but also in the smaller towns like Johor Bahru, Ipoh, Kuching (Sarawak) as well as Kota Kinabalu (Sabah) - just to name a few.

Malaysia's natural environment has plenty for all. For scuba divers, the internationally-renowned dive spots in Malaysia will offer you weekends of sheer pleasure! West Malaysia's dive spots can be found at Pulau Payar (just off the main island of Langkawi on the west coast), which is a Marine Park and then of course, there is Redang Island and on the east coast, which is fabulous for diving. Sipadan (voted one of the

world's top dive spots), located off the tip of Kota Kinabalu, is another fantastic dive spot! Miri in Sarawak is also a great dive to explore sunken vessels that have found their resting place there.

For the landlubbers, there is a myriad of activities to discover, from jungle trails in the country's renowned national parks



on the Peninsula, rainforests with canopy walks, to jungle trails through lush tropical flora and fauna. Across on the East Malaysian side, Sarawak has a wonderful kaleidoscope of national parks - right at the doorstep of Kuching city is Bako National Park, Damai Peninsula, next to the seafront. Bako also boasts of the world's rare proboscis monkey species, as well as the largest flower in the world, Rafflesia!

Water rafting is another popular activity in Malaysia. Sarawak organizes an

annual raft safari which begins deep in the interior of the state. Participants make their own bamboo rafts, row it down the Rajang River, spend the night at the home of indigenous tribespeople, and then race down the river to a small town in the centre of the state. Water rafting is also available on the Peninsula - Lake Chini and the Perak River (beginners) and for the more experienced, the exhilarating stretch from Cameron Highlands coming down to the lowlands is a must.

There are also the fascinating cave structures like the Mulu Caves in Sarawak or Gua Tempurung in Perak on the peninsula! Experience cave climbing and trekking right through to the underground rivers into the sunshine! Being one of the oldest civilizations in this region, heritage trails abound. From walk-about trails in Georgetown, Penang (which has the largest collection of heritage houses in South East Asia!), Malacca and Perak to Kuching, Sarawak.

All in all, Malaysia has something for everyone - from the city lights to the adventures of the forests and the oceans and heritage. As a country where the population celebrates every ethnic and indigenous holiday, you will find that there are 16 public holidays a year and, coupled with the weekends and leave available, it is an excellent opportunity to explore Malaysia.