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A Welcoming City with Opportunities and Helpful People

After a small detour, an American student found a law career in Hong Kong, which she has proudly called home for the past 26 years.



“ Hong Kong is all about its people. There are a lot of wonderful, fantastic people in Hong Kong, very educated and very knowledgeable as well. But I would say the best thing about Hong Kong and its people is that they are very willing to help those who ask for that help. ”

Kristi Swartz
Partner, DLA Piper

Born in Central Texas in the US, Kristi Swartz dreamed of taking the bar in the UK, but immigration policies there presented an obstacle – she was rejected from the bar since she didn't have the right of abode. She looked further east instead and arrived in Hong Kong in 1996 to take her Master of Laws degree at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). This education turned into a career and she now considers Hong Kong to be home.

A Terrific Place for Networking

The road to Hong Kong was not a smooth one, but Swartz looks back on it fondly. Luckily, things got easier once she was here. The journey taught her a lot about the city and its people, and she is grateful for the help she received along the way. From the Hong Kong friend who brought her an application for HKU, to a Hong Kong bank's branch in London that helped her sort out a hiccup with the application fees, her journey to Hong Kong included a lot of help. "Hong Kong is fantastic for networking and people are more than willing to help you, you just need to ask."

Finding a Niche to Succeed

The real obstacle came when she realised that she would never speak Mandarin or

Cantonese with great proficiency, this posed an issue when it came to working with major international firms. "It just proved that I had to bring more to the table and figure out what was going to be my niche, or what was going to be my practice, to allow me to be competitive in the Hong Kong market." She went on to launch her own firm, building experience and a reputation in Hong Kong as a passionate proponent of fintech. After 20 years in the field, her expertise, talent, and hard work in corporate finance and with startups led to a position as a leading partner of an international law firm.

Swartz points to Hong Kong's unique role as a major financial centre and a springboard to Mainland China and Asia as a factor in her success. According to Swartz, Hong Kong's ability to attract talent and funds is a major assistance to businesses as well, and the deals in recent years have only been getting bigger and better.

A City that Works Hard and Plays Hard

Swartz enjoys the work-hard, play-hard mentality of this bustling city. "For instance, within 20 minutes of most accommodation,

you can find the great outdoors and beautiful places to walk and hike around." And when it comes to food, Hong Kong is unbeatable. "You can get just about anything and everything that you want here and it's always available, so we're kind of spoiled for choice."

To those considering a career in Hong Kong, this Central Texas expat shared two insider tips. "Number one: know before you go." She encourages people to do their research and figure out what it is that they want to do. The second thing? "Speak to a lot of people that are here," she says, noting specifically alumni organisations. "There are a lot of people that are willing to help."



- After acquiring a law degree in the US and the UK, **Kristi Swartz** moved to Hong Kong in 1996 to obtain a Master of Laws degree from HKU and later decided to start her career here.
- Swartz is now a partner at DLA Piper. She specialises in fintech, global finance, regulatory compliance and licensing.