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Coronavirus: Hotels to accommodate Malaysian staff in guest rooms or ask them to go on leave



Grand Park City Hall will provide free accommodation in guest rooms for its Malaysian employees. PHOTO: PARK HOTEL GROUP

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Clara Lock Travel Correspondent (mailto:claral@sph.com.sg)

SINGAPORE - Malaysian staff who commute daily to Singapore will either be housed in guest rooms or be asked to take leave, say hotels affected by the country's movement restriction order.

But hotels will not be left wanting in terms of manpower as occupancy rates are down due to the coronavirus.

The lockdown, which was announced on Monday (March 16), will begin on Wednesday (March 18) and last until March 31. Malaysians, including those who commute to work daily from across the Causeway, will be barred from overseas travel.

Grand Park City Hall general manager Jeane Lim said about 10 per cent of Malaysian staff, who work in roles such as housekeeping, kitchen staff and front of house, commute across the border daily.

She added that the hotel will provide free accommodation in guest rooms for these employees. As of this afternoon, three of them have accepted the offer.

Singapore hotelier Far East Hospitality, which includes properties such as Oasia Hotel Downtown and The Barracks Hotel Sentosa, will also offer accommodation to Malaysian staff who are "critical to the operations in our properties", said chief executive Arthur Kiong.

Those who remain in Malaysia will use their annual leave. The company will supplement it with paid leave thereafter.

About 20 per cent of the group's staff are Malaysians, with most of them working in housekeeping and banquet operations.

"Despite the last-minute surge in demand for accommodation by companies affected by the lockdown, current business volumes are still below pre-Covid-19 level. Thus, we can still comfortably cope, without having the majority of our Malaysian staff members who commute daily to Singapore," said Mr Kiong.

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Smaller players have responded in similar ways. Singapore-based hotel management and booking platform RedDoorz, which operates 17 budget hotels here, will house 12 Malaysian employees at its properties such as RedDoorz Hostel@Kallang MRT.

Meanwhile, four Malaysian employees will take paid leave until the end of the month.

"We respect their decision to stay home. Nobody wants to be apart from their families for that long," says vice-president of operations Adil Mubarak.

The Scarlet, a boutique hotel located in Chinatown, will go a step further. It has allocated rooms for six Malaysian employees who commute daily. Two of them will be staying with their spouses, who also work in Singapore.

Thirteen of the hotel's 36 employees are Malaysian. The other eight stay with relatives or rent accommodation in Singapore.

General manager Fong Kah Seng said staff who live in Malaysia had time to return home and gather sufficient belongings for the next 14 days.

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He added: "In the midst of Covid-19, we are trying to do the right thing by taking care of the employees and letting them know we have their backs. They take care of our guests, so we should take care of them too."

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