

A moment with Jongeun (Christina) Lee

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Christina is no stranger to the Middle East and is well positioned to advise Korean clients on Middle Eastern business practices, legal process and decision making. She spent time growing up in Iran and in Libya. Her sentimental attachment to the culture and commitment to understanding its ways has brought her back here with her own family.

Christina originally found an interest in law whilst studying to become a diplomat. She found the reasoning behind law attractive and the technicality appealed to her logical, mathematical mind. At law school in New York she found laws importance to the way we live and its relevance to the economy, society and remembers the US way of studying the discipline very exciting: "I really enjoyed the Socratic way the law schools conducted the classes in the US- lots of debate and hours of open thinking and discussion. I enjoyed every single day of law school. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life."

Before graduating Christina had identified corporate law as the path she wanted to follow, "corporate law is adaptable and I realised it could take me to Asia, to Europe, to the Middle East. Not knowing where life would take me meant that I could relate this area of law to most countries I might find myself residing in." Immediately upon graduation, it took her to the hard and fast-paced life at the New York office of one the world's largest firms, DLA Piper. After the birth of her son gave her time to step back and relocate her family to Korea, she had eight months at home as a full-time mum. "The break stopped me from burning out. It gave me a moment to prioritise and reevaluate where I was going."

It was around this period that her father died. Christina's father had been a diplomat and with him she lived a very international life. She has lived in eight countries from Vietnam, to Iran, to Germany and the death of her father prompted a lot of personal reflection. "It's challenging for me to reflect on my identity as it's so linked to where you are from - which I struggle to really know. When my father died I thought a lot about how happy we had been living in the Middle East." This led to a lot of soul searching and the revival of Arabic lessons.

With her young family a priority, Christina went back to work in Korea, at the largest local firm, Kim & Chang: "The move from an international law firm to a Korean firm relied upon my business languages. It gave me great exposure to mediating between foreign clients in Korea and Korean clients conducting business outside the country."

Her time at Kim & Chang was perfect training for her move to Al Tamimi, where she is doing a great job translating the Middle Eastern business sensibility and process to Korean clients. She made the move after six years back in Korea where her longing for a return to the Middle East grew stronger.

Going to an Arabic firm was a strategic decision for Christina, who saw gaining a new perspective and independence as the key to being the best mediator between Korean and Arab business. Christina identified Al Tamimi as a firm she'd had experience with in the past and as an ideal 'home' for her in the Gulf. When comparing the culture of the team at Al Tamimi to her understanding of the wider legal market, Christina says: "There's nothing comparable to Al Tamimi anywhere else in the world."

So far she's loving her job and life in Abu Dhabi. She has great views of the city from both her office and home and samples the city's restaurants regularly. "I don't have a favourite restaurant yet, I have been surprised by the high standard of dining across the board in the UAE. I also enjoy the supermarkets here which seem to sell everything from everywhere!" Christina is a bit of an amateur chef who cooks a range

of international cuisines in her spare time. She is taking full advantage of the mix of cultures at Al Tamimi and regularly takes home arabic and indian cooking tips and recipes from the team. "My assistant who is from India is a fabulous cook and I can learn what real Indian food is about."

Although after a short period the family are still to move all of their belongings over, her son is enjoying school in their new hometown and mum and dad are looking forward to further exploring their new environment. It's been quite a journey to get here, but Christina feels like she's found a place she can call home, a truly metropolitan city in the heart of the middle east.