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Leadership
Mature Workers
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OH & S
Outsourcing
Performance Management
Recruitment
Relocation
Retention
Retrenchment
Serviced Apartments
Strategic HR
Succession Planning
Talent Management
Training & Development
Work Life Balance

Events
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Building bonds

Priya de Langen 11 Jul 2011



In a report, 2010 Hydrogen Global Professionals on the Move Report, 94% of employees stated that they were already developing their careers outside their own countries – or were willing to do so in the future. With more professionals on the move for work globally and more companies establishing operations in Asia, it is important to help new expatriates integrate to ensure a smooth transition.

A welcoming team celebration, onboarding activities and even out-of-the-office social gatherings can help expatriates settle in. Some organisations also have family days, where employees and their families can meet and establish new friendships. Many organisations house their expatriate employees and their families in serviced apartments, among other accommodation options. Serviced apartment providers also help expatriates and their families to help them integrate with the local culture through various networking events and activities.

Personalised experience

Serviced apartments provide a 'home-away-from-home' ambience and offer a personalised experience for expatriate residents and their families, according to serviced apartment providers.

Ascott Limited, serviced apartment provider with operations in more than 20 countries, accommodates a large clientele of expatriate guests locally in its six serviced residences in prime locations under the brand names of Ascott, Citadines and Somerset.

"Residents at our properties are mainly expatriates and their families, says Tan Boon Khai, Regional General Manager of Singapore and Malaysia, the Ascott Limited. "They are here for project assignments or have relocated, and they stay for months and sometimes years. At Ascott, we focus on making our residents feel right at home by providing them with a truly unique and memorable home-away-from-home experience."

Nomad Group is another well-known serviced apartment provider that has serviced residences in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur and Malaysia. Nomad Group management and staff know their residents personally, says N. K. Yeoh, Group General Manager, Serviced Residences, The Nomad Group, Bhd.

"Staff members can easily get to know the residents easier and faster compared to hotel guests as they normally stay between three to four months. There are much more opportunities for the staff to connect to residents and also offer help to the expat families to integrate better with local cultures," says Yeoh.

Cultural immersion and networking opportunities

Besides providing personalised services, serviced apartments provide a wide variety of activities that help residents network with each other and provide expatriates with the opportunity to experience local cultures.

Ascott Limited's Tan says that the groups' serviced apartments help residents settle in through programmes including local culture workshops, city tours and get-togethers to celebrate local festivals. "This also forms a platform where they can meet and mingle with each other, as well as with our service residence staff," says Tan, who adds that residence managers also organise visits to local attractions such as famous eateries to enjoy local cuisines.

Recently, residents and staff from the Citadines and Somerset properties had a Christmas get-together with 50 underprivileged children from TOUCH community services. The residents gave cash donations and bought the children gifts.

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Tan adds that management helps expatriate families by providing them with information about schools in Singapore for their children.

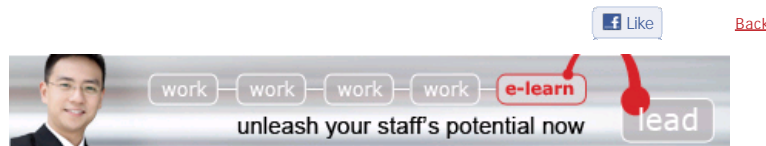
Yeoh says that the management of Nomad serviced residences in Bangsar arranges at least four to five events per year, such as potluck gatherings at the poolside to build management-resident relationships, while orientation programmes are also held for newly arrived families. Also in the wings are "expatriate societies to have their occasional coffee gatherings".

Other serviced apartment providers are using online media to help their foreign residents interact. Oakwood Asia Pacific has several apartments across the region including China, the Philippines and Thailand. It has introduced an 'Oakwood Neighbourhood' iPhone app for residents to download, which features shops, restaurants and other amenities in the vicinity as well as neighbourhood tips.

P.G. Matthew, Managing Director of Oakwood Asia Pacific, says that Oakwood apartments have also been running cocktail parties to help facilitate interaction among residents of the property. Oakwood employees also help residents become familiar with local amenities, services, night spots and shops.

Oakwood Asia Pacific believes it is important to help residents settle in from the start. "Oakwood is taking integration into a neighbourhood and culture one step further through an Oakwood Neighbourhood campaign. This campaign will include properties across Asia running different activities such as neighbourhood orientation schedules," Matthew says.

Moreover, Oakwood helps its residents connect with the local business community, as in the case of Oakwood Premier Joy-Nostalg Center in Manila, by allowing local businesses set up mini-stalls and interact with guests.



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