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Saturday August 28, 2010

## Up close and personal with Adlina Borhan

By EUGENE MAHALINGAM  
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ADLINA Borhan, who resides and works in Paris, France, doesn't get a chance to return home to Malaysia – as often as she'd like to, that is.

Still, she counts her blessings. Her job does provide her the opportunity to come home, every now and then.

"I miss Malaysia! I only come back about four times a year and usually it's for work. But I also use this time as an opportunity to meet my family and friends," she says.

Adlina leads a Paris-based marketing and communications agency, AB & Artho, specialising in lifestyle, leisure, niche travel, business travel and MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, exhibitions) for the European market under the brand "Adlina".

Her mission is to promote Malaysia as both a tourist and business destination to her clients.

"It's not always easy. The main challenge is often the language and the cultural differences of our clients. You really have to understand what they are looking for in a holiday ... get to know their likes and dislikes."

Adlina however says Malaysia is a country with "good products."

"Foreigners love Malaysia – the people, the shopping, and of course, the food. They love the villages or "kampung" here. Basically, they just like the things that we as Malaysians often take for granted.

"That's why I like championing a country with beautiful products," she says.

Adlina, a Johorean, started off her career in the mid-80s as a public



Adlina Borhan

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Adlina, a Johorean, started off her career in the mid-80s as a public relations officer with the Hilton group of hotels in Malaysia.

In 1986, she was promoted as marketing and communications director for Hiltons of Malaysia, and then as regional director for Hilton Asia Pacific in 1996, a post she held until 2001.

In 2002, Adlina left Malaysia to live with her Swiss husband in Switzerland.

"When I went to Switzerland, I told myself that I'd take a one-month break. But after a month, I started a small company there," she says.

<b>BORN:</b>	<i>Johor, 1959</i>
<b>PERSONAL:</b>	<i>Married</i>
<b>CAREER:</b>	<i>Senior partner, AB &amp; Artho</i>
<b>FAVOURITE FOOD:</b>	<i>Malaysian, Japanese, French, Spanish and Italian</i>
<b>FAVOURITE PLACE:</b>	<i>Somewhere peaceful, quiet and natural</i>
<b>VALUES:</b>	<i>Integrity, efficiency, quality, challenge and innovativeness</i>
<b>INSPIRATION:</b>	<i>Creativity and strengths to move forward</i>

*Adlina Borhan*

Adlina started AB & Artho, where she became the marketing and public relations representatives for hotels and resorts in Thailand and Malaysia, and even had a stint at promoting the Formula One race in Sepang. In 2003, she joined Tourism Malaysia.

After a five-year stint with Tourism Malaysia, she set up her Paris-based office on the chic avenue des Champs Elysees, on the same building of Louis Vuitton (LV).

"We chose to set up an office at Champs Elysees at the LV Building to be synonymous with what that brand represented, namely the high-end lifestyle," says Adlina.

To be able to work in a city like Paris, Adlina is certainly living the dream. Still, despite its differences with Malaysia, she claims that the city of love is not vastly different compared with working in Kuala Lumpur.

"Paris is a lovely city, but in a way it's like KL, just with a different working environment and work ethics.

"If you understand the language, the law and the way the business works, it's just like working in Malaysia."

Adlina, who speaks Bahasa Melayu, English, French and basic German, however adds that working in France is very expensive. That explains why the outfit only has two staff – her and an assistant.

"Just the two of us. It's a small outfit, but I do have big plans going forward for this business," she says, adding that it is expensive to hire people in France.

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At least once a month, Adlina travels back to Switzerland to be with her husband. Alternatively, it's her Swiss hubby that goes to Paris to be with her.

#### Home is where the heart is

Skiing, a popular Swiss winter sports, is naturally an activity that her husband enjoys but an activity that Adlina would much rather "prefer to see and not take part in."

"My husband loves to ski. I tried it once and decided that it just wasn't for me. I prefer to walk or jog. That's my sports."

Adlina also enjoys going to the cinema, dancing, reading and of course, travelling.

At their home in Switzerland, Adlina says she has converted one room in the house into a "Malaysian room" filled with all things Malaysian.

"Sometimes when I want to have some time to myself, I tell my husband that I'm "going home" and he knows that I'm going to my Malaysian room and don't want to be disturbed," she laughs.

One of her "favourite Malaysian décor" is a louvered window from the old Melaka Grill restaurant of the former Hilton Kuala Lumpur, she says.

"The room makes me feel like I'm actually back home in Malaysia," Adlina says.

Adlina's company also has a satellite office in Switzerland that targets companies, tourism boards and convention bureaus, airlines, hotels and travel trade professionals to promote destination. meetings and incentive travel, leisure and lifestyle and niche products and services from Asia into Europe.

Other services include sales and marketing representations, training and familiarisations, market trends and analysis and recommending innovative marketing solutions for business developments.

Areas of coverage include the French and German speaking markets, the Benelux and Spain.

According to Adlina, the global luxury travel industry has tremendous growth opportunities, with Malaysia being no exception.

"Malaysia has a good selection of resorts and high-end accommodations. In terms of high-end leisure travellers, there are always people around the world that are looking for high-end resorts to fulfil their dreams and experiences. Even in a downturn, the high-end traveller will continue to traverse the globe.

"Granted, we're no Monte Carlo or the French Riviera, but we certainly have areas of luxury that can be capitalised on. We just need to be sensitive to the trends and developments around the world," she says, adding that Malaysia is also a shopping haven for tourists around the world.

Adlina notes that plenty of Europeans love to travel on trains – something that Malaysia can help develop and channel to boost its tourism sector.

"It's a great way to see the country. We in Malaysia should find a way to repackage this and turn it into a unique experience for the foreign travellers."

"The trend is developing especially among the leisure French travellers who look for charming resorts and properties that are small and medium sized but with character and quality.

"They prefer to stay in boutique hotels and resorts where they can feel the place, rather than large complexes."

In June this year, Adlina, together with Paris-based luxury fashion branding expert Uché Okonkwo, organised the first Luxury Business Circle Workshop for South East Asia (LBC Asia) at the Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur.

The two-day workshop aimed at helping to develop the niche business segment of products and services for emerging brands in Malaysia and South East Asia and was targeted at individuals, small and medium enterprises and companies that were focused on high-end niche markets.

"It is for the Malaysian brands that are focusing on the high-end, niche markets but have yet to reach their aspired levels. There are a lot of companies that want to attract this lifestyle business segment, but don't know how to," says Adlina.

"Our goal is to also create more awareness about the luxury and lifestyle business and we try to help transfer knowledge to the participants on how to craft their brand in a niche market," she adds.

Adlina says about 40 participants attended the two-day workshop, comprising personalities mostly from the travel and tourism, footwear, fashion and accessories industry.

"We also had participants from the arts and craft and wellness and spa industry.

"We even had a Malaysian participant from London who was looking to boost her shoe business there (in Britain). And who knows? This person could just be the next Jimmy Choo!"

The LBC sessions are held in Europe, Asia and the Americas on a yearly basis. The LBC Asia will continue to take place in Kuala Lumpur again in July 2011.

"Last year, we conducted a training on marketing for tourism officers within the scope of tourism and travel. In addition, this year I will also try to propose hotels for Hotel PR training. It's this kind of events that bring me home," she says.