

# Luther.

## Setting up a Business in Malaysia



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# A. Entity form

When establishing a business presence in a new jurisdiction, it is crucial to choose the right entity form. The entity forms most commonly used by foreign investors are:

- the representative office or the regional office;
- the branch office;
- the Sendirian Berhad (“**Sdn. Bhd.**”), a company with limited liability; and
- the Limited Liability Partnership (“**LLP**”).

## I. The representative/regional office

The simplest way for foreign entities to establish a business presence in Malaysia is the registration of a representative or regional office. The entity form serves only as a transitional structure and cannot be used for any commercial activities.

### 1. What is a representative/regional office?

The representative office (“**RO**”) is the appropriate legal entity for entities active in the manufacturing or servicing sector wishing to “test the water” before entering the Malaysian market. The RO has the benefit of enabling a non-Malaysian company to study the local business environment and relevant market without establishing a new legal entity. This structure allows for more flexibility but also has its disadvantages. An RO is registered by a foreign entity and forms part of its company. In other words, the RO is not a separate legal entity and, therefore, the foreign entity is liable for its RO in Malaysia.

A regional office (“**RGO**”) is an office of a foreign entity that serves as the coordination centre for the entity’s affiliates, subsidiaries and agents in South-East Asia and the Asia Pacific region. The established RGO is responsible for the designated activities of the entity within the region it operates.

### 2. For how long can one operate an RO/RGO?

An RO/RGO can be registered for an initial period of two years – after which it can be renewed for up to a maximum of three more years, subject to the authorities’ discretion. An RO thus remains a transitional structure as its maximum period of validity will be limited to five years.

Once that period has elapsed, if the business chooses to maintain its presence in Malaysia, it must either incorporate a subsidiary or register a branch office as outlined below.

### 3. Eligibility criteria

The following conditions must be met for the creation of an RO/RGO:

- the project must be entirely funded by sources exterior to Malaysia; and
- the expected operational expenditure must be at least MYR 300,000 per annum

### 4. Restricted activities

Since ROs/RGOs are only meant to be preliminary/transitional structures, they are not allowed to undertake any commercial activities. The following are activities expressly allowed or disallowed:

#### a. Allowed

- planning and coordination of business activities in Malaysia or the region;
- collection and analysis of data, undertaking feasibility
- studies pertaining to investment and business opportunities in Malaysia and the region;
- identification of sources of raw material, components and industrial products;
- research and product development;
- coordination of subsidiaries, affiliates and agents in the region;
- liaison office;
- identification of suitable partners and agents/distributors;
- sponsor expatriates, after having obtained the relevant Expatriate Post Approvals and Support Letters; and
- other activities which will not result directly in actual commercial transactions (e.g. local or technical support to Malaysian firms without fees).

#### b. Not allowed

- engaging in any trading (including import and export), business or any form of commercial activity;
- leasing warehousing facilities; any shipment/transshipment or storage of goods shall be handled by a local agent or distributor;
- signing business contracts on behalf of the foreign corporation or providing services for a fee; and
- participating in the daily management of any of its subsidiaries, affiliates or branches in Malaysia.

## 5. Registration

The application for the registration of an RO/RGO in Malaysia should be addressed to the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (“MIDA”) or Bank Negara Malaysia (if related to banking and financial services) and must be accompanied by three sets of the following documents:

- cover letter signed by authorised signatory;
- application forms;
- certificate of incorporation of the parent company;
- latest audited financial statements of the parent company (last two years); and
- company profile (in .pdf or .ppt).

The examination of the application usually takes four to six weeks.

## II. The branch office

### 1. What is a branch office?

The Malaysian Companies Act 2016 allows foreign entities to register a branch office with the Companies Commission of Malaysia (“SSM”). Unlike an RO/RGO, a branch office is able to act independently and to engage in legitimate profit-making activities. However, a branch office will not be viewed as a separate legal entity from the foreign parent company it represents. Consequently, any and all contracts that it enters into, as well as the legal obligations, debts and liabilities arising therefrom, shall be binding and enforceable against the foreign parent company.

The registration of a branch office requires substantially more information to be filed with SSM compared to what is required for the incorporation of a limited liability company. The first step in the registration process is to apply for approval of the business name. The branch office will have to use the same name as its parent entity.

The parent entity’s main place of business, date of incorporation/ establishment, amount of share capital (if any) and core business activities also need to be provided in the filing documents.

### 2. Registration

Provided that the business name is approved, which usually takes about one to two days, the following documents/ information need to be submitted to SSM in order to complete the registration:

- a certified true copy of the foreign parent entity’s certificate of incorporation/establishment, or its equivalent;
- a copy of the latest audited annual financial statement of the foreign parent entity;
- a copy of the foreign parent entity’s current constitution, or its equivalent;
- personal particulars and certified true passport copies of the foreign parent entity’s current directors and the dates of appointment of their respective appointment; and
- information as to the address under which the branch office shall be registered.

All of the above documents must be submitted in English. If any of the original documents (e.g. the certificate of incorporation) are in another language, an official translation must be provided. Where necessary, Luther can of course provide translation services.

The company is furthermore required to appoint a branch agent. It is important to note that such branch agent can be held personally liable in case of any breach of the provisions of the Companies Act 2016.

There is no formal requirement for a branch office to appoint a company secretary. However its compliance and filing obligations are similar to those of a private limited company where such requirement exists. In order to ensure compliance, we therefore recommend appointing someone to provide company secretarial services.

Compared to a private limited company, the on-going requirements for maintaining a branch office are more cumbersome. Since the branch office is not a separate legal entity, changes related to the parent entity, such as change of its officers as well as its audited annual accounts, must be filed with SSM.

If these documents are not in English, official translations must be provided. Furthermore, a separate set of audited accounts reflecting the branch office’s annual “financials”, need to be drawn-up and filed with SSM.

In summary, due to the higher filing requirements for a branch office and the corresponding costs, and since the branch office’s liability is not separate from its parent entity, most foreign investors tend to prefer setting up a private limited company (for details, please refer to [Part A.IV.](#) below) rather than a branch office.

### III. The LLP

#### 1. What is an LLP?

The LLP offers the internal flexibility of a partnership whilst limiting the partners' liabilities to their respective individual contribution. For tax purposes, this structure can be particularly advantageous if the partners are individuals residing outside of Malaysia or for foreign partnerships, such as a German KG.

Two or more partners, whether private individuals or corporate entities, are required to form an LLP. The duration of an LLP is unlimited. A change in the composition of the partners (whether outgoing or incoming) does not affect the existence of the LLP as such or its rights and obligations.

The LLP is treated as an independent legal entity, distinct from its partners. This means that it can, amongst other functions, buy and sell property, sue and be sued in its own name as well as do such other acts and things in its name as bodies corporate may lawfully do and suffer.

LLPs are taxed at the entity level, unlike the treatment of a partnership where partners are taxed directly on his/her/its share of the income from the partnership.

As a general rule, considering the LLP is a separate legal entity, any debts and obligations of the LLP are borne by the assets of the LLP and not that of its partners. In other words, the partner's personal liability is limited to his/her/its individual contribution. Nevertheless, when a partner intentionally causes loss or damage through willful misconduct, both the LLP and the defaulting partner are jointly and severally liable, whereas the limited liability of the other partners remains intact.

A LLP is represented by each of its partners, unless the partnership agreement provides otherwise. Consequently, the actions of a partner are binding upon the LLP. It is therefore recommended that the partners conclude a partnership agreement, setting out their respective rights and obligations towards each other.

The LLP must appoint a compliance officer who must be a natural person residing in Malaysia. Although not mandatory, the compliance officer can be one of the partners. The compliance officer does not have the power to carry out any acts binding upon the LLP and he must ensure that the LLP

complies with its obligations as stated in the Limited Liability Partnership Act. We can hold the office of compliance officer for you, should circumstances require it.

There is no formal requirement for an LLP to appoint a company secretary. However, in order to be compliant with all notification and filing requirements, we recommend appointing someone to provide company secretarial services.

When considering the establishment of an LLP, it is important to know that businesses using this entity form can, inter alia, at the moment not apply for employment passes for foreign workers nor for so called Whole Sale Retail Trade Licenses ("WRT"). While this may change in the future, it is one of the many reasons foreign investors usually prefer to set up a private limited company.

#### 2. Registration

A LLP must be registered with SSM.

The first step in the registration process is to check with SSM whether the intended name for the LLP is available. The name of the LLP must include the words "Limited Liability Partnership" or "LLP".

The LLP must have a registered office in Malaysia. Our office can be used as your registered office in Malaysia.

For the registration itself, the particulars of the partners and manager(s) must be provided (namely the name, address, passport number or, in the case of a corporate shareholder, the company registration number).

The LLP must maintain proper accounts. However, the annual accounts of the LLP do not have to be audited. Additionally, the annual financial statements do not have to be published. The Manager of the LLP must inform SSM on an annual basis, whether the LLP is in a position to fulfil its monetary obligations.

### IV. The Private limited company (Sdn. Bhd.)

#### 1. What is a Sdn. Bhd.?

A Sdn. Bhd. is a fully-fledged, independent legal entity. It is the most common legal structure used by investors to carry out their business activities in Malaysia.

## 2. Incorporation of a Sdn. Bhd.

The incorporation of a Sdn. Bhd. usually takes about one week. Under the Companies Act 2016, it is no longer compulsory to adopt a constitution (previously called memorandum and articles of association). However, having a constitution is still beneficial in order for the company to have a bespoke set of corporate governance rules. In the absence of a Constitution, the functioning of the company is governed by the rules of the Companies Act 2016.

The first step for the incorporation of a Sdn. Bhd. is to choose a name for the intended company and check with SSM its availability. Assuming it is available and approved by SSM, the name will be reserved and the application must be submitted within a period of 30 days following the date of approval.

All documents and information required for incorporation must be submitted along with the particulars of the directors and shareholders (namely, but not limited to, their individual name(s), address, passport number and profession).

The incorporation of the Sdn. Bhd. will be successful only when all required information and documents are provided and approved by SSM:

- a certified true copy of the shareholder(s) or a certificate of incorporation, or equivalent, if the shareholder(s) are corporate entities;
- personal particulars and certified true passport copies of the shareholder(s), current directors and date of appointment as director, if the shareholder(s) are corporate entities;
- personal particulars and certified true passport copies of the shareholder(s) who are natural persons; and
- a group structure chart.

Further documents and information may be required, depending on the group structure and we will be in communication with you in this regard. All the above documents need to be submitted in English. If the original document is in another language, an official translation must be provided. We can provide translation services, if required.

As the Sdn. Bhd. is a separate legal entity, its shareholders are not directly liable for it. Instead, the personal liability of the shareholders is limited to the amount of the company's issued share capital. The issued capital must be fully paid-up.

## 3. Share capital

The minimum share capital required to constitute a Sdn. Bhd. is MYR 1.00. Nevertheless, a higher share capital is required to carry out certain operations (a minimum share capital of MYR 500,000 is, for instance, required if the company is wholly owned by foreign investors and wishes to hire expatriate employees) or to carry out certain activities (for example, for wholesale and retail companies, a minimum share capital of MYR 1,000,000 is necessary).

The share capital is working capital, which means that it may be fully utilised for salaries, rental, travel expenses and other business related expenses.

## 4. Shareholders

A Sdn. Bhd. can be incorporated with a minimum of one shareholder. The upper limit in terms of shareholders is 50 shareholders. The shares can be held by both natural persons or legal entities.

## 5. Board of directors

The power to manage a Sdn. Bhd. primarily vests in its board of directors. The board must have at least one director who is an individual (instead of a corporate entity), and whose principal residence is in Malaysia. If the company only has one such director, they cannot resign until a replacement has been appointed.

Luther provides nominee director services in order to enable our clients to:

- fulfil the requirement to have a local director;
- have a reliable director on the board who acts in accordance with the instructions of the overseas shareholder(s) appointing the director; and
- ensure that the shareholder appointing the nominee has a director who represents their interests on the board and who votes as they instruct.

## 6. Company secretary

The Sdn. Bhd. must, further, appoint a company secretary, who must be a natural person of full age and who has his/her principal or only place of residence in Malaysia. The company secretary is responsible for the necessary filings required by SSM, keeping proper corporate records as well as maintaining the requisite corporate registers.

In order to ensure the timely discharge of these duties it is common practice for external lawyers or accountants to act as a Sdn. Bhd.'s company secretary. If required, we can provide you with full company secretary services.

## 7. Registered office

A Sdn. Bhd. must, from the date of its incorporation, also have a registered office within Malaysia to which all official communications and public notices may be addressed. Moreover, it has to be open and accessible to the public for a minimum of three hours during ordinary business hours on business days. Non-compliance with these requirements may result in fines. In conjunction with this, the Companies Act 2016 stipulates that the company secretary of each company shall be readily reachable at the company's registered office by telephone or any other means of instantaneous communication.

Given these requirements, it is not surprising that many Sdn. Bhd. choose, initially at least, to have their registered office at the address of their company secretary. The registered office does not have to be at the same address as the company's actual place of business and it does not have to be stated on the Sdn. Bhd.'s letterhead or other correspondence.

## 8. Annual accounts and audit requirements

Every private limited company must prepare an annual set of accounts and appoint an auditor to audit its financial statements. The audited financial statements must be lodged with SSM annually. The Registrar may exempt any private company from having to appoint an auditor. Currently, the audit exemption applies in the following cases:

- dormant companies, i.e. companies which have been dormant since incorporation or dormant throughout the current financial year and during the immediately preceding financial year;

- zero-revenue companies, i.e. companies which do not have any revenues in the current and immediately preceding two financial years, and/or whose total assets do not exceed MYR 300,000 in the current and immediately preceding two financial years; and
- threshold-qualified companies, i.e. companies which have been continuously below certain thresholds in terms of their revenue, total value of assets and employees.

Any company electing to be exempted from audit must still lodge its unaudited financial statements with the Registrar.

## 9. Corporate Income Tax

Regular resident and non-resident Sdn. Bhd. are subject to the same corporate tax rate of 24%, while small and medium enterprises ("**SME**") benefit from a reduced tax rate as follows:

Chargeable business income (MYR)	Non-resident Company	Resident Company	Resident SME
For the first 150,000			15%
From 150,001 to 600,000	24%	24%	17%
From 600,001 and above			24%

Rates for year of assessment 2024

An SME is defined as a company with a paid-up capital of MYR 2.5 million or less and gross business income of MYR 50 million or less. Where the SME is connected to a group of companies, specific rules apply to determine this threshold. With effect from the year of assessment 2024, to qualify for the reduced rate, no more than 20% of the paid-up capital of the SME may be owned (directly or indirectly) by companies incorporated outside Malaysia or by non-Malaysian citizens.

Further tax reductions and rebates are available but vary from year to year. We can provide advice in this respect upon request.

## B. A brief note on licences and registrations

Despite its increasing participation in international trade, Malaysia still applies significant protectionist measures. Access to certain activities is thus subject to restrictions, certifications, registrations, and especially licensing requirements. Licences and authorisations are required by law and administered by various government agencies, statutory bodies and local authorities. Requirements vary by industry, business activity and location. Licences are often accompanied by specific obligations, such as a minimum amount of share capital or equity participation of Malaysians and/or Bumiputera (people of certain protected ethnicities).

Before commencing any business activity in Malaysia, it is therefore essential to determine which licences are required to conduct your business and whether there are any additional obligations to comply with. We assist our clients in determining which licences are required and which registrations are necessary. We are also able to assist with licence applications and registration with the relevant authorities.

## C. Work permits

All foreigners wishing to work in Malaysia must obtain a work permit prior to commencing employment. Malaysia offers a range of visa types, each with specific requirements depending on factors such as the legal structure of the entity, the nature of the employment and the terms of the contract. Luther has an experienced immigration team that can provide comprehensive assistance on these issues.

Early and careful planning of immigration matters is a key factor in the success of work permit applications and the overall project. We therefore strongly recommend that you discuss immigration issues before starting a business to ensure that the structure you choose is in line with your goals and objectives.

# Contacts

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Our advisory services are tailored to our clients' corporate goals. We take a creative, dedicated approach to achieving the best possible economic outcome for each of our clients. The name "Luther" stands for expertise and commitment. With a passion for our profession, we dedicate all our efforts to solving your issues, always providing the best possible solution for our clients. Not too much and not too little – we always hit the mark.

We know how crucial it is to use resources efficiently and to plan ahead. We always have an eye on the economic impact of our advice. This is true in the case of strategic consulting as well as in legal disputes. We have complex projects on our agenda every day. At Luther, experienced and highly specialised advisors cooperate closely in order to offer our clients the best possible service. Thanks to our fast and efficient communication, permanent availability and flexibility, we are there for you whenever you need us.

Luther has been named "Law Firm of the Year: Germany 2024" by The Lawyer, one of the most well-known legal magazines worldwide.

<p>Lawyers and tax advisors</p> <p><b>420</b></p>	<p>Locations</p> <p><b>21</b></p>	<p>Long-standing connections to commercial law firms worldwide</p> 	<p>Offices in international financial centres and investment locations</p> 
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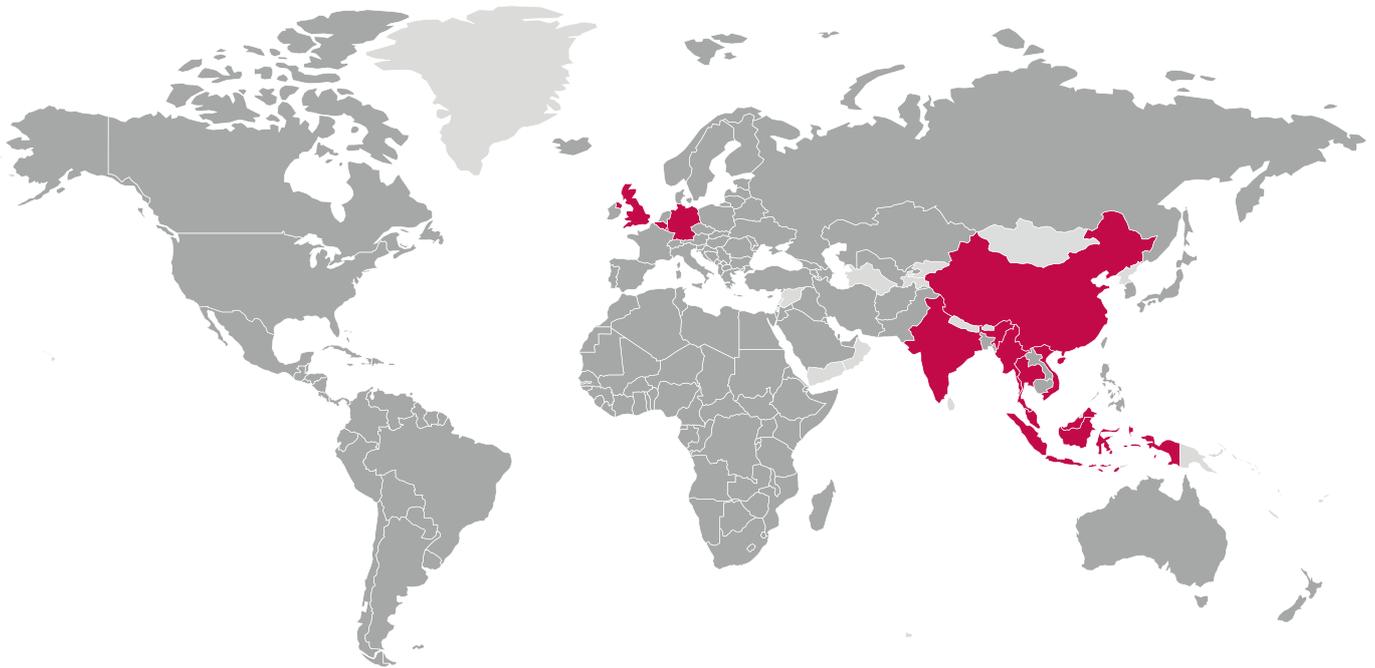
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# Our locations

We have a global outlook, with international offices in 11 key economic and financial centres in Europe and Asia. We also maintain close relationships with other commercial law firms in all relevant jurisdictions. Luther is a founding member of unyer ([www.unyer.com](http://www.unyer.com)), a global organisation of leading professional services firms that cooperate exclusively with each other. This way, we ensure a seamless service for our clients throughout their demanding international projects.

Our partner firms are based in Africa, Australia and New Zealand, Europe, Israel, Japan and Korea, the Middle East, Russia and the CIS, South and Central America, the US and Canada.



- Luther locations
- Best friends

**Our locations**

Bangkok	Jakarta
Berlin	Kuala Lumpur
Brussels	Leipzig
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Delhi-Gurugram	Luxembourg
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Hanover	Yangon
Ho Chi Minh City	

## Our awards



### The Lawyer European Awards

Luther has been named “Law Firm of the Year: Germany 2024” by The Lawyer, one of the most well-known legal magazines worldwide.



### JUVE

In the JUVE Guide of Commercial Law Firms 2024/2025, 58 lawyers from Luther were recommended, and eleven of these were also listed as “leading advisors” and three as “up and coming”. The legal publisher JUVE ranked Luther in 33 areas of law. In 2024, Luther won the JUVE Award “Law Firm of the Year - Regulatory Law”. Luther was also nominated as ‘Law Firm of the Year for M&A’. In 2019, Luther received the highest award from JUVE as ‘Law Firm of the Year 2019’.



### Chambers

In 2025, Luther was recognised by Chambers Europe for 17 practice areas in Germany as well as in two practice areas in Luxembourg. In addition, 20 partners were included in the Individual Ranking. Moreover, in 2025, Luther was recognised by Chambers Global in five practice areas in Germany and in one each in Luxembourg and Myanmar, while nine partners were also included in the Individual Ranking.



### The Legal 500

The Legal 500 Germany 2025 recommends Luther in 38 areas of law, with “Top Tier” rankings in two of these areas. 73 lawyers are being recommended, 19 of whom have been specially recognised as “Leading Individual” or “Next Generation Partner”. “The Legal 500 EMEA 2024” recommends Luther for seven areas of law in Luxembourg, and nine lawyers are also recommended, two of whom have been specially recognised as “Leading Individual”. “The Legal 500 Asia Pacific 2024” recommends Luther and two of its lawyers for one area of law in Myanmar.



### The Legal 500 Green Guide EMEA 2025

Two Luther lawyers have been included in the recommendations for Germany in the Green Ambassadors Europe Guide 2025. This guide, published by Legal 500, recognises lawyers who are particularly committed to sustainability and the green transition - both in their client work and beyond.



### Kanzleimonitor

Kanzleimonitor 2025/2026 recommends Luther in 20 areas of law. In addition, five Luther lawyers were listed in the individual recommendations, two of whom were even included in the top 100 lawyers.

## Best Lawyers

### Best Lawyers in Germany 2026

For the year 2026, 127 lawyers have been recommended by Luther as “Best Lawyers in Germany 2026”, an award presented by the US publisher “Best Lawyers” in cooperation with the German Handelsblatt, including two partners as “Lawyer of the Year” for his area of law, and 43 colleagues who have received the recommendation “Best Lawyers - Ones to Watch”.



### Lexology Index

Lexology Index (formerly: WWL - Who's Who Legal) recommends a total of 27 lawyers in its June 2025 publications, nine of whom received the highest accolade of Thought Leader and two of whom were recognised as Future Leaders.

## Imprint

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# Luther.

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