

# Living the High Life in Kuala Lumpur

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**W**e were only planning to move to Kuala Lumpur for a year,” Sharla Thomason says. “But after six months, we loved it so much we decided to stay and sold our home in Houston.” That was a year and a half ago, and Sharla, 72, and her husband Jim, 75, couldn’t be happier with their decision. “We’ve never looked back,” says Jim.

In August 2016, Jim had a massive heart attack that kept him in the hospital for three months. When their son asked Sharla and Jim to move to Malaysia for a year to be close to him and the grandkids, they jumped at the chance, knowing Jim’s recovery would be slow. In March 2017, they made the move.

“We are not worried about healthcare at all here,” says Jim. The couple lives right by two fantastic hospitals, Gleneagles and Prince Court. “I’m really pleased with my cardiologists here,” Jim says. “They spend an hour with us going over every fine detail. I feel like I am the only patient they have, even though there is a long line of people waiting.” Jim isn’t the only one who’s happy with the healthcare experience in Kuala Lumpur. “We have been so pleased with every doctor experience we’ve had since we’ve been here. Can’t say the same back in the U.S.,” says Sharla.

The Thomasons live in the heart of Kuala Lumpur’s city center, with a view of the soaring Petronas Towers, the tallest twin towers in the world. “I call the towers my crystal candlesticks—they twinkle and glow all night long. I sit on my couch or on the balcony and just stare at them: so beautiful. New Year’s Eve is incredible; we get a full hour of fireworks that light up the night,” says Sharla.

Jim and Sharla rent a 2,400-square-foot condo with three bedrooms, four bathrooms, and two parking spots. It is very modern, but it was sparsely furnished when they moved in. “We met an expat couple who was leaving and bought all of their furniture and dishes. It was a steal and worked out perfectly,” says



Malaysia, where English is often spoken, is one of the easiest places in the world to retire to.

Sharla. Although living in the heart of the action with a view like theirs can be expensive, the rent is only \$1,478 a month.

A bonus is that living in Kuala Lumpur’s center means they don’t have the added expense of a car. “We don’t need a car here. We’re close to everything, including all of Kuala Lumpur’s trains, so getting everywhere is easy. Traffic is pretty bad here. If it isn’t rush hour, we also use Grab (Southeast Asia’s version of Uber), which is super cheap and convenient,” says Jim. “We can walk to two nice grocery stores and get almost everything we want, or we can have it all delivered. Everything except American beef, which is the only thing I miss.”

Although Jim and Sharla are retired, they haven’t slowed down much. Sharla belongs to a Bible study group, a craft club, a book club, and a yoga class. They are members of AAM (American Association of Malaysia), which has a lot of activities going on monthly: happy hours, coffee groups, nights out, and regular

scuba/snorkel weekends. “There are a lot of people from America here, many in the oil and gas business. I just met five different girls here with families from Houston, all in that business,” says Sharla.

“We have a very active social life. I have trouble keeping up sometimes,” says Sharla. “We joined all the clubs we could. It’s the best way to meet people, especially if you don’t have kids in school.” The couple belongs to the Holy Trinity Anglican Church. The congregation is mostly Chinese Malaysians, with some expats and Indian Malaysians, as well. “We went to church in Houston for 10 years, but I already have more friends here in the first year than I did in 10 back home—and this church has a rock band, too.”

To stay healthy and active, Jim walks three or four laps around KLCC park, a four-minute walk from their condo and one of the city’s most beautiful recreational areas. It’s a 50-acre urban sanctuary with a large lake, Lake Symphony, which has daily water shows, with fountains shooting water over 100 feet in the air.

Jim goes to the Kelab Darul Ehsan driving range once a week; it’s only 20 minutes away from their condo by Grab. For \$3.45 he gets 100 balls. If he were a club member—which costs \$554 per couple a year—the cost would be less. Once he gets all his strength back, he plans to join the club and start golfing regularly.

When the grandkids aren’t coming over for slumber parties, the couple explores the town. One of their favorite restaurants is Las Carretas, a little Mexican place where the staff makes you feel like family. For three people, with wine and margaritas, the bill is only \$30. The drinks alone would cost more than that in Houston, they say.

“We love spoiling the grandkids but also feel like we are spoiling ourselves,” says Sharla. “We have a maid for four hours, three mornings a week (\$6.15 per hour). We go for 90-minute massages in the Intermark Hotel at The Oriental Signature Spa for \$43. Or if we want something less fancy, there are places along Jalan Ampang to get a one-hour massage for \$16. Maids, manicures, pedicures, massages...we couldn’t pamper ourselves like this in Houston.” ■

**“We couldn’t pamper ourselves like this in the U.S.”**