

# Life Maid Simple

**MALAYSIAN FAMILIES HAVE** a habit of sticking with one industry as the generations roll by, and while it is becoming commonplace to buy noodles from stalls that have existed for 70 years, longevity is a surprising quality to find in a maid agency.

“It was a family business,” David Yee tells me, when I ask what led him to start his agency. “I was the one my parents would send to the Philippines to meet the maids before we brought them over.” It may be unexpected, but it must be the most reassuring thing to hear when seeking a maid and someone to, effectively, become part of the family.

“I’ve had my own business for more than 20 years, so I’ve seen everything!” he jokes, but underneath his jovial exterior is a commitment to doing the best he can for all parties involved. “Many agencies cut corners but we don’t. It is so important to make sure the girls we bring over are safe, that they feel comfortable, and equally that the clients understand the process and feel supported, too.” Having a Filipina wife helps, and David admits that his wife becomes something of a maternal figure to the “girls,” answering all their questions and ensuring they arrive with their new family feeling secure and confident, which translates into fewer problems for their new employers.

But it is not just the new maids that are apprehensive about moving away from home: families welcoming a new face into the household – especially those expats coming from the West where maids are a rarity – have many questions and need guidance.

David and his team sort out everything from insurance to medical coverage, visas, and sourcing a maid that fits the client’s requirements, but the biggest area of need is advice and support. “I am always at the end of the phone,” explains David. “My clients text or email me when they have questions, or if there is a problem I will deal with it myself. It is vital to offer personal support to make sure there are no problems.”

So the Expat put David to the test: we put ourselves in the position of an unsure expat welcoming a new maid for the first time, to find some answers that would make life a little easier for our readers.

## CAN I APPLY FOR A MAID FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY?

“You can apply from anywhere, but you must already have a work permit for Malaysia, as the maid’s permit is attached to yours, and moves along with each new permit you get.”

## WHAT IF I DON’T LIKE MY MAID?

“Of course we can change the girls as many times as is necessary, but you should give it two to four weeks before you judge a girl. Any teething problems will usually come by the second week, but it can take up to a month for everyone to adjust. Bear in mind that to change the maid can take up to two months.”

## WHAT SHOULD I GIVE HER TO EAT?

“Go shopping with the maid and encourage her to buy the food she likes to eat. Some employers think they are being generous by getting the maid to eat things like spaghetti and pasta, but most will want their traditional food; they may not like Western food as Asians like to eat rice!”

## DO I KEEP AWAY FROM MY MAID’S ROOM OR AM I ENTITLED TO SNOOP?

“Be respectful and allow her some space, but if you have any concerns then you are entitled to take a look in her area. Remember she is your employee and it is your house.”

## WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN SHE FIRST ARRIVES?

“Prepare a guideline of tasks and a timetable, so she knows exactly what she is required to do. Remember she is a household maid, so you cannot ask her to paint your fence or fix the roof! Be strict until you get to know her. If she behaves in a way you don’t like, tell her straightaway.”



## WHAT ARE HER WORKING HOURS? WHAT HAPPENS IF I WANT HER TO WORK IN THE EVENINGS?

“Maids work from around 6.30am to 8pm, with an hour break in the afternoon and they should get Sundays off or the money equivalent, as well as a month-long holiday every two years. It’s fine to get them to work in the evenings, but it is a nice gesture to thank her for this extra time, or give her a token once in a while; it’s important to make her feel appreciated.”

## DO I BUY THE MAID TOILETRIES?

“Yes, buy her all her toiletries, or better, let her pick her own at the supermarket when you are together; otherwise she will end up sneaking into your bathroom to borrow some!”

## ANY LAST PIECE OF ADVICE?

“Try to remember that there are large cultural differences, and some things that may seem strange to you are normal for her, but it is your house and you employ her, so you set the guidelines. Lastly, and most importantly, it is always best to get a maid from a licenced employment company rather than from someone unknown; this will save you endless headaches.”

**By Elizabeth Perry**

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