

The Best Law Firms to Work for in Asia-Pacific

With many law firms around Asia-Pacific competing to hire and retain local legal talent, the region's top lawyers are becoming shrewder in their choice of employers. Following an extensive market survey, *Asialaw* reveals the best law firms to work for in Asia-Pacific, as ranked by the lawyers who work for them.

By Darrell Wright



The legal profession endures fierce competition from an abundance of law firms and lawyers crowding the marketplace in every jurisdiction in Asia, no less the world. This intense competition ensures that no firm or its employees can afford to relax at any moment and that profit margins are squeezed tight. Fiscal pressures make it necessary for law firms to place a heavy burden on its lawyers and staff to bring in new clients, complete deals and keep billable hours at a sustainable level. With these weighty demands, lawyers are generally expected to work long and, occasionally, unsociable hours in order to meet those targets and to perform better than their peers.

The rewards for all the hard work and long hours that lawyers put in are usually a sizeable salary and bonus package, at least in comparison to the national *per capita* income average. Many lawyers also receive generous benefits to accompany the financial rewards but, as consultant Karin Damen at recruitment company Hudson points out, good pay may not be sufficient anymore for a law firm to retain its human capital.

“Lawyers are demanding more in their workplace needs these days. Law firms should also now seriously consider a wider scope of incentives to retain their top talent, such as clear career prospects, flexible work hours and sabbatical leave, not just an attractive remuneration package,” says Damen.

By taking a look at almost any ‘magic circle’ or Wall Street law firm’s website, it is easy to see that competition is rife between the firms, with many offering more to lawyers than just pay and benefits. Common workplace benefits on offer include continued professional development, flexible working arrangements, an open and friendly

culture, firm-wide social and sporting events, opportunities to do *pro bono* work and an emphasis on providing a balance between work and personal life.

The lack of any real differentiation between some law firms in terms of working hours and employment conditions has led to the need for firms to adopt other strategies to attract top candidates.

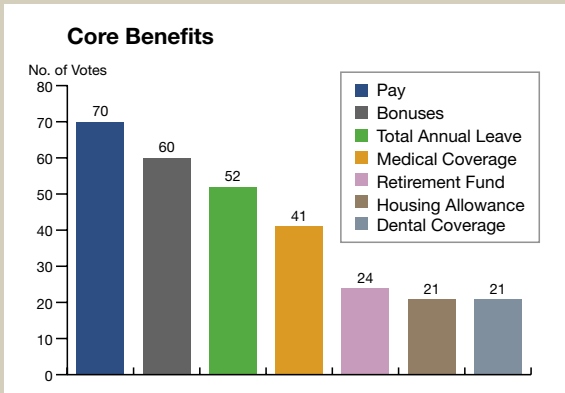
Conor Greene, the managing director of legal recruitment firm Law Alliance, says the intense competition for legal talent has resulted in some law firms developing other benefits to attract new employees and retain current staff. For example, some firms have offered innovative bonus schemes, flexible working hours, accommodation of family commitments and incentives like club memberships. “The challenge is that other law firms will follow suit and level the playing field again,” he remarks.

According to Greene, law firms must also contend with the exodus of legal talent to in-house roles at companies. In-house counsel positions are often perceived to be more desirable due to the freedom from billable hours and reduced working hours each day.

“Law firms are now compelled to effectively offer a 24-hour service to their clients. This of course has resulted in increased pressure on the workforce. How this is met, whilst still improving the work to personal life balance of their lawyers, will be a major challenge for law firms in the immediate future,” comments Greene.

The difficulty of staff retention in law firms seems to be one of the factors forcing law firms to make the work

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environment more flexible and satisfying for their legal talent. However, given the profit-earning pressures which law firms face, how realistic are leading law firms' promises to provide fee-earners with a better balance between work and personal life? Can an associate at a 'magic circle' firm in a city like Hong Kong really expect to be able to maintain a balance between work and personal life?

Several legal recruiters who *Asialaw* spoke with maintain that it is never going to be easy working at one of the top law firms in any jurisdiction. "Talented lawyers at the leading firms cannot expect to work flexi-time or to even have a lot of spare time to themselves. If they wish to succeed and move up the career ladder, they must put in the hours. There is no alternative," says a consultant at an international legal recruitment company in Hong Kong who wishes to remain anonymous.

Asialaw's survey

Despite the reality that lawyers will probably always be required to work hard, law firms do seem to be paying more attention to improving the work environment for their professionals. But which firms are doing the most for their lawyers?

As many law firms in Asia – both large and small – offer different fringe benefits and work environments, *Asialaw* set out to discover which law firms in the region are the best to work for from the perspective of private-practice lawyers.

More than 5,000 lawyers across Asia were asked their opinion of working conditions in their current law firms and their impression of other law firms in the market. Respondents were also asked to reveal their workplace needs, choosing from an extensive list of options.

The survey asked lawyers to rank their current law firms according to the following characteristics: salary competitiveness; professional development; supervision and guidance; opportunities to work on big or important deals; work environment, and prospects for career advancement. Respondents were then asked to rank three law firms in their jurisdiction (other than their current law firm) for strengths in these six categories. The survey also asked respondents to specify which workplace needs – such as flexible hours, staff camaraderie and job training – are important to them.

Australia

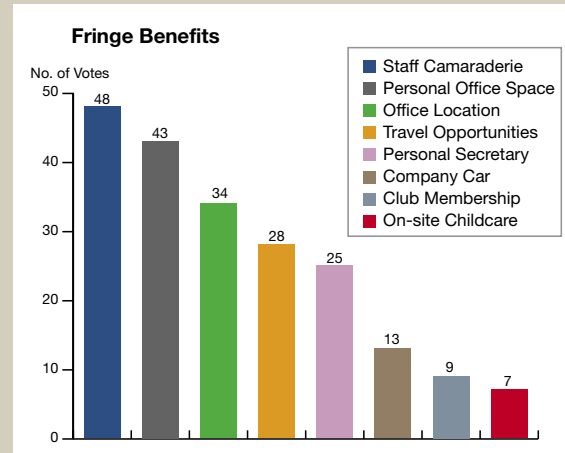
Australian law firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth has made a significant impact on private-practice lawyers, having been voted into the top three rankings for all six categories in the *Asialaw* survey. In addition, the firm has been voted as the best law firm in Australia for its work environment and for career advancement prospects.

Corrs Chambers Westgarth says it promotes an open and honest working environment which expects hard work from its lawyers but which rewards those who work hard. The firm's structured professional development programme means that lawyers at Corrs have distinct goals to reach which guide their careers from their induction as graduates through to partnership.

A partner currently working at Corrs Chambers Westgarth says that the firm has a "great atmosphere and camaraderie", whilst two other lawyers working at the firm describe the working environment as being "friendly and helpful".

Mallesons Stephen Jaques also features prominently as one of the best Australian law firms to work for in four of the survey's

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The Best Law Firms to Work for in Australia						
Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	Mallesons Stephen Jaques	Allens Arthur Robinson	Mallesons Stephen Jaques	Allens Arthur Robinson	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	Corrs Chambers Westgarth
2nd	=Allens Arthur Robinson =Clayton Utz =Corrs Chambers Westgarth	Mallesons Stephen Jaques	Corrs Chambers Westgarth	=Blake Dawson Waldron =Corrs Chambers Westgarth =Freehills	=Minter Ellison =Deacons	Gadens Lawyers
3rd	Freehills	=Corrs Chambers Westgarth =Freehills	Allens Arthur Robinson	Mallesons Stephen Jaques	Gadens Lawyers	Minter Ellison

categories. Of these, the firm has been voted as the best firm in Australia for supervision and guidance and for salary competitiveness.

Comments a spokesperson for Mallesons Stephen Jaques on its top ranking for salaries in the survey: "Our philosophy is to pay market competitive rates commensurate with our position as a leading law firm and linking this to individual performance".

Allens Arthur Robinson has been voted second for salary competitiveness in Australia and shares the accolade with Corrs Chambers Westgarth and Clayton Utz.

Allens Arthur Robinson also featured prominently elsewhere in the survey results, being voted as the best Australian law firm for professional development and for opportunities to work on big or important deals.

Although Allens Arthur Robinson has declined to comment on this ranking, the firm claims to represent "more than half of Australia's and 20 of the world's top 100 companies," which may explain why the firm was ranked first for opportunities to work on big or important deals. The firm's clients include News Corp, Westpac and ABN AMRO.

China

China's legal industry has grown quickly since the government liberalized its markets in the late 1980s. The market for legal services in China is now becoming more sophisticated, especially since the admission of foreign law firms to the fray.

Although foreign law firms are restricted to advising on foreign law in China, they have been getting a bigger share of the legal services market, with Chinese companies increasingly looking to expand abroad and foreign companies looking for their home firms to act as their intermediaries in China. That said, several of China's law firms have been rising in prominence and represent both foreign and domestic clients. Given the dynamics of the legal market in China, separate rankings have been provided for local law firms and international law firms.

Of the local law firms in China, three stood out in the survey: King & Wood, Jun He Law Offices and Lehman, Lee & Xu. Other firms that performed well in certain categories were Llinks Law Offices,



www.llinkslaw.com
master@llinkslaw.com

TOTAL NUMBER OF FEE-EARNERS
39

CONTACT PARTNERS
Charles Qin, Christophe Hun, David Yu

YEAR OFFICE OPENED
Shanghai 1998; Beijing 2002

LANGUAGES SPOKEN
English, French, Japanese, Mandarin, Shanghai dialect and Cantonese

KEY AREAS OF PRACTICE
Banking and Finance, Capital Markets / Corporate Finance, Corporate / M&A / Restructuring, Financial Institutions, Mutual Funds and Trusts, Private Equity, Projects and Project Finance

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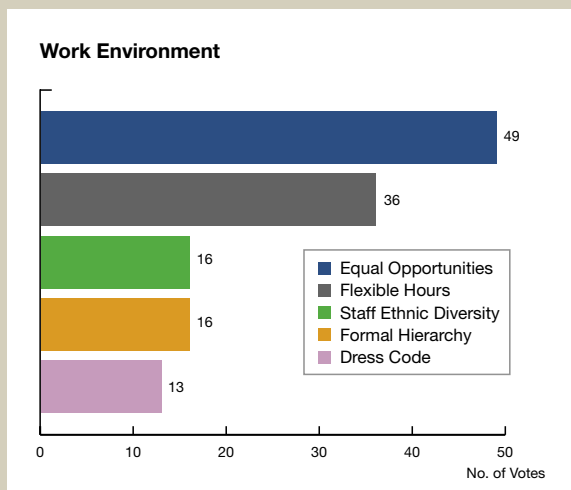
The Best Law Firms to Work for in China (Domestic Firms)

Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	=Jun He Law Offices =King & Wood	Lehman, Lee & Xu	Links Law Offices	King & Wood	Jun He Law Offices	Jun He Law Offices
2nd	Lehman, Lee & Xu	King & Wood	King & Wood	Jun He Law Offices	King & Wood	King & Wood
3rd	=CCPIT Patent & Trademark Offices =Links Law Offices	Jun He Law Offices	Jun He Law Offices	Lehman, Lee & Xu	AllBright Law Offices	Lehman, Lee & Xu

The Best Law Firms to Work for in China (Foreign Firms)

Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	Baker & McKenzie	Baker & McKenzie	Shearman & Sterling	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	Shearman & Sterling	Baker & McKenzie
2nd	Shearman & Sterling	Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker	=Linklaters =Lovells =Baker & McKenzie	Shearman & Sterling	Baker & McKenzie	=Clifford Chance =Jones Day =Morrison & Foerster
3rd	=Gide Loyrette Nouel =Sullivan & Cromwell	Gide Loyrette Nouel	=Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer =Gide Loyrette Nouel =Jones Day	Linklaters	=Debevoise & Plimpton =Clifford Chance =Simmons & Simmons	=Lovells =Minter Ellison =Sullivan & Cromwell

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CCPIT Patent & Trademark Law Office and AllBright Law Offices.

According to one legal recruitment specialist, China's top domestic law firms are on a relatively equal footing with each other in terms of salaries and benefits, but have widely disparate standards when it comes to training, work environment and career advancement.

"The local firms in China still have some way to go before they are as sophisticated as the foreign firms for in-house training and career planning for their lawyers, although this is beginning to change. This is especially true of the larger firms, which are beginning to establish offices outside of China," says the recruitment specialist. "This shows that the larger Chinese firms are maturing rapidly," he says.

King & Wood and Jun He Law Offices are two of China's largest law firms by numbers of lawyers. According to Jun He, the firm provides its staff with "more benefits than we are legally required

to do under the law,” and makes “an endeavour to create a most healthy work environment”. The firm also sends its associates to law schools overseas to advance their studies before bringing them back to practice in China.

Both Jun He Law Offices and King & Wood were voted into the top three rankings in China for every category in the *Asialaw* survey. Comments Jun He’s managing partner, Hongli Ma: “We believe it is crucial for Chinese law firms to manage their associate programmes and other staff matters in a more culture-sensible way and many rules at Jun He reflect such beliefs”.

Jun He Law Offices and King & Wood are tied in first place for salary competitiveness, although both law firms decline to comment on their pay scales. Sharing third place is Llinks Law Offices and CCPIT Patent & Trademark Office, while Lehman, Lee & Xu takes the second position.

Most of the law firms in China have declined to provide specific information on their salaries, citing it as a sensitive issue, although many state that salary levels are commensurate with market rates.

However, a few are more open about their pay scales. According to Charles Qin, the founding partner of Llinks Law Offices, his firm pays first-year qualified associates Rmb7,500 (US\$941) a month which, according to Qin, is “more reasonable” than most other local law firms in China. This base salary increases by as much as 40% for “associates with the greatest potential”. Top-level performers will also receive an annual bonus of about six months’ salary, while average performers will receive an annual bonus of about three-and-a-half months’ salary, says Qin.

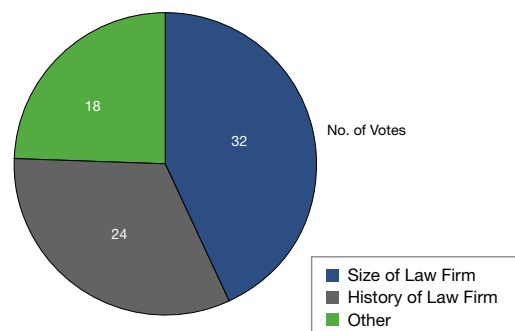
By comparison, a first-year associate at an international firm in Hong Kong can expect to earn at least US\$4,823 a month plus bonuses, according to Hudson’s 2005 salary survey of Hong Kong’s legal market.

Among the international firms in China, several share the second and third positions in the *Asialaw* survey results, although there is a clear winner in every category. With three first-place votes is Baker & McKenzie, which has been voted into the top three rankings in all but one category: opportunities to work on big or important deals. This category was won by Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, followed by Shearman & Sterling in second place and Linklaters in third place.

All but one of the international law firms voted into the top three places in China are either based in the US or in the UK.

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Law Firm Characteristics



The exception to this is French firm Gide Loyrette Nouel, which operates offices in Beijing and Shanghai.

Hong Kong

Riding partly on China’s success but also benefiting from an economic recovery in the region, Hong Kong’s lawyers report that the past year has been one of the busiest on record.

However, some Hong Kong law firms have not been able to expand their practices by hiring new lawyers as quickly as new work has come in during the past year, says a legal recruiter, and some lawyers have therefore been asked to work even harder than normal. “Law firms don’t know how to simply refuse to turn work away, even though they are buckling under their workload,” says the recruiter.

This gives rise to the question of how Hong Kong lawyers have been able to maintain a balance between their work and personal life during this busy period. During *Asialaw*’s visits to various local law firms and recruitment companies, it became clear that Hong Kong is not a place where law firms are known to respect the notion of a work/life balance in the same way as other jurisdictions. According to one senior associate at a magic circle firm, the past year has been “tough”, with all remnants of a once-active social life being consigned to memory, at least for now.

Comments David Fleming, managing partner of Baker & McKenzie in Hong Kong: “Hong Kong is primarily a work town and I believe falls behind other international cities when it comes to work/life balance considerations, although this is beginning to improve. In the latter part of 2005, we did decline work from some prospective

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Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	=Sullivan & Cromwell =Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom	Linklaters	Baker & McKenzie	Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom	O'Melveny & Myers	O'Melveny & Myers
2nd	O'Melveny & Myers	Baker & McKenzie	Allen & Overy	Linklaters	=Dorsey & Whitney =Johnson Stokes & Master	Baker & McKenzie
3rd	=Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison =Simpson Thacher & Bartlett	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	Johnson Stokes & Master	O'Melveny & Myers	=White & Case =Morrison & Foerster	=Deacons =Morrison & Foerster

clients because we felt that we would not be able to service them to our high standards due to current workloads. So yes, we take the work/life balance seriously.”

Unfortunately, Baker & McKenzie narrowly missed being elected into the top three rankings for its work environment in this year’s survey. Instead, the firm was voted as the best firm in Hong Kong for supervision and guidance. Baker & McKenzie also featured in the top three rankings for professional development and prospects for career advancement.

O’Melveny & Myers was the eventual winner of the first place ranking for the work environment in Hong Kong. Comments Howard Chao, the head of the firm’s Asia practice: “Our work environment is very collegial and informal. Appointments to meet with partners are not necessary.”

At least one associate at O’Melveny & Myers agrees. “There is a very straightforward culture here. There is no politics to deal with and people are generally very focussed on the job at hand,” says a Hong Kong associate.

However, one associate who wishes to remain anonymous has criticized O’Melvey & Myers’ professional development programme. He remarks that it lacks a defined structure compared to firms like Allen & Overy and Clifford Chance. “The firm’s lawyers have to take nearly all of the initiative to learn and develop. There is an internal email system which might be called training, but other than that, the firm does lack in this area.”

Linklaters has been voted as the best law firm in Hong Kong for professional development, beating Baker & McKenzie by a narrow

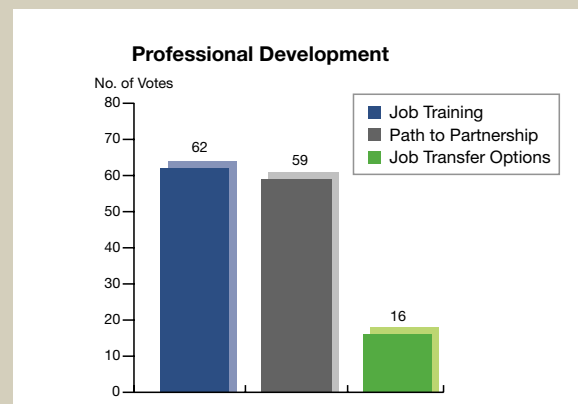
margin. Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer was placed third in this category.

According to Linklaters, each practice area has a technical skills curriculum which is used to develop each lawyer’s legal expertise. Once the lawyer has completed this, he/she follows a practice skills curriculum which supports each stage of his/her career. Comments Marc Harvey, who heads Linklaters’ Hong Kong office: “We invest heavily in developing the technical skills and commercial acumen of our people.” Linklaters lawyers are expected to follow a career development structure which maps out goals which they must meet in order to achieve a promotion.

India

At present, most law firms in India are relatively small by international standards due to a restriction of 20 partners per law

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The Best Law Firms to Work for in India						
Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	Amarchand Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co	Amarchand Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co	Wadia Gandhi & Co	Amarchand Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co	=Amarchand Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co =AZB & Partners	AZB & Partners
2nd	AZB & Partners	AZB & Partners	AZB & Partners	AZB & Partners	Wadia Gandhi & Co	Amarchand Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co
3rd	J Sagar Associates	Wadia Gandhi & Co	=Amarchand Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co =DSK Legal	Crawford Bayley & Co	J Sagar Associates	Wadia Gandhi & Co

firm under the *Partnership Act, 1932*. As such, many law firms are family-run and have maintained this structure for decades.

The upshot of this is that career advancement in India may not have the same prospects as it does in other jurisdictions, with paths to partnership being limited and openings sometimes only becoming available if a partner decides to leave the law firm or retires. On the other hand, new law firms are being established regularly in India, causing some of the nation’s legal talent to break away from the older firms to obtain greater promotion opportunities.

Two firms dominate the *Asialaw* survey rankings as the best law firms to work for in India’s legal market: Amarchand & Mangaldas & Suresh A Shroff & Co (Amarchand Mangaldas) and AZB & Partners. These firms have top positions in every category of the survey except supervision and guidance, in which Wadia Gandhi & Co has won the prize. The latter firm has rankings in four of the survey’s categories.

DSK Legal has also earned an entry in the survey rankings for its supervision and guidance, and associates often work directly with experienced partners in their practice areas, says the firm’s Managing Partner Anand Desai. “We also have internal training sessions group-wise and firm-wide, which are helpful in sharing experiences and developing legal knowledge and skills,” he says.

AZB & Partners has been voted as the best law firm in India for career advancement prospects. Also in the top three rankings for this category are the ubiquitous Amarchand Mangaldas and Wadia Gandhi & Co.

Amarchand Mangaldas and AZB & Partners share the top spot in the India survey rankings for their work environment. Shardul Shroff, the managing partner of Amarchand Mangaldas, says the firm operates an open-door policy in which all junior lawyers are able to talk freely with senior partners at work. This, says Shroff, creates “an atmosphere free from fear or hierarchical differences,” which produces better quality in the lawyers’ work.

Indonesia

At least one foreign legal consultant in Indonesia says that working in the country is challenging. In a recent market survey conducted by *Asialaw* (see ‘Indonesia Market Survey: Local Lawyers Speak Out’ in *Asialaw*, July/August 2006) it was concluded that being a lawyer in Indonesia demands a level of creativity and tolerance that is required in few jurisdictions.

Indonesia is still undergoing a period of radical change following the devastating effects of former President Suharto’s corrupt regime, coupled with the damage left by the Asian financial crisis. Recovery in the form of a forward-looking President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and frequent legislative developments means that things may be changing in Indonesia’s legal environment and thus for its lawyers.

However, lawyers in Indonesia still face numerous daily obstacles to doing their jobs. Comments a partner at a local law firm in Jakarta: “Being a lawyer in my jurisdiction is really challenging. Though we have written laws, sometimes people try to interpret the law without looking at the reasoning behind the law’s implementation, which can be irritating. Since Indonesia is still developing, there are a lot of opportunities for lawyers.”

The Best Law Firms to Work for in Indonesia

Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners	Ali Budiardjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro	Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners	Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners	Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono	Melli Darsa & Co
2nd	=Ali Budiardjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro =Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono	Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono	Ali Budiardjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro	Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono	Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners	Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono
3rd	Lubis Ganie Surowidjojo	Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners	Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono	Ali Budiardjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro	Ali Budiardjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro	Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners

Three Indonesian law firms stood out in the survey: Ali Budiardjo, Nugroho, Reksodiputro (ABNR), Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners and Soewito Suhardiman Eddymurthy Kardono (SSEK). Only two other firms made it into the top three, namely Lubis Ganie Surowidjojo and Melli Darsa & Co.

Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners has been voted by respondents to *Asialaw's* survey as the best law firm in Indonesia for supervision and guidance. The firm's strengths in this area may also lie in its long-standing relationship with Baker & McKenzie, through which it has access to extensive international resources. The global firm has also been voted into the top three rankings for this category in China and Hong Kong.

According to local lawyers, salaries for Indonesian lawyers depend heavily on their firms' client lists. Remarks a senior lawyer at a local firm: "a few of the larger law firms in Jakarta are retained by many of the big multinationals that invest here. Those firms make the most money and so pay their lawyers the most. It is

simple economics and it is hard for smaller firms to grab those big clients."

Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners has been voted as the top firm for salary competitiveness in Indonesia, with ABNR and SSEK sharing the second place and Lubis Ganie Surowidjojo coming in third place in the *Asialaw* survey.

Malaysia

With a relatively small population compared to its Indonesian neighbours, Malaysia has a somewhat small legal market. However, the market is regarded as being more sophisticated than some of its Asian competitors, perhaps as a result of its long period of colonization by Britain.

One of the largest law firms in Malaysia, Zaid Ibrahim & Co, is present in four of the six categories of the best law firms to work for in Malaysia and holds the first-place ranking for opportunities to work on big or important deals. The firm also holds a second-

The Best Law Firms to Work for in Malaysia

Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	Wong & Partners	Wong & Partners	Zul Rafique & Partners	Zaid Ibrahim & Co	Wong & Partners	Wong & Partners
2nd	Zaid Ibrahim & Co	Zaid Ibrahim & Co	Skrine	Zul Rafique & Partners	=Skrine =Zul Rafique & Partners	Zaid Ibrahim & Co
3rd	Lee Hishamuddin	Shearn Delamore & Co	Wong & Partners	Shearn Delamore & Co	Chooi & Company	Shearn Delamore & Co



WONG & PARTNERS
MEMBER FIRM OF BAKER & MCKENZIE INTERNATIONAL

A Malaysian law firm with an international perspective

Key Areas of Practice

- Banking & Finance
- Capital Markets
- Commercial Litigation/ Dispute Resolution
- Corporate & Commercial
- Corporate Governance
- Corporate Secretarial Services
- Employment
- Information Technology/Communications
- Insurance
- Islamic Finance
- Intellectual Property
- Labuan Offshore Matters
- Major Projects
- Mergers & Acquisitions
- REITs
- Securities
- Tax
- Tax Disputes
- Venture Capital/Private Equity

Managing Partner
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Wong & Partners is a member of Baker & McKenzie International, a Swiss Verein with member law firms around the world. In accordance with the common terminology used in professional service organizations, reference to a "partner" means a person who is a partner, or equivalent, in such a law firm. Similarly, reference to an "office" means an office of any such law firm.

place position for salary competitiveness in Malaysia, after Wong & Partners.

Zaid Ibrahim & Co says that its associates can expect to be paid a minimum of RM2,500 (US\$680) a month, up to a maximum of RM4,000, depending on their experience. This increases to a maximum of RM9,000 a month for senior associates with six or more years' experience. The firm currently employs more than 80 lawyers, including over 30 partners.

Wong & Partners has declined to provide details of its pay scales.

Wong & Partners has been voted as the number one law firm in Malaysia in four of the survey's categories, including professional development. The firm has established a knowledge and professional development committee to help lawyers focus on developing their legal skills and "personal advancements". Wong & Partners also leads in Malaysia for its work environment, ahead of Skrine, Zul Rafique & Partners and Chooi & Company, as voted by respondents to the *Asialaw* survey.

Chooi & Company's managing partner, Chooi Mun Sou, says the firm has made a concerted effort to make its work environment more attractive. Workplace benefits include a private room and

parking space within the main office building for each lawyer, and an executive room for partners which is open to associates for regular 'happy hours'.

Singapore

This small city-state next door to Malaysia has a highly-developed economy, political system and legal system. Due to the small size of the jurisdiction, there are only a small number of local law firms and lawyers. However, these firms have at times been equated as being as good as some of the bigger international firms, despite not having a global network of offices.

As a result, Singaporean law firms are thought to be good to work for, even though they may not be able or willing to pay the top rates which lawyers in 'magic circle' or large US firms can receive.

Professional development is the most hotly-contested category in the *Asialaw* survey, with seven law firms making it into the top three rankings. Leading the pack are Allen & Gledhill and WongPartnership.

Comments Alvin Yeo, the managing partner of WongPartnership, on the firm's approach to training and developing the skills of its lawyers: "Plans are underway to enhance this by implementing a

The Best Law Firms to Work for in Singapore

Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	Rodyk & Davidson	=Allen & Gledhill =WongPartnership	WongPartnership	Allen & Gledhill	Rodyk & Davidson	Allen & Gledhill
2nd	WongPartnership	=Drew & Napier =Rajah & Tann =Rodyk & Davidson	=Drew & Napier =Stamford Law Corporation	WongPartnership	TSMP Law Corporation	=Drew & Napier =Rajah & Tann
3rd	Allen & Gledhill	=Shook Lin & Bok =White & Case	Allen & Gledhill	White & Case	=Alban Tay Mahtani & De Silva =Drew & Napier	WongPartnership

set of structured training road maps spanning all levels of seniority for our lawyers. In addition to formalized training, promising lawyers are provided more exposure by way of secondments, both local and overseas, to law firms as well as corporations.”

Because of Singapore’s highly sophisticated educational and legal systems, the opportunities for locally-trained lawyers to advance their careers both at home and abroad are plentiful. Allen & Gledhill has been endorsed as the best law firm in Singapore for prospects for career advancement.

According to Allen & Gledhill, the firm’s approach to career advancement is based around a structured annual appraisal and development process for all lawyers, a soft-skills programme enabling career progression and stringent definitions of skill requirements for every legal position in the company which are “articulated and published”.

Unfortunately for Allen & Gledhill, the firm is not present in the survey’s rankings for work environment. Instead, this category is populated by some of Singapore’s smaller firms. TSMP Law

KIM & CHANG

**Korean Law Firm of the Year
- IFLR Asian Awards 2006 -**

Founded in 1972, Kim & Chang is the largest and most specialized law firm in Korea. It is a full service law firm based in Seoul with around 350 professionals, including lawyers, tax lawyers and accountants, and patent and trademark attorneys. Its professionals are top graduates of prestigious universities in Korea and abroad, including the United States, Europe and Japan. Many of its attorneys have practiced with major law firms overseas, adding to the firm’s resources their riches of experience and expertise in specialized practice areas. The expertise and multicultural background of Kim & Chang’s professionals make the firm the recognized leader in providing specialized legal services for cross-border transactions and uniquely qualified to address the legal needs of international companies doing business in Korea

*Antitrust & Fair Trade
Bankruptcy/Corporate Restructuring
Environment
Foreign Investment
General Corporate
Health Care
Human Resources & Labor
Insurance
Intellectual Property & Technology
International Trade & Foreign Exchange
Litigation & Arbitration
Maritime
Mergers & Acquisitions
Privatization
Product Liability
Real Property & Construction
Securities/Capital Markets & Banking
Tax
Telecommunications & E-Commerce
White Collar Crime*

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E-mail: lawkim@kimchang.com**

The Best Law Firms to Work for in South Korea						
Rank	Salary Competitiveness	Professional Development	Supervision & Guidance	Opportunities to Work on Big/ Important Deals	Work Environment	Prospects for Career Advancement
1st	=Kim & Chang =Woo, Yun, Kang, Jeong & Han	=Bae, Kim & Lee =Lee & Ko =Yoon Yang Kim Shin & Yu	Kim & Chang	Kim & Chang	Bae, Kim & Lee	Kim & Chang
2nd	Bae, Kim & Lee	=Kim & Chang =Shin & Kim =Woo, Yun, Kang, Jeong & Han	Shin & Kim	Lee & Ko	=Kim & Chang =Woo, Yun, Kang, Jeong & Han	=Bae, Kim & Lee =Lee & Ko
3rd	Hwang Mok Park	Hwang Mok Park	=Bae, Kim & Lee =Lee & Ko	=Bae, Kim & Lee =Shin & Kim	=Kim & Company =Yoon Yang Kim Shin & Yu =Hwang Mok Park	=Shin & Kim =Kim & Company

Corporation and Alban Tay Mahtani & De Silva have received nominations in this category against some larger rivals, while Rodyk & Davidson has won the first position.

South Korea

South Korea’s legal market is relatively small compared to the size of its population. The jurisdiction contains about 10,000 lawyers who service a population of 48.8 million, or one lawyer for every

4,880 people. By contrast, the USA has one lawyer for every 300 people.

Within Korea’s small legal sector, there are clear leaders which control a large proportion of business-related legal work. With this in mind, it may follow that South Korea’s lawyers are some of the hardest-working professionals in Asia.



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Several of the firms that are widely regarded as being leading law firms in South Korea have been voted into top positions in the *Asialaw* survey. One lawyer says this is not surprising: "The top firms in Korea have the best clients, the best lawyers and can afford to have the best training and pay. There are good law firms out there other than the big firms, but it is hard for us to compete."

Among the largest law firms in Korea in terms of the number of lawyers, the top three are: Kim & Chang; Bae, Kim & Lee; Lee & Ko, and Shin & Kim. These firms each have more than 100 lawyers currently working for them, with Kim & Chang leading the field with more than 300 lawyers and more than 80 partners.

Kim & Chang has been voted into the top three ranking for every category, including being elected as the best law firm in Korea for salary competitiveness, supervision and guidance, opportunities to work on big or important deals and prospects for career advancement.

Sharing the winning place for salary competitiveness with Kim & Chang is law firm Woo, Yun, Kang, Jeong & Han. A spokesperson for the firm tells *Asialaw*: "We believe in compensating our lawyers for their dedication and abilities and, therefore, we have continually provided them with top salaries and with a bonus twice a year". Also making it into the top three rankings in several categories are

Methodology

Asialaw's inaugural survey, *The Best Law Firms to Work for in Asia-Pacific*, commenced with in-depth market research to determine the benefits and working conditions that law firms offer in order to attract and retain lawyers. *Asialaw* then interviewed lawyers at all career levels to determine their workplace needs.

This information was subsequently analyzed to create a survey that was sent to more than 5,000 private-practice lawyers around the Asia-Pacific region. Respondents were asked to rank law firms in each jurisdiction based on six key criteria and to specify their workplace needs based on a list of options.

The survey findings were collated and analyzed to produce rankings for each jurisdiction covered. Independent editorial research into each law firm was also conducted to verify the information provided in the surveys.

the smaller Korean law firms Woo, Yun, Kang, Jeong & Han; Yoon & Yang Kim Shin & Yu; Hwang Mok Park and Kim & Company.

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