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We chat with Diageo's Annabel Moore

THE BEST LAW FIRMS TO WORK FOR IN ASIA

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

REFORM CALL
Will Park ouster bring change to Korea?

THE LAST MILE
Challenges of enforcing arbitral awards

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EMPLOYER OF

In keeping with the high numbers we have grown accustomed to seeing annually, more than 95 percent of lawyers across Asia have expressed satisfaction with their jobs in this year's survey, with almost half of the respondents calling themselves extremely satisfied. "Flexibility, interesting work, quality cases, great clients and for the most part, I get to choose who I work with, and they are brilliant people," cites an associate at a local law firm in Hong Kong.

For an associate with a law firm in the Philippines, "the firm provides us with all that we need. The firm has a good working environment that encourages professional growth without compromising the employees' well-being." And a partner at a local law firm in Vietnam says they are doing their "most favourite things" everyday: "This helps the sustainable development and growth of the firm, and also all of our staff in the firm according to our firm's core values, philosophy, and culture."

For all but 7 percent of the respondents, remuneration appears to be at least at the market standard; and almost 45 percent believe it to be above that. And more than 61 percent say that they feel their contributions to the firm and its success are "frequently" recognized. "There are regular appraisals, constant feedback sessions and opportunities galore," says an associate at a firm in India. "If you want to succeed, the firm is always there to support you."

Similarly, when it comes to opportunities for training or professional development, more than 94 percent are appreciative of what is available. "We not only have an extensive learning and development programme but also – and more importantly – we have an open door policy under which anyone of any seniority is encouraged to walk in to discuss and learn," says an employee at an international law firm in Hong Kong. Adds an employee of a Philippine law firm: "When there are seminars and training related to our practice or field of work, the HR director will pitch it to the managing partner and if the latter sees the importance of the said seminar or training, he will not hesitate in sending people to the said event because he knows that if the firm trains people and acquires additional knowledge, that would also serve as an asset to the firm."

The path to partnership is however a bit of a sticking point – almost 45 percent of those surveyed feel that the path is "somewhat transparent"

CHOICE 2017

or not transparent at all. "We have a structure in place, but as promotion is on a case-by-case basis and partly depending on performance, we may not have much clarity as to how far we are from partnership," says a senior associate with a law firm in Hong Kong.

That said, a whopping 81 percent rate their firm as "very collaborative." And almost 65 percent feel that their senior leaders communicate their goals and vision for the firm "very effectively."

For work-life balance, meanwhile, a little more than 40 percent think it's worth writing home about. "It's a law firm so sleepless nights come with territory, but the predominant feeling is that how much you need to spend at the office has more to do with your choices than with anything else," says an associate in Malaysia. And around 40 percent feel only "somewhat valued" at the firm, or not valued at all. But job security is high at 75 percent.

Overall, though, the signs are good. When asked if they saw themselves in the same firm in five years' time, more than half answered "definitely" while almost a third answered "probably." And just over two-thirds said that they would recommend the firm to a friend "wholeheartedly."

METHODOLOGY

The ALB Employer of Choice Rankings were compiled talking into account responses from more than 3,500 private practice lawyers across Asia, ranging from managing partners to paralegals, as well as our own market knowledge. The survey was open in the months of February and March, and law firms have been ranked on the basis of job satisfaction, remuneration, work-life balance, career prospects, mentorship, job security and other aspects, with respondents being asked to submit their inputs anonymously. Law firms in each jurisdiction have been listed in alphabetical order.

HONG KONG

At Baker McKenzie, an associate praises the "collaborative international culture where professional services are valued and all colleagues are top notch." A partner at Deacons notes the "excellent cultural environment, excellent client base and cutting edge work." Mayer Brown JSM is lauded by an associate for its "very professional environment, supportive staff and congenial colleagues. It's a woman-friendly working environment." And Stephenson Harwood has "excellent colleagues, variety of work, great support staff and structure."

INDIA

At Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, "the firm provides the ideal environment in which one can set goals and meet challenges without any constraints," says a partner. A lawyer at Khaitan & Co. says the firm has a great working culture with emphasis on work-life balance. You are also remunerated well for your services." And an associate with Trilegal highlights the "clean, spacious office, very cordial work atmosphere, and helpful and cooperative colleagues."

INDONESIA

Job satisfaction is upwards of 97 percent in Indonesia, and salary levels are also generally high, with 93 percent praising opportunities for guidance and mentorship.

At Ali Budiarjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro, an associate highlights the "comfortable working atmosphere, excellent seniors and mentor, and good salary." An associate at Budidjaja & Associates says their job allows them to "keep growing personally and professionally." "My passion was always to be a lawyer," says an associate at Hanafiah Ponggawa & Partners, "and my firm give the opportunity to achieve my dreams." And a lawyer at SSEK says "the working environment is really good and the partners really give everything they have to the associates."

HONG KONG

- Baker McKenzie
- Deacons
- Mayer Brown JSM
- Stephenson Harwood

INDIA

- Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas
- Khaitan & Co
- Trilegal

INDONESIA

- Ali Budiarjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro
- Budidjaja & Associates
- Hanafiah Ponggawa & Partners
- Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono

JAPAN

- Atsumi & Sakai
- Baker & McKenzie

KOREA

- Bae Kim & Lee
- Kim & Chang
- Shin & Kim
- Yulchon

MALAYSIA

- Azmi & Associates
- Wong & Partners
- Zul Rafique

JAPAN

The response was fairly low this year from Japan, but two firms stood out from the pack. Atsumi & Sakai was noted for its "broad practices and healthy working environment," while Baker & McKenzie was praised for "encouraging and rewarding those behaviours which are at the core of our culture, including quality, respect, team work, diversity and inclusion."

KOREA

Bae, Kim & Lee is praised for being "a great place to work with a great platform and outstanding lawyers." Shin & Kim is lauded for its good compensation, creative working environment and no bureaucracy. And Yulchon, says an attorney, "boasts high-profile and challenging work highly-qualified and pleasant colleagues, and an innovative and collaborative culture."

Gene-Oh (Gene) Kim, senior attorney, and Hoin Lee, senior foreign attorney, at Kim & Chang, say that they have seen the needs of their young lawyers become more diverse over the past few years. "Each of them has different strengths and characteristics and they are pursuing their own professional career development in a way that best utilizes their strong points," say Kim and Lee. "Our focus is to understand the different needs and characteristics of the different lawyers and ensure that we are giving them the best new career development opportunities, customized for each of them, and recognizing the significant contributions they are making to the firm. While the specific needs of law firm professionals may vary, a robust and diverse mentoring program providing ample and meaningful training opportunities, in both classroom and work experience settings, will always be the most efficient measure for them to develop into the best lawyers they want to and can be."

Kim and Lee say that throughout their associate careers, junior attorneys are provided with hands-on mentoring from both their junior level mentors and senior level mentors. "This dual mentoring system allows the firm to provide the necessary help and assistance that only this type of comprehensive mentoring can provide. An offsite 2-day program for associates that have completed their second year provides them with a meaningful and open opportunity to interact amongst themselves and with more senior attorneys that are invited as well," they note.

KIM & CHANG

The professional training programs offered, which have definitely become more extensive and diversified in recent years, are good examples of the commitment of the firm in the professional development of its attorneys, say Kim and Lee. "We have implemented a year-round training course for our incoming associates covering all areas of law that they could be practicing at the firm. In addition, the various practice areas have their own training program focusing on their detailed expertise and this is offered to a wider group. Depending on the audience, the training program offers diversified programs, such presentation skills, legal writing and so on," they add.

Clients come to the firm because of its people and the expertise and client service that its professionals bring to the table, say Kim and Lee. "We are able to recruit the best professionals because of the opportunities that only Kim & Chang can provide which, in turn,

is a reflection of the caliber of clients that we are servicing and the satisfactory client service that we have been able to provide throughout our history," they note. "The understanding that they have access to opportunities to develop their potential and become the industry's top professional is the key element that keeps our professionals happy to be working at Kim & Chang."

MALAYSIA

Azmi & Associates always "gives full opportunity to the members of the firm to always upgrade their knowledge and performance," says an associate. At Wong & Partners, a partner says that the work is challenging, rewarding, and requires us to push our limits." And at Zul Rafique & Partners, "the work culture is healthy; the outcome is rewarding."

PHILIPPINES

The Philippines has a job satisfaction rate of 94 percent, and salaries are above the market standard for more than two-thirds of the respondents. "Everyone, most especially the bosses are very supportive, patient, welcoming and open-minded. All lawyers are very easy to talk to or approach," says an associate at Gatmaytan Yap Patacsil Gutierrez & Protacio. An associate at SyCip Salazar Hernandez & Gatmaitan says "there's always a new thing to learn every day. Work is varied and rarely monotonous." Meanwhile a respondent from Villaraza & Angangco praises the "great people, diverse work and great learning opportunity."

Ricardo J. Romulo, senior partner of Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & de los Angeles, says that competition among law firms has become tough, as the firm operates not only in the Philippines but also in the ASEAN region. "Local Philippine law firms can no longer be parochial in their goals. The two main challenges have been on fees and on the immediate delivery of services to the client," he says.

According to Romulo, in this environment, legal talents are crucial. "We need to harness and develop them early," he says. "Thus, we

PHILIPPINES

- Gatmaytan Yap Patacsil Gutierrez & Protacio
- Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & de los Angeles
- SyCip Salazar Hernandez & Gatmaitan
- Villaraza & Angangco

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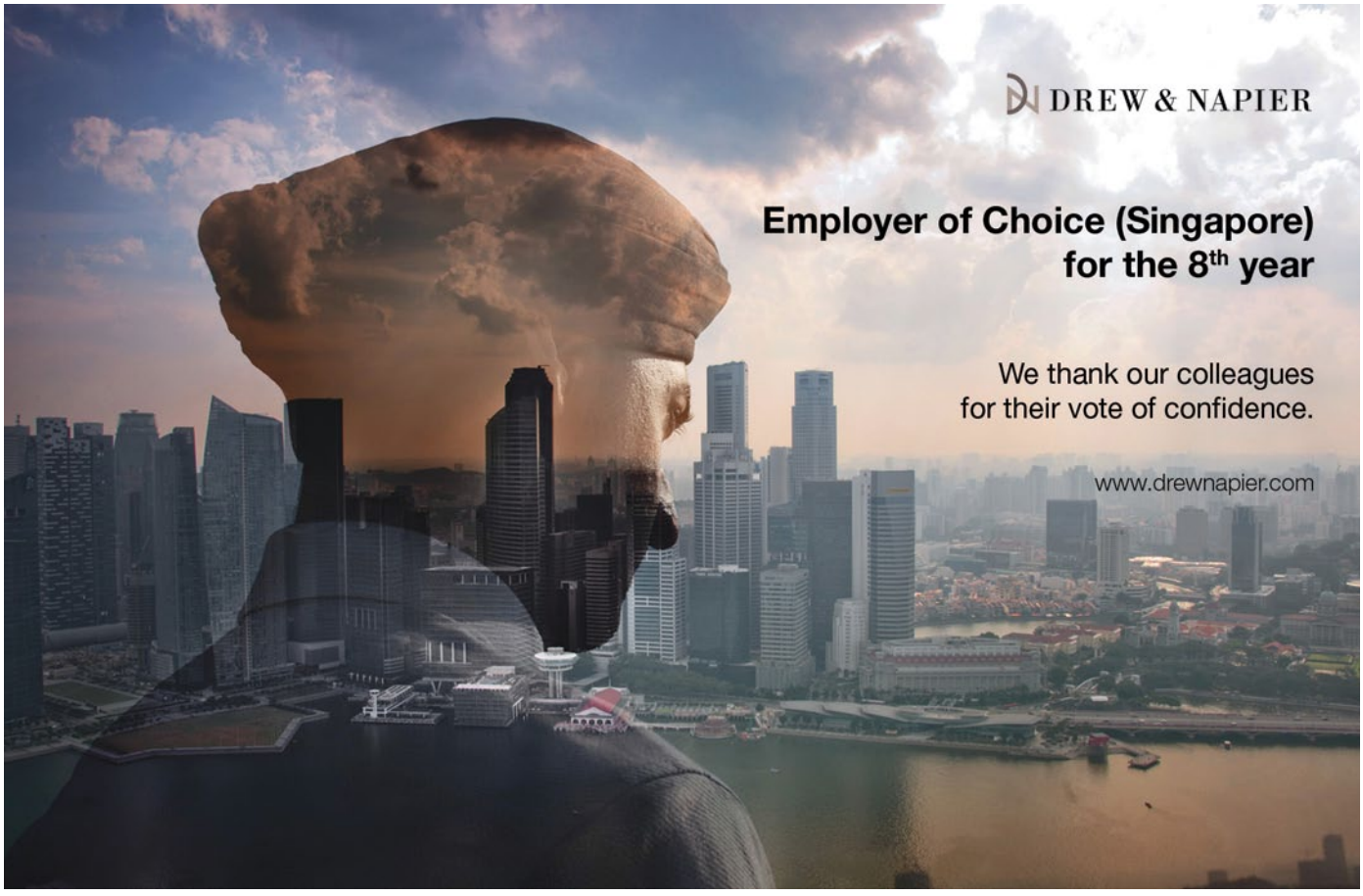
have made our law firm internship program more engaging, participative and fun. Our hiring starts from this internship program. And for our associates, we have organized seminars and workshops for each of our law firm practice areas, specifically dwelling on the latest legal trends and development."

Romulo adds that his law firm has perhaps the lowest ratio of lawyer resignations in the country. "Sometimes even if some of them leave, they still come back to us for whatever reason," he says. "We really attribute this to our basic law firm policies of no monopoly of legal knowledge, no sense of entitlement, teamwork, civility and professionalism. Plus, the fact that we give our associates the opportunity to take further legal studies abroad without loss of basic pay and seniority. And we have been doing these for the last 110 years or more." He notes that the essential ingredients for a happy, harmonious workplace, are "trust and respect."

DREW & NAPIER

SINGAPORE

Singapore's job satisfaction comes in at around 85 percent, still a fair achievement for a market



that has seen work being sluggish of late. Remuneration remains stable, and the path to partnership is at least somewhat transparent for 92 percent. Teams are generally collaborative, and lawyers also feel that their work-life balance is decent (84 percent). With nearly half the respondents feeling "extremely valued" and 66 percent feeling secure about their jobs, more than 30 percent "definitely" expect to see themselves in the same firm in five years' time.

At Duane Morris & Selvam, a respondent says "the firm provides me with opportunities to grow professionally." An associate at Harry Elias Partnership praises the "excellent work culture," while at RHTLaw Taylor Wessing lauds the "nice colleagues, progressive management team and challenging deals." And at Yeo & Associates, a new entrant this year, "We work as a family."

Kelvin Tan, director at Drew & Napier, says that the firm has been fortunate to attract high calibre lawyers who aspire to work on significant and challenging work, and want to excel at what they do. "The people who join us are the future of this firm, and we make sure they get opportunities to do great work," he says. "We do everything we can to ensure that they perform to the best of their abilities, so that they have a real sense of pride and achievement."

Tan adds that the most important things the firm provides to its employees are trust and responsibility. "You could say it's old-fashioned, but it always holds true," he says. "It's a matter of flexibility in embodying it. So, for example, our lawyers can work from home if they want or need to stay home for a day here and there. And that trust is reciprocated – we find that the policy is used responsibly."

Finally, Tan notes that people don't just go to the firm to work. "Generations of friendship are built in Drew, and I constantly hear from members of the firm who have gone on to do other things in life that they have fond memories of their time in this firm," he says. "This culture makes it easier to come to work every day."

TAIWAN

"This is an international law firm with abundant global resources. The office environment is friendly and supportive," says an associate with Baker & McKenzie. A partner at Eiger Law praises the "very congenial and flexible working environment in a multi-cultural setting, and the high quality of practice." And a respondent at Winkler Partners lauds the "Meaningful work, experienced, knowledgeable colleagues, pleasant work environment and benefits."

THAILAND

While job satisfaction is at just under 84 percent, the proportion of lawyers who are "extremely satisfied" is relatively high, coming in at 53 percent. About 51 percent also feel that they are paid above the market standard, and for 81 percent, work-life balance is at the least acceptable, while more than 56 percent feel "extremely valued" in the firm. An impressive 63 percent definitely see themselves in the same firm in five years' time. At Baker & McKenzie's Bangkok office, an associate feels the "career path is clear, and compensation is excellent," while at Tilleke & Gibbins, another says, "I have the job I love."

Weerawong Chittmittrapap, senior partner at Weerawong, Chinnavat & Peangpanor, says that the firm's employees enjoy working together in a collegial environment, so it has a combination of formal office space and co-working space with break out areas. "We have Friday cafe sessions to discuss complex, interesting deals, where we share legal knowledge as well as insights on how a deal gets done," he says. "We also have town halls, practice group meetings and an informal mentoring system that allow employees to freely ask questions and express their ideas.

WEERAWONG, CHINNAVAT & PEANGPANOR

SINGAPORE

- Drew & Napier
- Duane Morris & Selvam
- Harry Elias Partnership
- RHTLaw Taylor Wessing
- Yeo & Associates

TAIWAN

- Baker & McKenzie
- Eiger Law
- Winkler Partners

THAILAND

- Baker & McKenzie
- Tilleke & Gibbins
- Weerawong, Chinnavat & Peangpanor

VIETNAM

- Phuoc & Partners
- Rajah & Tann LCT Lawyers
- YKVN

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Employees are increasingly focused on health, so we are building a gym in order to promote good health and enhance work-life balance."

He adds that employee engagement is one of the keys to the firm's success. "Younger lawyers prefer a clear career path with established milestones, so we have a transparent system and a career path committee to fully support individual development," says Weerawong.

"We empower and encourage lawyers to build their own unique career and success is measured on merit. We have a practice group rotation plan, which provides training and experience in all areas of law in order to build legal knowledge and relationships across practice groups. We are known for advising on some of the most significant deals in the region, where practice groups work together to provide solutions for multi-faceted transactions, he adds.

Finally, Weerawong stresses that the firm works as a team. "People work harmoniously in the spirit of "together we can,"" he says. "We emphasize, among other factors, a politic free, transparent work environment without power play, which motivates lawyers in terms of assignments, rewards and career path."

THE BEST OF THE WORST

Feedback from some extremely dissatisfied respondents

"If you're in the spotlight, anything you do is grand, no matter how insignificant it is. If you're not in the spotlight, anything you do is lousy, no matter how significant it might be."

— From a law firm in Singapore

"The firm does not help me in three important areas of my work: (1) compensation, (2) work load management, and (3) professional development."

- From a law firm in the Philippines

"I hate everyone I work with."

- From a law firm in India

VIETNAM

A job satisfaction rate of upwards of 95 percent, above-market remuneration for more than 53 percent of the respondents, and adequate opportunities to receive training and professional development mean that it's not a bad time to be a corporate lawyer in Vietnam.

Work-life balance is "excellent" for 39 percent and "good" for 53 percent more, and almost 64 percent feel "extremely valued." Job security is at 82 percent.

"I can learn a lot while working here," says an associate at Phuoc & Partners. A lawyer at Rajah & Tann LCT Lawyers praises the "professional working environment and good benefits," while at YKVN, a responded says that "the job pays well and we receive good cases to handle."