

Magnet for migrant workers

Kota Raya Complex has become a hub for foreigners drawn to its central location and variety of goods and services catering to their needs. However, many street vendors in the vicinity have been fined by Kuala Lumpur City Hall for operating illegally. >2&3

Kota Raya



Feeling at home: The area around Kota Raya Complex becomes even busier on the weekend, especially Sunday, as foreign workers converge there to shop and meet friends. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star



Kota Raya has been dubbed Little Manila due to its popularity with workers and tourists from the Philippines. — Photos: YAP CHEE HONG and LOW BOON TAT/The Star

Filipinos feel right at home in Kota Raya

Complex in KL offers variety of goods, services from their country

By **BAVANI M** and **MEGAT SYAHAR**
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ON A weekend visit to Kota Raya Complex, Bahasa Malaysia may seem like a foreign language.

That is because Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines, is more often heard in the vicinity as most shops there cater to the Filipino community.

They include a convenience store called *Kapatid*, which means sibling in Tagalog.

Maria-Louisa de la Cruz, 71, from Bulakan, Philippines, has been helping the store owner, who is Malaysian, run the place.

“My late husband who was Malaysian used to work here.

“After he passed away in 2018, I took over,” she said of the popular complex located in Kuala Lumpur, at the intersection of Jalan Tun Tan Siew Sin (formerly Jalan Silang) and Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock, near Leboh Pudu.

Apart from *Kapatid*, there are several other stores inside the complex, stocking items like biscuits, noodles, canned food and other essentials like toothpaste, shampoo and detergent brands from the Philippines.

Upstairs, there are other businesses selling clothes, bags, shoes, cosmetics, eateries, hair and beauty salons, money changers, remittance and courier services as well as mobile stores.

Although owned and run by Malaysians, the outlets are largely staffed by foreigners.

Ana Jean Lapada, 39, visits Kota Raya on her day off, which is Sunday, at least once or twice



Kota Raya is a hub for migrants working in Kuala Lumpur, especially those from the Philippines.

“I work as a maid in Shah Alam, and take a bus to Kota Raya to meet up with friends who work in different parts of the Klang Valley,” said Lapada, who hails from Delfin Albano and has been working in Malaysia for 10 years.

She and her friends from areas like Sri Hartamas, Mont Kiara and Bangsar would have breakfast together and catch up at Kota Raya.

They would often spend the whole day there, shopping or getting their hair, nails and eyebrows done.

For Myrtle Aparente, 52, Kota Raya is like home.

“Manila for good reason. People can spend the entire day here because everything is available under one roof.

“When we go home, it almost feels like we have spent the day with our family,” Aparente said.

Due to the variety of Filipino-centric goods and services, even out-of-towners make a beeline to the area during weekends.

“My boyfriend and I have been wanting to come for a long time.

“There is nothing like Kota Raya for our people in the whole country,” said 34-year-old Karen Vinson who lives in Melaka.

“From food to groceries,

country can be found here.”

The area is also popular with other foreigners, who often come to visit barber, money changer and mobile phone shops.

Restaurant owner and Filipino-Sabahan Mohammad Omar Bitoh, 55, said before the Filipino community started hanging out at Kota Raya, they would meet up at the Sin Sze Si Ya Temple nearby.

“When Kota Raya complex started catering to the Filipino community, it began to regain its popularity.”

A business owner who only wanted to be identified as Faye,



Visitors will find dozens of Filipino eateries, grocery stores, hair and beauty salons, remittance shops and courier services at the complex.



Filipinos (from left) Arlene C. Alicando, Aparente, Joy Handugan and Bhie Alvarado enjoying their weekend outing in Kota Raya.



De la Cruz's convenience store sells items sourced from the Philippines.

nail salon on the third floor for more than 20 years.

Faye said Kota Raya started off as a family mall, and became popular with young working adults in the early 1990s.

"People would come here to buy clothes, shoes and costume jewellery and visit the food court.

"When newer malls started opening, things got quieter and many shops closed.

"But, then foreigners started doing business here, starting with Indonesians.

"It later became a hangout for Filipinos, and soon there was an influx of businesses catering to them."

She said this had driven up rental rates and unit owners started dividing and sub-letting to cash in on Kota Raya's popularity among the community.

"It's expensive to rent here because Kota Raya is in a good location.

"You will notice that some lots are divided into two or three units.

"One half might have a hair salon and the other a cafe."

It has also become a meeting point for foreigners too.

"You can find many Bangladeshi and Pakistani men coming here.

"Many are homesick and come here for some for social contact," added de la Cruz.

Outside the complex, the surrounding area has a high concentration of people from South Asian countries working in shops and restaurants.

And just as Kota Raya caters to the Filipino community, these shops help meet the needs of migrant communities from Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Indonesia.

They can be seen visiting shops for essentials from their respective countries in the area and many do some small trading there too.



Foreign traders take the opportunity to sell their wares outside areas popular with migrant communities. — Photos: MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI and BAVANI M

Some foreign street vendors plying their trade illegally in KL

By BAVANI M
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FOREIGN street vendors are a common sight around Kota Raya Complex, Jalan Petaling and Leboh Pudu, all located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur city centre.

The area outside Kota Raya, from the steps leading down to the bus stop, walkway and beneath the bridge linking to Chinatown are a hive of activity on weekends as traders take advantage of the large crowds to do brisk business.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) said it had been carrying out enforcement in these areas.

"Apart from confiscating their goods, we cannot arrest anyone operating illegally," said a DBKL spokesperson when contacted.

Up to September this year, 570 fines were issued and 220 licences cancelled.

DBKL had previously identified 20 types of businesses that foreigners were barred from.

This ruling was introduced in July 2020, and still stands today (see graphic).

Foreigners are prohibited from applying for a licence to open a hypermarket, supermarket, mini mart, sundry shop, 24-hour-convenience store, petrol station and laundry service.

This also includes foreign partnerships, where one spouse is a foreigner.

However, those already operating such businesses prior to the ban can continue to do so.

There are two types of licences issued by DBKL – premises and business – under the Licensing of Trades, Businesses and Industries (Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur) By-laws 2016 (UUK20) and Licensing of Hawkers and Food Placement (Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur) By-laws 2016 (UUK22) respectively.

Under UUK22, local traders are not allowed to hire foreign employees to manage their stalls, and this extends to husband-and-wife partnerships where one spouse is a foreigner.

This rule encompasses hawkers and traders operating in markets, food courts, night markets and roadside stalls.

For UUK20 or the premises licence, a foreigner is allowed to do business and hire a foreign helper as long as the worker has a valid working permit and the business is registered with



DBKL enforcement officers sealing a business premises at a retail outlet in Jalan Kenanga for various licence infringements.

20 businesses foreigners are barred from operating in Kuala Lumpur

Hypermarket/supermarket/mini mart	24-hour convenience store	Kiosk or five-foot-way stalls	Petrol station (with or without a convenience store)
Spa service	Sundry shop	Jewellery shop	Laundry service
Wet market	Bag shop*	Cybercafe	Car workshop
Hair salon and barber shop	Restaurant/bistro/cafe	Teakwood furniture shop	Food and drinks kiosk
Retail shop (clothing and accessories)	Herbal and Chinese medicine shop (KKM approved)	Mobile phone and prepaid card shop	Textile, clothes, shoes* (except international and exclusive brands)

Source: DBKL

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Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM).

Premises licence holders are those running businesses in shoplots, department stores and shopping centres.

In a raid on Oct 11, about 44 premises in Jalan Kenanga were sealed for violating Section 101(1) (v) of the Local Government Act 1976.

"The activities were being car-

ried out by foreign nationals, many of whom had no valid documents," said the spokesperson.

A total of 51 notices were issued for various offences pertaining to licence infringement.

A total of 29 foreigners comprising 22 from Bangladesh, Indonesia (three), Pakistan (three) and Myanmar (one) were arrested under the Immigration Act 1956 during the raid.