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# Seeing green

Japanese expatriate drawn to good golf courses and sunny weather here

By CHRISTOPHER KHOO  
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**J**APANESE businessman Shima Kaoru first arrived in Malaysia for a business trip seven years ago and he has not looked back since.

In 2007, he was tasked with surveying the local market for a Japanese-Malaysian resort company and placed in charge of the branch here.

"Business was not good so we had no choice but to close down the branch," said Kaoru, who was born in the city of Nagano.

Even though he was disappointed by that, Kaoru found that he could indulge in his passion for golfing in Malaysia.

He discovered Malaysia's high-quality golf courses, cheaper golfing fees and consistent weather, instantly seeing the opportunity for Japanese golfers and retirees to play here.

Feeling confident and ambitious, he set up his own travel agency to specialise in golf tourism.

"I love to play golf and Malaysia's golf courses are very beautiful. The year-long summer weather allows me to play five times a week, which I normally can't do in Japan because of the four season climate," he said with a smile.

Over the years, he brought 700 to 800 retirees from Japan for golf and eventually, some of them decided to call Malaysia their home.

"Malaysia is the number one country for Japanese retirees over the past seven years. At the same time, I've managed to convince many small business owners in Japan to invest here through golf tourism," he said.

"Everything is so much cheaper compared to home and that's another reason why many Japanese retirees choose to come here," he added.

Adapting to the Malaysian culture was not a huge problem for Kaoru.

He loved the Malaysian culture, its people, the colourful culinary scene, the weather and of course, the golf courses.

"It's true what they say about Malaysians being very friendly and helpful.

"Getting used to the food was not a problem because Chinese and Japanese cuisines are almost the same.

"At the same time, there are so many choices like Indian and Western," the 45-



year-old said with a big smile.

When he is not managing his business or playing golf, Kaoru travels around Malaysia.

"I've been to Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi, Tioman, Malacca and Penang.

"My favourite place is Kota Kinabalu, because of its beautiful beach and clear waters, as well as the wildlife, the forest and the mountains," he said.

"During my last trip to Sabah, I got the opportunity to see orang utan and Proboscis monkeys," he added.

Before coming to Malaysia, he knew little about the country.

"I always thought Malaysia was similar to the Philippines and Indonesia, but I was very surprised by the diversity and the people here are completely different," he said.

He said that he felt safe living in Malaysia compared to the another South-East Asian country where he previously worked.

"I don't feel safe on the streets there because people are allowed to carry guns everywhere. I would always grip my briefcase very tightly," he said.

In Malaysia, he faces hurdles of a different nature, particularly in his business ventures.

"Setting up business here is hard, especially getting permits and also the expensive government tax," he said.

Despite the challenges, he plans to stay and hopes to find continued success in the Malaysian tourism market.



1 Kaoru finds Malaysia alluring due to the attractive golf courses such as this one in Genting Highlands – filepic

2 Kaoru plays golf five times a week.

3 One of Kaoru's favourite holiday destinations is Sabah because of its beautiful beaches and its clear waters. He also likes the place for its wildlife, jungle forest and mountains. – filepic

4 Kaoru got to see Proboscis monkeys during his last trip to Sabah.