



Asia – an international HR experience

After the tech wreck, HR professionals from Australia found it difficult to move to roles in Asia – that's changing. Asia is open for business and in this month's Instep we look at the potential for Australian HR professionals to source roles in Asia.

It's been a long held ambition for many HR practitioners in Australia to work overseas at some point in their career. Those that have worked offshore regularly say that it has been one of their career highlights – something not to be missed.

In the past, the UK was the main option for Australian HR practitioners wanting to work overseas. Thankfully the boundaries have been opened, if ever so slightly, for more people to work in HR in Asia.

We asked, Richard Letcher, Managing Director of leading Hong Kong HR recruitment specialist, Profile Search & Selection to provide guidance on the up to date story of working in HR in Asia.

The Asian Opportunity

The economies of many Asian countries are experiencing double digit growth and there is a strong demand for capable HR professionals as many businesses grow to meet demand. Companies looking for talented contemporary HR business partners have been frustrated by the level of capability in the local Asian markets and therefore there are opportunities opening up for Australian based practitioners.

As described by the Profile Search & Selection 2007 Salary Survey, the demand for HR talent in Asia was across the board in 2006 with Financial Services companies leading the charge, however many other sectors from Consumer Products and Technology to Hospitality continued hiring. Indeed no sectors appeared cautious about hiring HR talent in 2006, if it was available.

Profile has indicated that the hot areas for candidates this year in Asia will be:-

- High calibre candidates who combine broad generalist skills in all areas of HR with experience in large multidivisional corporate environments.
- Specialists in the areas of T&D, Compensation as well as Recruitment.
- Progressive areas of HR such as diversity and OD.

The hard cold realities

Whilst the market is strong and there are some fantastic opportunities for HR professionals in Asia, there are some reality checks that need to be considered:-

Money - Expat type salaries are a thing of the past. Most Asian based employees on expatriate terms have been relocated to Asia by their existing employers. If HR professionals are moving to Asia and moving company at the same time, expatriate benefits can be very rare and most people are employed on local terms, (in HR). Potentially, HR professionals may be compensated with a higher base but housing, schooling, flights home, club membership were far more prominent 10 + years ago.

Language - Over the past 6 years only a third of placed HR assignments by Profile in China, Singapore and HK have been non-Chinese speakers. Clearly a local language is a huge benefit for HR job seekers.

Locals win most of the time - Many of the non-Chinese speakers that are placed in the Asian market are already happily located in the Asian city that they find their next role. There is a comfort level with people that have shown that they are adjusted to the local scene and are across the cultural and technical issues related to working in another jurisdiction.

How do you go about finding a role?

If you are interested in working in Asia, Richard has some tips for finding a role:-

- **Be proactive** - Pass through or be prepared to travel to your chosen city in Asia for a week or so to interview. Occasionally employers will fly candidates up for interviews or carry out video conferences but more frequently CVs of Australian-based candidates are put on the 'too hard to deal with' pile. A proactive approach will secure results with doors opening once dates are established for time on the ground.
- **Make people feel comfortable** - Let people know what you are doing and thinking to make them feel comfortable they know you are serious, for instance, if you are relocating permanently due to your partners work, let people know.
- **Have the experience that is in demand** - Sectors that are most likely to demand HR talent, and are less concerned by Asian language ability, are the knowledge capital markets such as financial services, law firms or consulting companies.
- **Have the specialist skills that are required** - The more specialist functions which are in demand include remuneration and benefits, recruitment, and, to a certain extent, learning and development.
- **Highlight past experience** - Ensure that any experience of working across Asia, even if this was whilst based in Australia is highlighted.