

# EMPLOYER OF CHOICE 2018

## ASIA'S BEST LAW FIRMS TO WORK FOR

**T**imes have been tough for law firms in Asia, what with the twin forces of rising competition and an increasingly savvy clientele. This has resulted in a slight decline in the number of responses from last year, as lawyers are more likely to recommend their firm when they are happy to be working there. That makes the responses we received even more meaningful, and highlights the stellar work that the ranked law firms have been doing.

Despite the dampening of enthusiasm, the job satisfaction numbers remain high. 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. "Collegiality, mutual respect, and work efficiency... We have experts in many fields and cooperate smoothly, creating a great environment to provide our clients comprehensive advice in an efficient way," says a partner at a local law firm in South Korea.

For an associate with a law firm in Taiwan, "the firm provides what I need and what I like, and I know that our firm will do their best to satisfy their lawyers." And an associate at a law firm in the Philippines adds: "There is diversity in the accounts we handle. The senior lawyers mentor us younger lawyers in order to ensure full comprehension of the accounts we handle. We have superb office facilities such as lounge, gym and even a bar which aids us in ensuring that we are able to unwind after work hours."

For all but 8 percent of the respondents, remuneration appears to be at least at the market standard; and almost 47 percent believe it to be above that. "The firm pays its associates more than other law firms - even the firms at the same level. Also, the firm gives us various facilities which are far more than that provided by other firms and which I would

like to consider as forming part of the remuneration," says an associate at a law firm in India.

And more than 62 percent say that their feel your contributions to the firm and its success are frequently recognised. "If you want to succeed, the firm is always there to support you," says an employee of a law firm in the Philippines. "My boss tells everyone that he appreciates my loyalty to the firm. It is difficult to put it into words, but when I leave my home in the morning, I feel like I'm going to my second home."

Similarly, when it comes to opportunities for training or professional development, more than 93 percent are appreciative of what is available. "Our firm sponsors its employees attending seminars, meeting and overseas training. For example, some employees are sent to Korea and Japan on two-month internship, and all expenses for the internship are borne by the firm," says an employee at a local law firm in Vietnam. Adds an employee of a Philippine law firm: "The firm offers substantial opportunities not just in established fields but also in new ones, such as cryptocurrency, technology, etc."

The path to partnership is, however, a bit of a sticking point for a number of firms – almost 49 percent of those surveyed feel that the path is "somewhat transparent" or not transparent at all.

That said, a whopping 84 percent rate their firm as very collaborative. "My current team is fantastic to work with. People are supportive, are genuinely interested in delivering high-quality work product consistently, and at the same time are dedicated to ensuring a work-life balance for every member of the team. It is a very positive environment to grow in," says an associate in India. And almost 67 percent feel that their senior leaders communicate their goals and vision for the firm "very effectively." ALB

## HONG KONG

**J**ob satisfaction is at 95 percent in Hong Kong, but remuneration could be better, with more than two-thirds (69 percent) believing it to be at market standard. Opportunities to receive mentoring are well-received by about 74 percent, but less than a fifth believe the path to partnership is “very transparent.” More than 75 percent find their firm “very collaborative,” while more than half say that they feel their contributions are frequently recognised. Work-life balance is good or better for more than 90 percent, and the majority (52 percent) feels “extremely valued” or not valued at all. Job security is fairly high, and nearly 60 percent would wholeheartedly recommend the firm to a friend.

At **Clyde & Co**, lawyer praises the “friendly environment and open door policy.” An associate at **CMS** says “the boss is smart and nice. People here are friendly and helpful.” Meanwhile, a **Stephenson Harwood** partner says: “I am totally fulfilled, with an interesting balance of work, managing my colleagues and helping them develop their careers.”

## INDIA

**I**ndia notches up a job satisfaction rate of 93 percent this year, slightly down from last year, but still quite high. Salaries broadly trend towards the higher end of the scale among those surveyed, while more than 85 percent appreciate the opportunities for training and professional development, and 89 percent like the mentoring they receive at their firm. The path to partnership could be more transparent (it is “somewhat transparent” for 43 percent) but 85 percent find their team “very collaborative” and work-life balance is “excellent” for more than a quarter. Almost 63 percent feel “extremely valued, and job security is at a healthy level (71 percent say they feel “very secure”).

“As a junior member of the firm’s corporate practice, it is extremely satisfying

### HONG KONG

*CLYDE & CO*

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*CMS*

—

*STEPHENSON  
HARWOOD*

### INDIA

*CYRIL AMARCHAND  
MANGALDAS*

—

*KHAITAN & CO*

### INDONESIA

*ALI BUDIARJO,  
NUGROHO,  
REKSODIPUTRO*

—

*HADIPUTRANTO,  
HADINOTO &  
PARTNERS*

—

*HANAFIAH  
PONGGAWA &  
PARTNERS*

—

*SOEWITO  
SUHARDIMAN  
EDDYMURTHY  
KARDONO*

to be involved in such quality work and work with extremely talented lawyers across our offices and under the supervision of a very experienced senior management,” says a lawyer about **Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas**. And a lawyer at **Khaitan & Co** praises the “extremely cohesive and well-guided working environment with excellent support staff.”

## INDONESIA

**J**ob satisfaction is upwards of 96 percent in Indonesia, and salary levels are also generally high, with 92 percent praising opportunities for guidance and mentorship. Work-life balance is passable for about 65 percent, and a majority (53 percent) feels extremely valued; with almost two-thirds feeling secure in their jobs. Some 46 percent definitely see themselves in the same firm in five years’ time, while 62 percent would wholeheartedly recommend the firm to a friend.

“I work with people around me that are not just my colleagues, but also my friends as well as my mentors,” says a lawyer at **Ali Budiarto, Nugroho, Reksodiputro**. My office has a great environment and supporting system which help me a lot in my career development.” At **Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners**, “we have a solid team and we support each other in and outside the office,” says a lawyer. For a partner at **Hanafiah Ponggawa & Partners**, “this firm is based on family values and yet is very professional. So it feels like we are working not only with very professional colleagues, but also family and friends.” And a lawyer at **Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono** praises “the excellent work environment, nurturing supervisors and the fact that associates are not only delegated odd jobs.”

## JAPAN

**W**hile job satisfaction is at just under 85 percent, the proportion of lawyers who are “extremely satisfied” is relatively high, coming in at 55 percent. About 52 percent also feel that

they are paid above the market standard, and for 83 percent, work-life balance is at the least acceptable, while more than 52 percent feel “extremely valued” in the firm. An impressive 61 percent definitely see themselves in the same firm in five years’ time. An associate at **Atsumi & Sakai** says that “job training is excellent and I can experience all fields of legal practice.” A lawyer at **Baker McKenzie** says the firm is “a great place to work with if you’re looking for international exposure (both clients and colleagues).” And an associate at **Nishimura & Asahi** says: “My work is challenging and I have interesting colleagues.”

## KOREA

**A**s in previous years, South Korea had the largest number of responses to the survey this year, with hundreds of lawyers submitting enthusiastically. And the enthusiasm was not unfounded: almost 63 percent declared themselves “extremely satisfied” with their jobs. Remuneration is “well above” the market standard for almost 42 percent, and more than 59 percent said opportunities for training and professional development was of the highest quality. The path to partnership is “very transparent,” according to 53 percent, and nearly 81 percent praise their team for being highly collaborative. Work-life balance is excellent for 46 percent, and a whopping 64 percent feel “extremely valued.” No wonder job security is at 74 percent, and almost 75 percent would “wholeheartedly” recommend it to a friend. **Bae, Kim & Lee** is praised for making an “effort to take care of the associates to ensure that we are adequately looked after.” And at **Kim & Chang**, an attorney lauds the “support from colleagues and staff, varied opportunities and challenging projects.

Sai Ree Yun, managing partner of **Yulchon**, says that the firm’s three main foundational principles are commitment, innovation, and excellence. “To achieve this mission, we look for the following qualities in our new recruits: professional expertise, high-ethical standards, and a willingness to collaborate,” he says. “We then systematically invest in our professionals through education and training that is tailored to the

### JAPAN

ATSUMI & SAKAI

BAKER MCKENZIE

NISHIMURA &  
ASAHI

### KOREA

BAE KIM & LEE

KIM & CHANG

YULCHON

experience level of each professional. This education and training system is comprised of special committees populated by experienced partners of the firm and a central training body. Yulchon understood from its early days that today’s young associates and partners choose law firms based on the quality of the professional development programmes.”

For example, he says, the firm’s Hiring Committee generally oversees the hiring process of associates, and the Talent and Career Development Committee (TCDC) is responsible for developing highly effective training programs and career development opportunities for new associates.

At a firm-wide level, Yun notes that the Yulchon Academy serves as an in-house centre for continuing education and training on legal, business, and professional development issues. “In the first half of 2017 alone, almost 60 classes were offered by the academy, where the topics varied from technical legal skills to “soft skills” as well as the latest developments in newly-emerging markets, such as blockchain, cryptocurrency, and fintech,” he says. “It is our view that the skill sets required of a junior partner is different from those of a new associate, senior associate, or a senior partner, and we try to deliver appropriate levels of training at different stages of a lawyer’s career.”

Yun notes that the firm emphasises communication and collaboration in



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**DIVINA LAW**

building a positive, engaging work environment. "Throughout the year, we host various activities to create a fun, exciting workplace so that professionals want to leave their offices and collaborate," he says. "For example, we have bi-monthly gatherings at our in-house café to introduce new employees, host welcoming parties for new partners, and celebrate our significant court victories, deal closings, and awards.

In terms of building up skills, Yun says that Yulchon also has an in-house research centre, which analyzes new industries, products, and services. "Research teams of our legal professionals are then formed to receive this information and develop new ways to more effectively and efficiently serve our client," he says. "For example, we have research teams on new tax structures, autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, IoT, big data analysis, blockchain, virtual and augmented reality, mobile health-care, and many more cutting-edge topics. Furthermore, we regularly invite industry experts on these subjects to provide us

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with further enlightenment on new and future trends. Our innovations come from this constant need to learn about these new technologies and businesses in order to develop new legal paradigms for our clients.”

## PHILIPPINES

**T**he Philippines has a job satisfaction rate of 93 percent, and salaries are above the market standard for more than two-thirds of the respondents. More than 89 percent appreciate the opportunities for training and professional development that their firm provides, while 78 percent like the opportunities to receive mentorship. The path to partnership is very transparent for just under a quarter of respondents, while more than two-thirds think their firm is “very collaborative.” With work-life balance acceptable at the least for 86 percent, and job security for nearly three-quarters, 79 percent would “wholeheartedly” recommend the firm to a friend.

“The working environment at my firm is easily the best among the large law firms in the Philippines. Many of my friends from law school are jealous that I work here,” says a lawyer at **Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & de los Angeles**. “An associate at **Quisumbing Torres** says: “there is work-life balance. The environment is conducive to continuous learning and improvement.



*ROMULO MABANTA BUENAVENTURA SAYOC & DE LOS ANGELES*

### PHILIPPINES

*DIVINA LAW*

—

*QUISUMBING TORRES*

—

*ROMULO*

—

*VILLARAZA &  
ANGANGCO*

People are generally easy to work with.” Meanwhile, a respondent from **Villaraza & Angangco** says the firm is a “teaching law firm. It ensures that we learn from every assignment.”

Nilo T. Divina, managing partner of **Divina Law** says the most basic requirements of employees today are an adequate compensation package, professional fulfillment and, increasingly, work-life balance. “On compensation, our rates for lawyers and non-lawyers are arguably the best in the industry,” he says. “Even our non-legal staff have a quarterly profit share on top of their salaries. The lawyers, on the other hand, have profit shares that correspond to their collection for the concerned quarter

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which makes it very equitable. It incentivizes industry or hard work. At the same time, it encourages lawyers to assist in the firm's collection efforts by gently reminding their clients on timely payments."

He notes that professional fulfilment refers to that sense of appreciation that one's work is valued and makes a positive impact on the firm, their workmates, clients, and other people. "First, we make sure that we hire people who share our goals and values and are eager to contribute to what the firm does," he says. "Second, in the course of their employment, we make sure that there are adequate feedback mechanisms in place to let the employees know how they are faring at their job and how they can further improve. Third, we make sure that everyone is coached or mentored on their career paths and progression. This gives employees a sense of direction which in turn makes them more engaged and invested in the firm."

On-work life balance, Divina says the firm recognises that study after study has shown that employees' productivity increases when they are not burnt out and have more time to pursue other interests and be with their families. "We have recently implemented a four-day workweek once every month for employees," he says. "This will enable them to go on short trips with their families, work on personal projects, and pursue other interests outside of work which may be difficult to accomplish on ordinary two-day weekends. We have likewise provided our staff a chapel for their spiritual nourishment."

## SINGAPORE

**S**ingapore's job satisfaction comes in at around 86 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 93 percent. Teams are generally collaborative, and lawyers also feel that their work-life balance is decent (85 percent). With nearly half the respondents feeling "extremely valued" and 66 percent feeling secure about their jobs, more than 32 percent "definitely" expect



*The ALB Employer of Choice rankings were compiled taking into account responses from more than 2,500 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. There is no list for Malaysia this year due to a lack of significant responses.*

### SINGAPORE

**BAKER MCKENZIE  
WONG & LEOW**

—

**DREW & NAPIER**

—

**EVERSHEDS  
HARRY ELIAS**

—

**STEPHENSON  
HARWOOD**

### TAIWAN

**BAKER MCKENZIE**

—

**EIGER LAW**

—

**WINKLER PARTNERS**

to see themselves in the same firm in five years' time.

At **Baker McKenzie Wong & Leow**, a respondent says "I have a lot of autonomy, a good line manager and a variety of work." "I love my work and I am grateful to have supportive colleagues and bosses," says an associate at **Eversheds Harry Elias**. Meanwhile, at **Stephenson Harwood**, a lawyer says: "There is a good level of cooperation and teamwork amongst colleagues."

**Drew & Napier** continues to attract the most passionate and ambitious young lawyers in search of challenging and cutting-edge work, says Blossom Hing, a director at the firm. "Our relentless focus on training and ethics keeps our lawyers grounded as they set their sights high," she notes. "Our mentorship is based on a team structure where senior lawyers spend time to guide our young lawyers, always encouraging them to express themselves, especially when they differ. This structure creates an environment which nurtures talent and transforms the very able into the exceptional."

Young lawyers also aspire to give back to society, and the firm encourages that, says Hing. "We provide ample opportunity for them to do pro bono work in conjunction with the Law Society's Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, Community Legal Clinic, Legal Aid Bureau and various charities," she adds. "Our lawyers act for accused persons who cannot afford legal representation, provide free legal advice at legal clinics, and lend a helping hand to charities."

Drew & Napier additionally recognises that work-life balance is a critical element of motivation, and makes for fresher insights and better productivity. "Therefore, in addition to having 30 days of leave in a year, our lawyers can work from home or take time off," she says. Hing adds: "We are very proud of our young lawyers. They are full of promise and potential."

## TAIWAN

**"I**nteresting challenges, positive competition, and a friendly working environment. The remuneration is great," says an associate about

**Baker McKenzie.** A partner at **Eiger Law** praises the “great teamwork and communications between colleagues and partners, so that I can work not only independently but collaboratively.” And a respondent at **Winkler Partners** says the firm is “the ‘healthiest’ place I have ever worked. The firm cares deeply about its people, community and clients.”

## THAILAND

**W**hile job satisfaction is at just under 83 percent, the proportion of lawyers who are “extremely satisfied” is relatively high, coming in at 54 percent. About 52 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 57 percent feel “extremely valued” in the firm. And 62 percent definitely see themselves in the same firm in five years’ time. At **Baker McKenzie**, an associate says, “This is the



DREW & NAPIER

**DREW & NAPIER**

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first job I've ever not hated coming to. I like the people and the culture and most of what I'm doing every day." At **Tilleke & Gibbins**, a respondent says: "The atmosphere is friendly and we have good teamwork. The compensation is also above average."

Weerawong Chittmittrapap, senior partner at **Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners**, says the firm acknowledges that professionals continually strive to develop their careers and maintain work-life balance. "This year we implemented a new programme called 'Be the CEO of your own career.' The definition of hard work and a balanced life is different for each person, so we encourage lawyers to define their goals and then plan and adopt their work and routine accordingly to create a 'well-designed life.' To support this, we implemented new technology systems so that lawyers may work from anywhere at any time and we have designed the office with the facilities to meet their needs and wishes in a comfortable work environment."

He adds that "Be the CEO of your career" also involves individual reward and development plans. "Every lawyer has the flexibility to choose the annual number of billable hours," Weerawong says. "They decide how much they want to earn and how fast they want to grow. Competencies are mapped to our WCP Academy eLearning platform, which provides ongoing professional development in legal knowledge, soft skills and leadership so that they can continually expand their knowledge and skill set while following their desired career path. For junior lawyers, we have an associate pool program which allows them to work in multiple areas of law in their formative years so that they have a holistic view before they choose an area of specialization."

Finally, he says that the firm believes that employee engagement can be created if employers demonstrate that they "care" for their employees. "'Care' for employees has long been our culture as evidenced through many of our initiatives, including the new 'CEO of your own career' and the new office design to suit their lifestyle," Weerawong says. "Regular formal and informal team activities encourage team spirit and a collaborative working environment. We also have a Listening Committee to facilitate the resolution of employee grievances."



WEERAWONG, CHINNAVAT & PARTNERS

## THAILAND

BAKER MCKENZIE

—

TILLEKE & GIBBINS

—

WEERAWONG,  
CHINNAVAT &  
PARTNERS

## VIETNAM

LNT & PARTNERS

—

RAJAH & TANN  
LCT LAWYERS

—

TILLEKE & GIBBINS

## VIETNAM

**A** job satisfaction rate of upwards of 94 percent, above-market remuneration for more than 54 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 41 percent and "good" for 49 percent more, and almost 65 percent feel "extremely valued." Job security is at 81 percent. For 71 percent, their teams are generally quite collaborative, and 63 percent feel reasonably secure about their jobs in the immediate future. Some 64 percent definitely see themselves in the same firm in five years' time, and 78 percent would "wholeheartedly" recommend the firm to a friend.

"The environment is so nice and the team is supportive," says an associate at **LNT & Partners**. A lawyer at **Rajah & Tann LCT Lawyers** says they "enjoy the work I am assigned to do, the variety of areas I get to explore in order to give out legal advice." At **Tilleke & Gibbins**, a respondent says that "the working environment is great, the salary is OK and the work is interesting." ALB



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