

Careers @ Singapore Legal Services



*Photo courtesy of the Singapore Tourism Board
Photographer: Choo Chee Hong*



Singapore is widely regarded as a commercial focal point of Southeast Asia and the larger region. As Asia assumes a much more dominant role in driving the world economy, Singapore is looking to strengthen its position as a global legal hub, providing services that will benefit from and contribute to this process.

Currently home to around 4,900 practicing lawyers and 900 law firms,

Singapore's legal services sector has seen healthy growth in recent years. The sector contributed 0.57% to Singapore's GDP (S\$1.51 billion) in 2009, representing a year-on-year growth of about 2.1% from 2008.

Today, Singapore is a key legal hub for Southeast Asia and, increasingly, the Indian subcontinent.

A fast-growing, increasingly liberalised legal services sector

A vibrant legal services sector is an economic engine in itself and a key enabler for growth in many other sectors of Singapore's economy. For this reason, Singapore has continued to liberalise its legal services sector.

As part of the process of deregulation, six Qualifying Foreign Law Practice (QFLP) licenses have been awarded to selected firms to allow them to practise in commercial areas of Singapore law. Of the six QFLP firms, three are ranked

among the top 10 in the world in terms of revenue. Singapore will soon be reviewing the QFLP scheme with a view to further liberalisation.

In addition, Singapore also recently enhanced its Joint Law Venture (JLV) scheme to allow JLVs to similarly practise Singapore law. Along with the QFLP scheme, the JLV programme has increased the range and supply of legal services in Singapore, and made the sector a more dynamic one.

Upcoming industry developments

Singapore will soon be launching the Foreign Practitioners Examination (FPE), designed to help meet growing industry demand for high-calibre lawyers. The FPE will allow experienced foreign lawyers to practise Singapore law within permitted areas of legal practice and enhance the depth of expertise in the legal services sector. The FPE will be conducted by the Singapore Institute of Legal Education which was established on 3 May 2011 to develop, coordinate and oversee initiatives on legal training.

This strategy of liberalisation has clearly borne fruit, as the sector has seen impressive growth in the past few years. Besides having more than 800 local firms and over 3,800 local lawyers, Singapore now also hosts over 100 foreign law firms (more than twice the number in 2005), along with almost 1,000 foreign lawyers. Eight of the world's top 10 law firms by revenue – firms like Clifford Chance, Linklaters and Latham & Watkins – have all set up branches here.



An International Arbitration Centre

A 2008 report published by the International Chamber of Commerce's International Court of Arbitration (ICC-ICA) ranked Singapore as the top city in Asia for ICC arbitrations and one

of the five most popular arbitration venues alongside Paris, London, Geneva and Zurich.

Geographically, Singapore is within a seven-hour flight from major cities in Asia such as Jakarta, New Delhi, Seoul, Shanghai, Sydney and Tokyo. Singapore is also an excellent venue for disputes to be heard as its business is conducted in English, and its legal system and arbitration laws are familiar to international lawyers.

In addition, a Blue Ribbon Board was formed at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC). Comprising nine members from seven countries, the Board is chaired by Mr Michael Pryles, an Australian who is ranked among the top 20 arbitration specialists in the world.

To further anchor its position as Asia's international arbitration centre, Singapore launched Maxwell Chambers, the world's first integrated

dispute resolution complex in 2009. It houses top international alternative dispute resolution (ADR) institutions such as the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the ICC-ICA, and the International Centre for Dispute Resolution (a collaboration between the American Arbitration Association and the SIAC).

For these reasons, legal and business communities across Asia are increasingly promoting the city-state as a one-stop venue for international arbitration. The growth in international arbitration cases in Singapore has increasingly gained momentum in recent years. The SIAC handled 198 new cases in 2010, twice the number handled in 2008, while Maxwell Chambers heard 119 cases in 2010. Singapore's fast-growing international profile as a neutral centre for dispute resolution and the burgeoning demand for international arbitration has led law firms to significantly increase the number of lawyers handling arbitration work from Singapore.



World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO)



The Singapore office of the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center (AMC), housed at Maxwell Chambers, makes intellectual property (IP) ADR services in the Asia Pacific region more easily accessible. It is the only WIPO AMC office in the region, providing training and advice on procedures such as arbitration, mediation and expert determination, and administering hearings in cases conducted under the WIPO rules in Singapore.

The AMC's presence in Singapore is testament to Singapore's commitment

to the protection of intellectual assets and its support of WIPO's efforts to develop the international IP regime. This initiative offers companies and other parties in the region a cost-effective dispute resolution option, and boosts the availability of fully-trained professionals to effectively deliver ADR services throughout the region.

For more information on Singapore's legal services sector, visit the Ministry of Law's website at www.minlaw.gov.sg.

Where do you fit in?

Singapore is working towards becoming a top international legal services hub. It welcomes lawyers from all areas, although some emphasis is given to the following:

- Biosciences
- Competition
- Intellectual Property
- International Arbitration
- Islamic Finance
- Projects, including Oil & Gas and Clean Energy
- Shipping
- Tax
- Technology, Media and Telecommunications

As a key financial centre for the region, Singapore offers lawyers the opportunity to be involved in large-scale and complex cross-border transactions.



In addition, Singapore law practices are becoming increasingly international in their practice and outlook, while international law firms have been allowed to practice Singapore law in corporate areas. Hence strong demand is expected for both foreign- and Singapore-qualified lawyers in local and international firms. And, with

Singapore cementing its position as a regional international arbitration centre and a growing number of international disputes in the current climate, the demand for arbitrators and arbitration lawyers is also expected to increase.

There is, in short, no better time to practise law in Singapore than now – the city-state is growing economically, with a constant bustle of activity. Situated at the heart of the world's fastest-growing economies, the city is a bridge between the East and West, burgeoning with diversity and opportunities. Couple these factors with the city's superb physical infrastructure, sophisticated IT network, great variety of living, dining and entertainment options, and you have one of the world's most liveable cities.

What requirements must you meet?

Students

Overseas law graduates must generally be Singapore Citizens or PRs, obtain at least a recognised Second Class (Lower) Honours degree from an approved overseas university, pass Part A of the Bar Exam and complete at least six months of recognised legal experience. Thereafter, they are required to pass Part B of the Bar Exam and fulfil the Practice Training Period requirement, which can take the form of a six-month Training Contract with a Singapore law practice.

Working Professionals

If you are admitted, qualified or authorised to practise in any foreign

jurisdiction, you can practise as a Foreign Lawyer in Singapore by simply registering with the Attorney General's Chambers. The FPE will allow experienced foreign lawyers to practise Singapore law within permitted areas of legal practice.

You will also be required to engage in continuing professional development, made compulsory for all practising lawyers by new amendments to the legal regulatory framework. This will help you stay updated on changes to existing laws, and remain familiar with new and emerging areas of law.



About Contact Singapore

Contact Singapore is an alliance of the Singapore Economic Development Board and Ministry of Manpower. It aims to attract overseas Singaporeans and global talent to work, invest and live in Singapore.

With offices in Asia Pacific, Europe and North America, Contact Singapore is the one-stop centre for those who wish to pursue a rewarding career in Singapore, as well as individuals and entrepreneurs who are keen to invest in or initiate new business activities here. Contact Singapore actively links Singapore-based employers with talent and provides updates on career opportunities and industry developments in Singapore. Contact Singapore works with public and private sector partners to facilitate the interests of potential individual investors in Singapore.

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