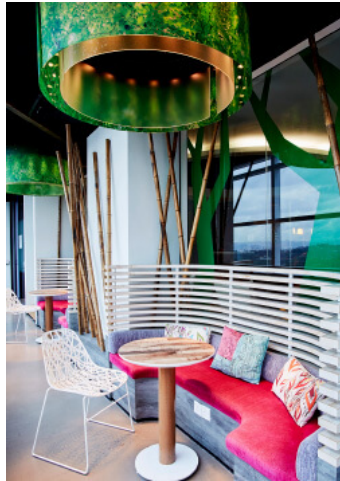


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Google Malaysia's office in Kuala Lumpur is a beautiful coming together of local inspirations and thoughtfully included corporate themes

Technology company Google is famous the world over for its sprawling facility in California, where an innovative approach to the interior design has resulted in a conducive environment that supports creativity, productivity and inventiveness. Needless to say, Google's office in Malaysia is no different, although it is a much smaller operation. The principles behind the positively reinforcing physical environment in California bring the comfortably proportioned office in Menara Axiata to life, giving it an outstanding sense of design that has become a major HR calling card.

Google's presence in Malaysia was officially established in 2011, with the staff spread across several office spaces. Unfortunately, the offices were not designed to express the brand, the local culture in which the company was operating nor Google's unique working style. Therefore, the brief that Sajith Sivanandan, managing director for Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines and new emerging markets, gave to architecture firm M Moser & Associates was to address all these needs.

"Sajith was actually very specific about wanting a design that reflects Malaysian culture. As a company, Google tends to like contextual office spaces," says M Moser design director Ramesh Subramaniam, who went on to design 15 other Google offices around the world after completing work on the KL office. "Aside from that, we were given carte blanche to answer the brief the way we saw fit. Based on those considerations, we came up with the concept of celebrating Malaysia's natural wonders in all their forms throughout all the public spaces."

The lush rainforest theme starts right at the entrance, leading into a sun-lit space shared by a café — where a delicious lunch is served daily — and an informal, amphitheatre-like space used for discussions with clients as well as for internal meetings and training sessions. The café, charmingly called Gerai Gugel, is especially indicative of the design direction Ramesh and his team worked on: swing sets (nailed to the ground, unfortunately) join traditional chairs and benches while a vertical garden creates the sensation of dining in a rainforest-inspired courtyard.

The elements of Malaysiana continue all over the office, the visual cues inspired by both cultural imagery and our natural environment. "There is a meeting room with stalactites, which is meant to be like Mulu Caves. Another that's inspired by the beaches and, of course, the rainforest theme in the café," Ramesh adds. This dedication to creating a strong local flavour is also what inspired the oh-so-Instagrammable batik-sheathed Google logo in the reception area — a design element that has made it into many visitors' social media feeds. Also popular is a small, bright green meeting room called Nasi Lemak — the idea is to feel like you're being wrapped in banana leaves, just like the much-loved dish is.

Ramesh was also careful to include Google's corporate colours into the final design to preserve the company's youthful and dynamic identity. "We tried to do it as respectfully as possible, and without being kitschy. Sajith actually wanted a lot more colour, so we struck a balance between what he wanted and what would have worked best," Ramesh shares. "We put the colours in context, so it answered Sajith's request while fitting into our design concept."

The sun-drenched open-plan work spaces are a combination of hot-desking and permanent desks, catering for the many ways staff can opt to work. Complementing the work sections — which were off limits to our photographers — are plenty of meeting rooms and breakout spaces for group activities, one-on-one discussions or solo brainstorms. Some of these spaces are located on the outer periphery of the main section of the office, overlooking the lush greenery of Bukit Persekutuan.

"Because you have an open-plan office that encourages a lot of we-time, you also need to have smaller and more intimate spaces so whoever who needs it can get some me-time. That's why we have these meeting rooms and private cubicles all over the office. Also, this office was created some years ago, and the alternative spaces ensure that scalability isn't an issue — the need for expansion was built into the design."

While the bold themes and serotonin-stimulating colours are reserved for the work areas, the spaces reserved for rest and relaxation feature a more sedate tone. On Sajith's request, an area earmarked for the staff to let off some steam is done up in a Jonker Street theme, complete with imagery from the Unesco World Heritage site of Melaka. Soft lighting, dark cement walls and exposed brick set the tone for a relaxed environment, which, we hear, gets plenty of use when the staff need a quick break. We imagine the pool table and the ping-pong table must be especially popular.

Although, if you work at Google, any part of the office is.