

Marie-Louise Hannan@Kuala Lumpur



First posting

Marie-Louise Hannan is a trade commissioner entering her second year of a posting in Kuala Lumpur. She was assigned to the China Division in 1997, and spent a year in the Post Support Unit before joining the Malaysian Commercial Division where she is responsible for the environment and energy sectors.

THIS IS YOUR FIRST POSTING. IS IT WHAT YOU EXPECTED?

During my time in Ottawa, I was exposed to some of the issues and challenges faced by staff at posts. So, there were no major surprises upon arrival, just a few adjustments to be made in terms of perspective. I was accustomed to focussing on the Trade Commissioner Service as a whole and worrying if our guidelines would make sense to posts in widely differing

markets. Now, I focus on one place with its own particular set of circumstances. This requires more in-depth knowledge of the country and the market, which doesn't happen overnight. With time, though, I feel that I'm understanding more and more, which is encouraging.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST ASSIGNMENT WHEN YOU ARRIVED AT POST?

I began working right away on the World Road Congress, providing support to my colleagues who had been organizing this mission with Transport Canada for several months. It was not only a major effort for our small trade team in terms of the trade show and our booth presence, complete with two

live Mounties, but also a protocol event with the visit of four Canadian ministers at once. I surfaced from this hectic event about three weeks later and began ringing up my predecessor's contacts and learning about my sectors.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE JOB?

The most rewarding part of my work is finding out that my efforts have made a difference to a Canadian company trying to enter this market. Whether it's a written communication,

an exchange I facilitated or an opportunity I passed on, I find that clients often give very useful feedback that helps me to learn where to focus my energies.

WHAT'S THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF THE JOB?

Being relatively young and inexperienced in a culture that is very age-conscious is an issue at times. However, I try to focus on what I can achieve rather than the few limitations I've

encountered. Another area that often presents challenges is the coordination and communication between posts on issues of common interest.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE YOU LEFT HOME?

The only surprises in my first year were in my personal and professional development (like giving a speech in English, French and Bahasa, and running in a half-marathon). Would

I have liked to know about the experiences that awaited me? Probably not, but then again, I like surprises.