

Working in the Middle East: A Personal Experience

By: Siti Zabedah Ali Akhbar

When I was asked to share my personal experience of working in the Middle East, I was enthralled by the bittersweet memories that flooded my mind. Suffice to say it triggered the same kind of excitement I felt when I was about to jet off to a distant land and broaden my horizon. I am going to share with you my personal experience of working in Saudi Arabia for 2 years.

The whole adventure started when I got a call from Melorita, an employment agency that informed me about the opportunity to work in Saudi Arabia. Convincing my husband to allow me to go was a whole different plot by itself. My two boys were already in college, and the family needed more funding in order to cover their tuition fees. Using this as the main premise for my argument, and after a tremendous amount of persuasion, I managed to convince my husband to allow me to go.

As I prepared myself to leave my home, family, friends, and the comfort zone in Malaysia, I cleared my mind and drafted the real objectives on why I needed to go. There were so many things I had to take into consideration. Knowing that I had to equip myself with the right tools and knowledge, I began to read up about Saudi Arabia, its culture and customs. Melorita, as the agency, was excellent in providing me with the information. From a professional perspective, I buried myself in

tomes about nursing procedures, medication, CPR, and even packed up a few text books for reference purposes.

As I embarked on my journey, I knew that I would have to deal with being homesick and that sickening feeling of missing my loved ones. Thankfully, I had a plethora of communication tools and brief escapism. Laptop, handphones, and a camera were just what I needed in this modern world to keep connected with my friends and family. Arriving there, I knew that being a dynamic individual was highly important for me to assimilate and get familiar with the new surroundings as fast as possible. Being a headstrong, focused, and highly motivated person really helped me to cope with the pressure and emotions.

The working environment there was of course quite different from what we experience here in Malaysia. Work ethics, communication problems and barriers of trusts were just some of the enigmas I faced. However, instead of allowing those issues to overshadow my *raison d'être* there, I rose to the occasion and showed the Saudis how great a Malaysian worker could be.

Having a strong, close companion also helped me adjust to my new environment. As we comforted each other and kept our head up despite being so far away from our motherland, we concocted ways of

escapism to thrill ourselves. Ballroom dancing, exercising, swimming, shopping trips, sightseeing, karaoke, and nights out dining, stuffing our palate with excellent food – those were just some of the fun-filled activities we shared.

However, it is utterly important for you to know the limit of fun that you can have. The line between fun and vice is a thin one. So when the situation was hard, I knew that Allah would always guide me on to the straight path. I took the liberty of going to Mecca and Medina to perform the Hajj and Umra' as many times as I could.

As I sit here reminiscing about my two-year adventure in the Arabian world, I realise that the *pièce de résistance*, the Holy Grail, the real prize of my journey, is knowing that I managed to battle the challenge of working overseas, outside my cocoon of comfort, and rise to the epitome of success in my industry. Not only that, I also managed to achieve my objectives of going there, sweeping up all the intangible benefits such as the experience, the adventure and the knowledge, and I have become more confident as I strut my stuff in the universe of Nursing Academia.

So, my fellow readers, my friends, are you ready for your own piece of adventure? Just remember that the only person who can stop you from being the very best is Yourself. If you have an objective, a dream, go get it. Believe in yourself. ■

About the Author:

Siti Zabedah Ali Akhbar is a proud wife, a mother of two, and currently pursuing her Master's Degree in Education.