

Wanted to surf more - resigned from the top job and started a company in Sri Lanka

Full article in Swedish below link.

https://www.breakit.se/artikel/29800/ville-surfa-mer-sa-upp-sig-fran-toppjobbet-och-startade-bolag-pa-sri-lanka?utm_medium=newsletter&utm_source=Breakit_Alert



Anna Kalm and her husband left their top jobs in Stockholm, sold the apartment and moved to Sri Lanka to surf more. Now they have built up a company in Colombo with 85 employees.

It started with a holiday trip. Anna Kalm and Patrik Alm had heard that Sri Lanka was a wonderful country with good surfing, beautiful nature and elephants.

“We had no more control than that but went there and liked it very much. I have surfed for a long time and had tried to find more ways to get it into everyday life”, says Anna Kalm.

Not quite easy with a full-time job in Stockholm at Microsoft.

The couple had talked about wanting an adventure and moving abroad for a while and maybe starting their own. They began to think about what they could do in Sri Lanka.

“My husband was in tourism and was looking at building villas. But I who have worked with IT all my career and think it is the absolute most fun saw that there was a lot of potential”, says Anna Kalm.

Took the wedding money

In 2016, they made a difference and moved. They sold the apartment in Stockholm and resigned from their jobs at Microsoft and ABB.

The money they had intended to use for their wedding they instead spent on starting a company in Colombo (the wedding ended anyway, but a little later).

Ascentic, as the company is called, is a consulting company with the idea of finding the best developers in Sri Lanka and working for Swedish companies. The company started in the

spring of 2017 and today has 85 employees, mainly in Colombo, but also has an office in Sweden.

But the competition for developers in the country is also fierce. There are several companies that have a similar business concept but work with other countries, such as Australia and the United Kingdom. There are also other players who work in the Swedish market. Nelly, for example, has a development office in Sri Lanka.

That is why it is important to stand out.

Anna Kalm and Patrik Alm decided early on to do so by trying to have the very best workplace. They let employees work from home (even before the pandemic). A big thing in Colombo where there is a lot of traffic and people can have two hours of commuting to work.

“When we introduced it in 2017, it was quite unique in the job market. Above all, it was the trust aspect that people reacted to, that we as employers trusted that people do their job and take their responsibility even if they are at home. The labor market in Sri Lanka is more conservative, top-down and with a lot of micro-management, they are not used to that kind of freedom”, says Anna Kalm.

She had the idea with her from Microsoft and the philosophy that the job is not something you go to, but something you do.

How was surfing?

Ascentic has also put a lot of focus on the employees being able to both have a healthy family life and at the same time be able to make a career. "In Sweden it is natural, but here it is more aha with a company that values a healthy workload".

After already topping the lists of best employers in Sri Lanka, this year the company also joined Great place to work's list of the best employers in all of Asia.

"It feels super cool, especially considering that we competed against companies in countries like India and China," says Anna Kalm. This year, Ascentic aims to have sales of around SEK 22-24 million with a profit margin of around 20 percent.

Company building in all its glory, but how has it gone with surfing?

Anna Kalm's vision of being able to go down and surf before work in the morning has not really been fulfilled. However, there have been many long weekends on the South Coast two hours away, with surfing in the morning and work in the afternoon.

“Starting a company takes an extremely long time and energy and this has been a real start-up journey, it has certainly not been a joy from day one. We have gone on many rivets, but on the whole, it has always gone in a positive direction”, says Anna Kalm.

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