

## BUILD YOUR CAREER IN MALAYSIA: EMPLOYMENT PASSES & WORK PERMITS

Malaysia has long been a hub for global professionals and investors, thanks to its strategic location in Southeast Asia, robust infrastructure, and multicultural society. Expatriates looking to work in Malaysia must navigate a structured legal and regulatory framework that governs the issuance of work permits and passes. This article provides a detailed overview of the available permits, governing laws, and practical requirements for foreigners intending to establish careers in Malaysia.

### **The Legal Framework**

The primary legislation regulating expatriates in Malaysia is the Immigration Act 1959 (Act 155) and the Immigration Regulations 1963. The Immigration Act provides that under Section 6(1)(c), non-citizens must obtain a valid permit or pass to enter and remain in Malaysia, and entering without one constitutes an offence. The Immigration Regulations 1963, on the other hand, empower the Director General of Immigration to issue different passes, including Employment Passes, Dependant Passes, and Visit Passes. Together, these laws provide the foundation for Malaysia's expatriate management system.

### **Employment Pass (EP)**

The Employment Pass is the most common permit for foreign professionals and is divided into three categories based on salary and position. The table below summarises the categories, validity, eligible positions, and family-related entitlements:

Category	Salary Range	Validity & Eligible Positions	Dependants Allowed
Category I	RM10,000 and above	Up to 5 years; top executives and specialists	Yes
Category II	RM5,000 – RM9,999	Up to 2 years; mid-level professionals and managers	Yes
Category III	RM3,000 – RM4,999	Up to 12 months; skilled technical staff (renewable twice)	No

- **Category I** is reserved for senior-level expatriates with higher salaries and offers the most stability and benefits, including the right to hire domestic help.
- **Category II** applies to mid-level professionals with moderate salaries.
- **Category III** is limited to skilled technical staff with shorter validity periods and more restrictions.

All Employment Passes require employers to submit comprehensive documentation through the Expatriate Services Division (ESD), including the expatriate's passport, academic and professional certificates, employment contract, proof of insurance, and industry-specific approvals.

### **Residence Pass-Talent (RP-T)**

The Residence Pass-Talent is designed for highly skilled expatriates who wish to establish a long-term career in Malaysia. Applicants must have worked in Malaysia for at least three years under an Employment Pass, earn a salary of at least RM15,000 per month, hold recognized qualifications, and maintain a tax record in Malaysia. The RP-T offers a validity period of ten years and is renewable, providing greater flexibility than the Employment Pass. Holders may switch jobs or start businesses without needing fresh approvals, and family members can also obtain dependent visas aligned with the RP-T duration. This makes the RP-T ideal for professionals who have already established themselves in Malaysia and are seeking stability and long-term residency options.

### **Professional Visit Pass (PVP)**

The Professional Visit Pass caters to foreign professionals engaged in short-term assignments, training, or projects in Malaysia for a duration of up to twelve months. Applicants remain employed by their foreign companies and are only authorized to perform temporary work in Malaysia. This pass is particularly relevant for consultants, trainers, and technical experts who come to Malaysia for limited engagements.

### **Golden Visa Schemes**

Malaysia also provides residency-by-investment pathways, primarily aimed at investors, retirees, and affluent individuals. The Malaysia Premium Visa Programme (PVIP), introduced in 2022, offers a twenty-year renewable visa for investors who place at least RM1 million in a Malaysian bank and demonstrate offshore income of RM40,000 per month. The Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H) programme, by contrast, is a more established scheme that provides five to twenty-year visas based on fixed deposits and property purchases and is particularly popular among retirees and families. While both programmes provide access to lifestyle benefits, property ownership, and healthcare, they do not lead to citizenship.

### **Dependant Passes and Family Matters**

Expatriates who hold an Employment Pass or Residence Pass-Talent may apply for

Dependant Passes to bring their legally married spouses and children under the age of eighteen to Malaysia. The required documents typically include the dependants' passports, marriage or birth certificates translated into English, photographs, and the primary pass holder's supporting documents. The Dependant Pass is valid for the same period as the principal pass, although dependants are not permitted to work or study without securing their own permits. This ensures that expatriates can live in Malaysia with their immediate families while complying with the regulatory requirements.

### **Investor Pass (2025)**

In April 2025, Malaysia introduced the Investor Pass, which aims to facilitate easier entry for global investors and business people. The pass allows stays of up to six months per entry with multiple-entry privileges. Unlike the Premium Visa Programme or the MM2H scheme, the Investor Pass is not designed for residence or retirement but is instead focused on supporting business-related mobility and investment opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

Malaysia's expatriate framework offers a comprehensive system tailored to different categories of foreign professionals, investors, and families. From temporary assignments under the Professional Visit Pass to long-term stability through the Residence Pass-Talent or investment opportunities under the Premium Visa Programme, expatriates can select a pathway that best fits their career, lifestyle, or financial aspirations. Compliance with the Immigration Act, employer sponsorship, and proper documentation remain central to obtaining and maintaining legal residence and employment in Malaysia. For companies, ensuring compliance when hiring foreign talent is equally critical. With Malaysia continuing to position itself as a competitive global destination for investment and talent, its immigration framework remains an essential gateway for international professionals seeking opportunities in Southeast Asia.

### **How We Can Help**

Transitioning into Malaysia's professional landscape requires more than just a job offer. It demands compliance with immigration laws, employment regulations, and family relocation requirements. Azmi & Associates delivers clear, practical legal advice on work permits, residency pathways, and long-term settlement options, helping you navigate every step with confidence.

### **References:**

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