Hankering for a holiday

Malaysia is the fourth most vacation-deprived country in the world, says study. To address this, there are suggestions for Malaysia to have its own ‘Golden Week’.

Time for a break

Malaysians aged 18 to 34 are most vacation deprived

67% of Malaysians are vacation deprived, a 2% increase from 2017

64% have cancelled vacations due to work

54% of bosses are supportive of employees going on vacation

Reasons for the lack of vacations

Affordability

Guilt from leaving work behind

Saving leaves for a long holiday

Being unable to get time off from work

Without a doubt, Malaysians are one of the longest-working nations on earth, working 16% more than the global average. Many says bosses support their workers’ time off.

As for the number of public holidays, he says bosses should not be imposing unreasonable expectations at work.

He says it should be similar to China’s Golden Week, whereby 25 days are necessary to be completed before employees go off. He argues that it is important to advance through overtime and weekends.

Wan believes the proposed Golden Week will help workers feel reinvigorated.

"It’s funny. We have a lot of festivals, but we lack vacations. During big festivals, a lot of time is spent on preparation and family obligations. Other holidays are used for chores. There is no real break to just get away and unwind.

"That’s why I think the Golden Week is good. Its dedicated purpose is for us to relax," Wan says.

Account executive Wendy Chang, 30, supports the idea too, as it will improve productivity for workers when they return to the office.

"It doesn’t even have to be used for travelling," she says. "If the holiday can be used to unplag, pursue hobbies or just for some peace of mind, it would already serve its purpose.

However, Chang agrees that a worker’s allocated annual leaves should be untouched.

"It should be presented as an option. "Workers should be given a choice to use a preferred number of days that the week. It’s only fair if we have plans outside that week," she says.

Concurring that it’s tough to switch off from work, Chang had to postpone numerous social outings because of work. "Sure, we can open our handphones and laptops from wherever we are.

"But nobody wants to be worrying about work when they are with their loved ones," Chang says.

Meanwhile, some disagree with a Malaysian Golden Week like Mohd Syarik Hamdan, 36, a company executive.

"What’s more important is understanding employers," says the father of one.

He says the national vacation week is sufficient and people should not be going to concerts and shopping malls.

"I agree that Malaysians are deprived of vacations but we should improve our skills to create a better future.

"Most of us are generally made to feel guilty when we take leave even though we are entitled to do so."

"Last year, I cancelled a holiday because my foreign employer wanted me to be around for a project," Mohd Syarik says, repeating that in India he had wanted to watch a concert in Singapore.

He had already paid for the concert tickets, flight and hotel stay. "I also make it a point to reply to all messages about work despite being on leave.

"So, I believe there is more important than a national vacation week," he adds.

He feels it is also unfair for those in the service industry, who have to deal with unsightly traffic while the rest go on holiday.

Calling Malaysians committed and dedicated workers, Malaysian Trade Unions Congress secretary-general L. Solomon says many are called back to work from leave.

"But in many developed countries, work ends at 5pm and no clients are entertained after that.

"For workers, many Malaysians oblige customer demands past working hours," he says.

"But it’s a point to note that they cannot afford to go on vacation, especially the low-income group (B40)."

Vacation is secondary to putting food on the table," Solomon says.

To make it easier for workers to have vacations, he suggests that employers provide vacation leaves besides a annual leave.

"They could also pay an allowance to enable workers to have a vacation even if it’s within the country.

"They will help spur the economy and motivate workers."

The government can also provide tax exemption to employers who offer such benefits as they will be acting in the best interest of the workers," he says.

Solomon says it is difficult to pull off the Golden Week because Malaysia is a multicultural nation, with various celebrations at different times.

"Both Japan and China are monocolonial, and that allows them to have common customs, including festivals."

"A few national holidays also fall within the Golden Week.

"These are not deducted from workers’ annual leaves," he points out.