

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

ASIA'S BEST LAW FIRMS TO WORK FOR

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.

BY ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

Times 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 93 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. "No micro-management, in control of my work both when I was an associate and now as a partner, friendly environment, easy-going, work long hours when there is a need, freedom to work short hours when things are not busy, many social meaningful events organized by firm," says a partner at a local law firm in Hong Kong. For an associate with an international law firm in Hong Kong, there are "a lot of learning opportunities. Super good supervisor, easy-going and providing us guidance whenever necessary, always there for

us. A great honour to be part of the team." And a partner at a law firm in India adds: "Given the established brand and clientele, there is a regular inflow of interesting work. As a harmonious partnership across offices, collaboration across practice sectors makes my firm a truly pan-India firm and allows attorneys to work on interesting matters across jurisdictions. The culture here stresses on a work-life balance to ensure that attorneys have an overall development of not only their work life but also time for their personal passions."

For all but 11 percent of the respondents, remuneration appears to be at least at the market standard; and almost 46 percent believe it to be above that. "The firm functions on the principle that the revenue and the growth of the firm is largely attributable to the team and its contribution and this is clearly visible from the manner in which the team is compensated and appraised at every level," says a respondent in India. And more than 62 percent say that their feel your contributions to the firm and its success are frequently recognised. "Contributions in transactions, cases etc are frequently circulated internally by emails," says another respondent from India. "These emails mention the contribution of every member who contributed

and how. This is in addition to internal team recognition, which helps build confidence."

Similarly, when it comes to opportunities for training or professional development, more than 90 percent are appreciative of what is available. The firm offers a variety for young associates the opportunity to get involved in big projects and enhances the coaching and mentoring to develop new generation. In addition, the firms also pays attention to organise internal seminars focusing on a specific topic, which aims at exchanging knowledge and experience between working teams," says an employee at a local law firm in Vietnam.

The path to partnership is, however, a bit of a sticking point – almost 46 percent of those surveyed feel that the path is "somewhat transparent" or not transparent at all. That said, a whopping 86 percent rate their firm as "very collaborative." And around 40 percent feel only "somewhat valued" at the firm, or not valued at all. But job security is high at 77 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 68 percent said they would recommend the firm to a friend.

HONG KONG

Mayer Brown
Oldham Li & Nie
Stephenson Harwood

Job satisfaction is at 93 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 71 percent, but less than a fifth believe the path to partnership is “very transparent.” More than 76 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 (51 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.



STEPHENSON HARWOOD

At Mayer Brown, a lawyer says “colleagues are all collaborative and friendly. Great working atmosphere.” An respondent at Oldham Li & Nie says “the firm offers great flexibility for me to handle cases and the atmosphere between colleagues is good.”

Danny Cohen, chief operating officer, Asia, at Stephenson Harwood, says that the firm places central importance on its people, and has made this a core facet of its strategy. “The aim is to foster an environment where ambition thrives, potential is developed and talent is

STEPHENSON HARWOOD

“We pride ourselves on creating a working environment where our people flourish and reach their potential, where talent is fostered and where entrepreneurialism is embraced. Being recognised as one of Asian Legal Business’ ‘Employers of Choice’ is testament to this.”

Danny Cohen, chief operating officer, Asia

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rewarded. This approach is taken across the business – irrespective of geographic location or seniority,” he says.

Cohen adds the firm places real value on learning and development and has an experienced and capable team running its L&D programmes both in Europe and in Asia. “The firm also values on-the-job learning, workshops, seminars and retreats, as well as secondments – whether that be to a different office in the firm’s network, or to a client,” he notes.

“The firm has an award-winning global career progression programme, to which all mid- and senior-level associates are invited, as well as a six-month ‘high potential’ programme for those senior lawyers who aspire to become partners. Each of the development opportunities has been designed – with input from partners and clients – to be practical, relevant and commercially focused,” says Cohen. “The firm spends time and effort promoting a positive and inclusive workplace culture.”

Cohen says that the firm caters to the needs of junior lawyers in a variety of different ways, including experience of client work, development of technical skills, involvement in forums and initiatives, feedback and career development, experience with technology and innovation, business development and inter-office work and secondments.

INDIA

Dhaval Vussonji & Associates
Ikigai Law
Khaitan & Co.
TLC Legal
Veritas Legal

India notches up a job satisfaction rate of 92 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”).

“Good working culture, surrounded by good colleagues and seniors,” says a lawyer about Dhaval Vussonji & Associates. “At Ikigai Law we are not concerned with fitting in the mould but breaking it and creating solutions for our client,” says an associate at that firm. “We often go out of our way to ensure that not only is our Client’s interest protected but they are well informed.” A lawyer at Khaitan & Co says: “I feel I am part of a family, and I am treated just like a family member, which improves my performance.” A lawyer at TLC Legal recounts: “I joined the firm after a two-year-long maternity leave. They are all always very considerate and accommodating towards my needs and priorities as a new mother.” And an associate at Veritas Legal says: “The firm has a fantastic work culture, there is good team work and support from all team members including partners.”

INDONESIA

Ali Budiarto, Nugroho, Reksodiputro
Soewito Suhardiman
Eddymurthy Kardono
Tilleke & Gibbins

Job satisfaction is upwards of 94 percent in Indonesia, and salary levels are also generally high, with 91 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 have the freedom to handle my own files, and flexibility to arrange

meetings and other tasks,” says an associate at Ali Budiarto, Nugroho, Reksodiputro. A lawyer at Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono says: “I am satisfied with the work in my Firm and I love my colleagues.” And for a lawyer at Tilleke & Gibbins, “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.”

KOREA

Bae, Kim & Lee
Kim & Chang
Shin & Kim
Yulchon

As 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 65 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 its “high salary, sufficient vacation days and satisfactory work-life balance.” At Kim & Chang, an attorney lauds the “top-notch work, substantial responsibility and respectful, collegial working environment.” A lawyer at Shin & Kim notes that “the relationship between colleagues is very friendly. Lawyers provide great support to their colleagues.” And at Yulchon, “Our firm provides me with a great opportunity to develop my expertise and network with clients,” says a respondent.

MALAYSIA

Raja, Darryl & Loh
Skrine
Wong & Partners
Zul Rafique & Partners

While 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 Raja, Darryl & Loh says the firm provides “good guidance, supportive supervising partners and excellent support staff.” A lawyer at Skrine praises the firm’s “ability to

carry out high-end dispute work which can either define or change the existing laws.” An associate at Wong & Partners lauds “great exposure to international deals and a steep learning curve.” And a respondent at Zul Rafique & Partners says: “I have the freedom to express my professional creativity and the firm encourages me to do my best by giving all the facilities needed.”

PHILIPPINES

DivinaLaw
Puyat Jacinto & Santos
Quisumbing Torres
Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura
Sayoc & de los Angeles

The Philippines has a job satisfaction rate of 91 percent, and salaries are above the market standard for more than two-thirds of the respondents. More than 88

percent appreciate the opportunities for training and professional development that their firm provides, while 80 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 85 percent, and job security for nearly three-quarters, 77 percent would “wholeheartedly” recommend the firm to a friend.

A respondent from DivinaLaw praises its “near-perfect work environment. It is populated by people who are team players. Every lawyer is driven and always eager to contribute to the betterment of the firm.” At Puyat Jacinto & Santos, a lawyer says: “The partners are easy to talk to and very approachable, the work and subject matter are exciting, the firm is forward-looking and always looking for ways to modernize and innovate.”



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QUISUMBING TORRES

Says another lawyer: "I am given a variety of challenging and interesting work. Although I am already quite senior, the Firm encourages me to further grow and spread my wings. For instance, I am allowed to pursue my other advocacies with the full support of the firm."

And a third respondent from DivinaLaw sums it up: "Work-life balance, generous pay, great boss."

Meanwhile, an associate at Romulo Mabanta Buenaventura Sayoc & de los Angeles says: "the firm calls out achievements that are noteworthy and promotes continuing professional development through activities within the firm and other endeavours outside of it."

Says another: "The firm handles groundbreaking and difficult transactions, which has required us to hone our skills and develop our structuring

skills at a much quicker pace than our peers. The firm has equipped us with both the tools, and the practice needed to perform at a higher level."

Quisumbing Torres provides its lawyers with a training program that ensures their development at every stage of their career, says Donemark Calimon, partner and head of the firm's dispute resolution practice group. "The training program of Quisumbing Torres tracks the development of its lawyers in terms of their personal qualities and certain key performance areas," he notes. "These personal qualities include intellect, dedication and humanity and the key performance areas include business development, client service, legal knowledge and expertise, matter and people management."

There is a rotation program that new hires at Quisumbing Torres are required

to undergo during their first year with the firm. "This allows each lawyer to experience each practice area and to learn from the lawyers from each practice group" says Calimon. "The firm also organizes various trainings that provide its lawyers not only substantive knowledge but also help them improve their practical skills. These include training firm lawyers to provide legal advice in a commercial manner that clients can easily understand, deepen their knowledge not only of their practice areas but also of the industries of their clients, and contribute to the firm's CSR awareness and pro bono programs (such as diversity and inclusion and environmental issues), continuing legal education program, involvement in relevant organizations."

The firm's lawyers are guided by a developmental framework that sets

Quisumbing Torres.

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Asian Legal Business

Understanding our client's business through the lens of the industry in which it operates is key to providing legal solutions that work. We organize our lawyers into industry groups that keep track of market trends, regulatory developments and legal updates in each sector:

- Consumer Goods & Retail
- Energy, Mining & Infrastructure
- Financial Institutions
- Healthcare
- Industrials, Manufacturing & Transportation
- Technology, Media & Telecommunications

out performance expectations for all our lawyers at all levels based on their key performance areas and personal qualities that the firm have identified as key contributors to high performance.

Calimon points out that Quisumbing Torres provides a collaborative environment, both structurally and socially. "While our lawyers are basically structured by practice groups (banking a finance, corporate & commercial, dispute resolution, employment, immigration, intellectual property and tax), they also specialize from the perspective of industries," he says. "Each practice group is represented in each industry group like consumer goods and retail; energy, mining and infrastructure; financial institutions; healthcare; industrials, manufacturing and transportation; and technology, media and telecommunications. The structure encourages very close coordination among the firm's lawyers and helps builds camaraderie and teamwork."

SINGAPORE

Drew & Napier
Eversheds Harry Elias
Stephenson Harwood

Singapore's job satisfaction comes in at around 83 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 (87 percent). With nearly half the respondents feeling "extremely valued" and 64 percent feeling secure about their jobs, more than 31 percent "definitely" expect to see themselves in the same firm in five years' time.

"Partners are willing to teach and allow us some independence in our cases. They also encourage us to

learn about business development and maintain a good work-life balance," says an associate at Eversheds Harry Elias. Meanwhile, at Stephenson Harwood, a respondent says: "There is a good level of cooperation and teamwork amongst colleagues."

Foo Yuet Min, director at Drew & Napier, says that young lawyers always seek growth and development. "Maintaining a nurturing environment where ideas can flow freely and constructively is vital to the development and retention of our talent," she notes. "Our mentorship structures and culture of training mean that any junior lawyer is able to approach a senior lawyer for guidance and encouragement. A progressive culture focused on continual training and ethics ensures our lawyers are constantly hungry to improve."

Foo adds that the nature of the firm's work is very demanding and it recognises the importance of work-life balance to avoid burn out. "The firm adopts a

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DREW & NAPIER

flexible work approach allowing lawyers to work from home or take time off, on top of 30 days of annual leave," she says.

Despite their packed schedules, Drew's lawyers also seek opportunities to give back to society, notes Foo. "It is simply the right thing to do," she

says. "To provide our lawyers and staff with ample opportunities, the firm works with several organisations and initiatives such as the Law Society's Criminal Legal Aid Scheme, Community Legal Clinics, Legal Aid Bureau and various charities for children."

THAILAND

Tilleke & Gibbins
Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners

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 55 percent also feel that they are paid above the market standard, and for 82 percent, work-life balance is at the least acceptable, while more than 55 percent feel "extremely valued" in the firm. An impressive 64 percent definitely see themselves in the same firm in five years' time. At Tilleke & Gibbins, a respondent praises the "good salary, good boss and ability to do a job that I love."

Weerawong Chittmittrapap, senior partner at Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners, says that last year, the firm implemented its "Be the CEO of your career" program, including individual

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reward and development plans. “Every lawyer may decide how much he or she wants to earn and how fast they want to grow,” he notes. “Competencies are mapped to our WCP Academy eLearning platform, and we provide ongoing multimedia professional development in legal knowledge and skills to be developed for our signature legal services. For junior lawyers, we have an associate pool program which allows them to work in multiple areas of law before they choose an area of specialization.”

Weerawong adds that lawyers prioritize career development combined with work-life balance. “We encourage our lawyers to define their goals and then plan and adopt their work and routine accordingly to create a ‘well-designed life,’” he says. “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. We also installed an on-site gym.”

He notes that the firm cares about its people; its philosophy is that the firm is a platform to support all lawyers’ advancement in the profession and achievement of their potential. “At the same time, we emphasize a culture of collaboration – a politic free, transparent work environment without plays for power, which keeps lawyers motivated in terms of assignments, rewards and career path,” says Weerawong. “Often, lawyers from different practice groups work as a team to advise and provide solutions for clients’ multi-faceted transactions. Regular informal activities have fostered

a great team spirit – we work hard and play hard together.”

VIETNAM

LNT & Partners
Phuoc & Partners
RHTLaw Taylor Wessing Vietnam
Tilleke & Gibbins
VILAF

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.

A lawyer at Phuoc & Partners says that the “working environment is professional and comfortable. I can improve myself by knowledge and soft skills.” At RHTLaw Taylor Wessing Vietnam, a consultant says: “I feel respected at work. My colleagues are nice and cooperative. The salary is acceptable.” At Tilleke & Gibbins, the firm creates “good conditions for employees to work and the working environment at the company is very friendly,” says a respondent. And at VILAF, a lawyer praises the “good working environment, high salary, fair performance evaluation and great support from colleagues.”

At LNT & Partners, the firm says

that learning and development is one of the core values that defines it who is as a law firm. “We are committed to providing our lawyers with a variety of growth and development opportunities, from organising internal training sessions on legal expertise as well as soft skills, to informing them of external courses and events which they might find useful, encouraging them to attend and supporting them financially if they do,” the firm says. “For younger lawyers, we aim to involve them in client matters from day one as we believe early exposure to real cases is one of the best ways to help them learn and grow professionally.”

In 2018, LNT started taking lawyers who had been at the firm for at least three years on overseas training trips. “This was very well received and is something that we aim to keep up. We have also been sending our associates out to client secondments and secondments at leading regional law firms. Secondment opportunities are there to help our lawyers improve their business acumen and understanding of the market,” says the firm. “We also make sure that all of our lawyers are aware of their career map and the promotion opportunities available at LNT. Talented associates are spotted, coached and promoted to become the next generation of partners. We believe that this transparency is important and incentivising to our lawyers.”

LNT & Partners says that its lawyers have voiced that one of their professional priorities is to learn as much on the job as possible. “In addition to delivering the opportunities mentioned above, we as

the firm's partners take it as one of our key priorities to mentor each and every member of the team we are responsible for," says the firm. "One of the things we constantly aim to bring home to our trainees and associates is that professionalism should always be at the core of their work ethics: being professional not only to our clients but also their workmates. This has become one of the core values that LNT lawyers truly uphold."


It adds that the lawyers, especially the more junior ones, find it important to constantly challenge themselves and step out of their comfort zone. "To this end, we regularly take on challenging and complex landmark cases from top tier clients who are market leaders in their respective sector, thereby giving our lawyers an opportunity to challenge themselves and think outside the box," the firm says.

Teamwork is a key part of LNT's identity and important to every aspect



LNT & PARTNERS

of office life. "Underpinning the positivity in our offices is the fact that our lawyers and support staff, regardless of seniority, respect and support each other," says the firm. "Each partner also organises group outing for their team and as a firm we go on company trip(s) every year so that all members can get to know each other."

"Furthermore, we have always been of the view that each and every member of the firm has the right to voice their opinion about their workplace and the firm's leadership, and that the leadership has the responsibility to take into account these opinions in running the firm," says the firm. 



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