

OCT 2024

# ScandAsia

**BUSINESS:**

Saxo Bank close Hong Kong and China offices

**INTERNATIONAL:**

Swedish Embassy in Phnom Penh closed

**COMMUNITY**

Singapore adopts flexible work policies inspired by Scandinavia

**How to  
select the best  
Kindergarten  
for your child**



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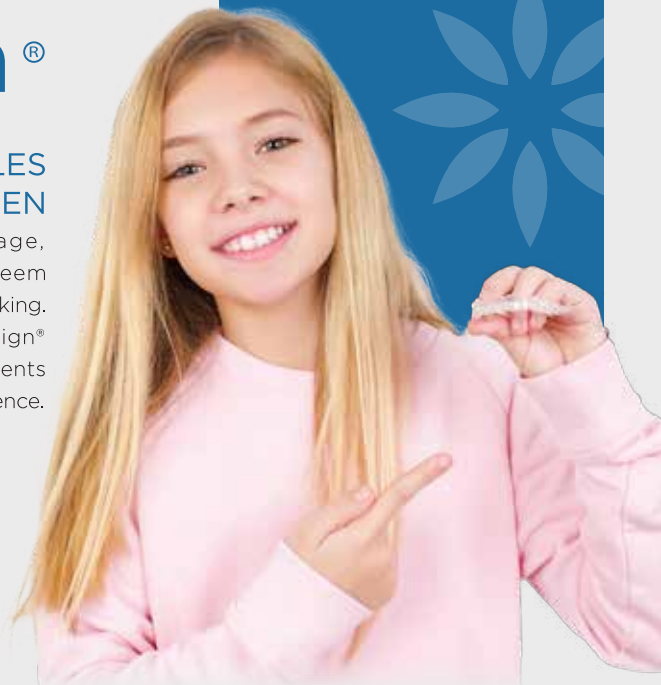
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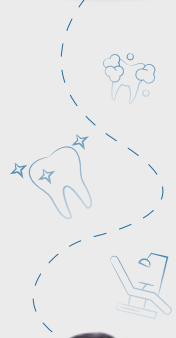
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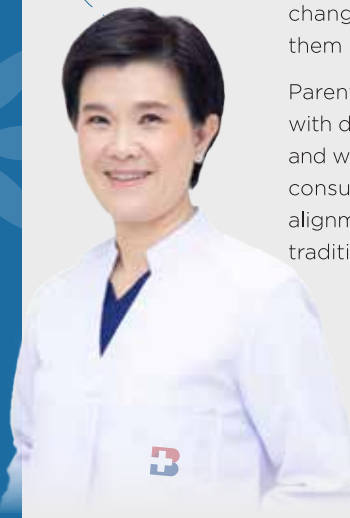
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# Danes Worldwide shortlist needed changes

Politicians, decision makers, experts and global Danes gathered on 28 August 2024 at Christiansborg, the home of the Danish Parliament, to discuss the many issues that global Danes experience in relation to Denmark.

Prior to this hearing, Danes Worldwide conducted a survey among 3000 Danes about their relationship to Denmark.

Every third of the Danes surveyed (36%) considered relatively few issues to be serious obstacles for them when considering returning home to Denmark. Almost all of them felt that not only themselves but also Denmark as a whole could benefit considerably by making a few simple corrections to facilitate this.

- Make it easier for Danish young people to remain Danish citizens. The Danish Parliament should make an amendment to Section 8 of the Citizenship Act to facilitate this. When applying to remain a Danish citizen, registration in the "CPR register" should be sufficient documentation that the young Dane "has lived in the kingdom" and the passport-issuing authorities should not additionally ask to see a Danish citizenship certificate.
- Introduce and disseminate a fundamentally different approach in the Danish administration towards Danes returning home with international experience and a wish to contribute their acquired knowledge to the benefit of themselves and the Danish society. In particular, welcome the accompanying spouse and help him/her integrate in Denmark. Create also a special unit at the Danish Revenue Department which specializes in moving out and moving home for global Danes, so that

communication and requirements are clear and consistent. Make it easy to understand for people without up-to-date knowledge of the Danish tax system what the rules are.

- Establish clear criteria when young Danes return to Denmark after studying abroad how their grades and courses can be translated and qualify them to work in Denmark or continue their studies in Denmark. Create also a database of young Danes studying abroad where Danish companies can "shop" for talent.
- Register Danes working in international organizations and involve them actively in dialogue with relevant authorities in Denmark to maximize utilization of their unique knowledge. A similar list already exists for Danes working in the EU administration.
- Stop taking voting rights away for Danes just because they live abroad.

Nothing in the above shortlist of requirements seem to be of a political nature but rather administrative. Get on with it!



**Gregers Moller**  
Editor in Chief

## ScandAsia

ScandAsia is a printed magazine and online media covering the people and businesses of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland living and working in China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

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ScandAsia subscribers are typically Nordic expats and companies from the Nordic countries living in and active in Asia. Another group of subscribers are Nordic people living in the Nordic countries who subscribe to ScandAsia for personal or business reasons. We also have many Asian subscribers, who for a wide range of reasons are following the activities of the Nordic expats and companies via a subscription to ScandAsia.

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# Vietnam and Norway strengthen bilateral cooperation for energy transition



Vietnam's ambitious goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 has gained momentum through the Just Energy Transition Partnership.

During a meeting on September 18 between Deputy Minister of

Industry and Trade Nguyen Hoang Long and Norwegian Ambassador Hilde Solbakken in Hanoi, both sides emphasized the critical role of the partnership in advancing clean energy.

Deputy Minister Long out-

lined Vietnam's efforts under the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) framework, with the Ministry of Industry and Trade establishing eight working groups focusing on key areas such as offshore wind power, smart power grids, and green hydrogen. The collaboration aims to accelerate Vietnam's energy transition in line with the National Power Development Plan 8.

The Deputy Minister praised Norway's contributions, noting that JETP partners will support Norwegian energy investments in Vietnam. Ambassador Solbakken commended Vietnam's commitment to the energy transition and reaffirmed Norway's dedication to assisting Vietnam in achieving its sustainability goals.

This strengthened bilateral cooperation marks a significant step toward a greener future for both nations.

## Swedish Embassy in Phnom Penh closed

The Embassy of Sweden's Section Office in Phnom Penh was formally closed and ceased operations on September 30, 2024, the Embassy wrote on its Facebook page.

This was part of the Swedish government's decision to phase out bilateral development cooperation with Cambodia.

However, the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok continues to represent Sweden in Cambodia. The Consulate of Sweden in Phnom Penh also remains open and continues to offer basic consular services for Swedish citizens in Cambodia.



On its Facebook page, the Embassy also announced the closure of its Facebook page. The Embassy

thanked everyone for their support and interaction over the years.



# Singapore adopts flexible work policies inspired by Scandinavian success

Singapore’s decision to implement flexible work arrangements (FWA) mirrors successful strategies seen in Scandinavian countries, where work-life balance is a key contributor to happiness and productivity. Starting December 1, 2024, the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests will encourage Singaporean employers to adopt practices such as remote work, staggered hours, and job-sharing. This formal process ensures that FWA requests are handled fairly, aiming to balance organizational needs with employees’ personal lives.

In Scandinavia, countries like Finland, Denmark, and Sweden have

long embraced FWA, with major cities like Copenhagen and Helsinki ranking among the best for work-life balance. Finland, the world’s happiest country according to the 2024 World Happiness Report, credits its happiness to such policies, with almost half of jobs offering hybrid or remote work. Similarly, Denmark and Sweden also emphasize flexible work options, contributing to their high rankings on global happiness indexes.

By following this path, Singapore aims to improve productivity, reduce absenteeism, and foster a more family-friendly and sustainable workplace culture. The Scandinavian experience shows how such policies



can lead to greater employee satisfaction, talent retention, and even environmental benefits, as reduced commuting lowers pollution. With this move, Singapore strengthens its position as a forward-thinking nation in the global workforce, while enhancing the well-being of its workers—just as Scandinavia has done for decades.



**DOLPHIN BAY RESORT** is a family run beach front resort in Sam Roi Yot National Park, offering Bungalows, comfortable Rooms, Suites & Pool Villa. Enjoy a relaxing holiday, away from the crowd, where there is something for everyone



# Swedish company Vilja enters Thailand to drive digital banking innovation

Swedish digital banking company Vilja has expanded into Thailand, marking its entry into the ASEAN market. At a launch event in Bangkok, the company signed partnerships with four local firms to boost financial inclusion and foster innovation in Thailand's banking sector. This initiative introduces next-generation banking solutions, aiming to help underserved communities while strengthening ties between Thailand and the Nordics.

During the ceremony, Sweden's Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Anna Hammargren, emphasized

the importance of innovation for achieving sustainable development goals. She noted that collaboration between Thai and Swedish companies is key to driving future financial progress. Vilja's CEO, Fredrik Ulvenholm, highlighted Thailand's role as ASEAN's second-largest economy, stressing its potential to lead the region in adopting advanced digital banking technologies.

Vilja Managing Director APAC, Juan Carlos Mauritz, explained that these partnerships demonstrate the demand for digital solutions in Thailand. Furthermore, Vilja's approach

goes beyond just providing technology, aiming to foster public-private partnerships to enhance financial inclusion.

Additionally, the Thai FinTech Association, Vilja, depa, and the Swedish FinTech Association announced a joint initiative. This collaboration will strengthen innovation between Thailand and the Nordic region, boosting financial technology across both markets.

---

# Finland falling behind in attracting foreign workers from Asia



Finland is not attracting foreign workers like other competitive countries, according to the Finnish media Yle News, who has interviewed multiple immigration researchers.

With an unemployment rate at over 8 percent, Finland has one of the highest rates among EU member states. This calls for more foreign workers to help out in various sectors, like the social and health sector.

Finland primarily targets international recruitment from its partner countries: India, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Brazil, which together make up a quarter of all work-based permit applicants.

Many Filipinos are already working in the healthcare sector, but Markku Sippola, a senior lecturer at the University of Helsinki says Finland is falling behind other countries.

"It will soon become evident that Japan and China, which have never taken in many immigrants, are competing for these same Vietnam-

ese and Filipino caregivers."

Overall, the experts interviewed by Yle agreed that Finland lags behind many competitor countries in attracting work-based immigration.

"There is potential in the recent surge in work-based immigration. However, it's hard to gauge how sustainable this development is regarding whether people will continue to come and how many will actually stay," says Pasi Saukkonen, an immigration researcher at the Helsinki City Information Service to Yle News.

# Three Chinese businessmen fall victim to Danish CEO impersonation scam

Three Chinese businessmen arrived at Power's headquarters in Glostrup, Denmark, expecting to finalize a major electronics deal with CEO Jesper Boysen. However, they soon learned they had been deceived by an impersonator.

The scam started at the IFA technology fair in Berlin, where a man posing as Boysen handed out fake business cards and placed large electronics orders, including a request for 5,000 cooktops. One of Power's white goods executives discovered the fraud when a Chinese businesswoman inquired about the

order. Boysen confirmed he wasn't present at the fair, and the order was immediately canceled.

Power has since received more questions regarding substantial orders allegedly placed in China, including one large enough to require two 40-foot containers. Boysen warned that the scam, involving millions, went beyond mere pranks and could still have unforeseen consequences.

The company has reported the matter to Danish police and is also working with IFA organizers to alert other businesses.



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# Nordic ambassadors in support of Hanoi Pride



The Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish ambassadors in Vietnam emphasized the importance of a more inclusive future for LGBTIQ+ individuals in Vietnam during this year's Hanoi Pride.

"Let's gather and celebrate the beautiful diversity within ourselves," said Norwegian Ambassador Hilde Solbakken in a video alongside her Nordic colleagues.

The ambassadors shared a unified message: to come together and embrace love for one another, not just during Pride, but beyond.

"You have the right to be exactly who you want to be, and no one can tell you otherwise," said Finnish Ambassador Keijo Norvanto.

Hanoi Pride took place from September 9-22, 2024.

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# Beijing subway now easier for tourists as Norway joins China's visa-free list

Tourists in Beijing can now navigate the city's massive subway network with greater ease. As of September 13, international credit cards such as Visa and MasterCard are accepted at subway turnstiles, allowing travelers to simply "tap-and-go" without the need for purchasing tickets from vending machines. This new feature was made possible through the upgrading of over 20,000 facilities across 490 stations on Beijing's 27 subway lines.

Beijing is the first city in mainland China to adopt this system, making it more accessible for foreign tourists. Dennis Chang, MasterCard's executive vice president for Greater China, praised the initiative, noting how it streamlines travel for visitors and eliminates cumbersome steps. This move also aligns with Beijing's broader strategy to position itself as an international exchange center.

Coinciding with the subway



upgrades, China has also expanded its visa-free travel policies. Norway is one of the latest countries added to the list, along with Poland and Australia. This has significantly boosted tourism, with inbound trips by foreigners reaching 17.3 million between January and July 2024—a 183% increase from the previous year.

The new visa-free travel option for Norwegian citizens, combined with the more convenient public transport system, makes China even more accessible. As China continues to open up to international visitors, improvements like these enhance the overall travel experience for millions of tourists.

# Danish company Tempur opens immersive showroom in the Philippines

Tempur, a global sleep solutions brand from Denmark, launched a new experiential showroom in Uptown Bonifacio, Taguig. This follows the success of the first Tempur cinema in the same location, where visitors can relax on Tempur mattresses and adjustable beds.

The new showroom offers a range of sleep products, including mattresses, pillows, and accessories. A standout feature is the immersive sleep pod, allowing customers to experience Tempur's products firsthand. Visitors can even take a nap to understand the brand's unique comfort and support better.

Celebrities like Maja Salvador-Núñez and Mylene Dizon attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony, adding flair to the opening event. Stephen Sy, president of Focus Global Inc., highlighted how the showroom complements the Tempur cinema,



letting customers easily purchase products they've tested.

Tempur is known for its NASA-developed material that adapts to body temperature, providing optimal support and pressure relief. The brand recently earned the "Made in Green" certification, ensuring that its

products meet high environmental and safety standards.

This new showroom aims to redefine sleep experiences for customers in the Philippines while promoting eco-conscious sleep solutions.

# Thailand's king legalizes same sex marriage



Thailand's landmark marriage equality bill was signed into law by King Maha Vajiralongkorn on September 24, making Thailand the third country in Asia, after Nepal and Taiwan, to legalize same-sex marriage.

The new law will come into effect in 120 days, meaning LGBTQ+ couples will be able to register their marriages in January next year.

The marriage law adopts gender-neutral terms, replacing "men," "women," "husbands," and "wives,"

and grants adoption and inheritance rights to same-sex couples.

The king's approval marks the culmination of years of campaigning for equality. Thailand, known for its LGBTQ+ tolerance, has seen strong public support for this reform.

# China bans international adoptions

China has prohibited the adoption of Chinese children by foreign families, ac-

ording to a statement from the country's Foreign Ministry. The only exception to this ban is if the adop-

tive parents are biological relatives of the child or a stepchild.

The last adoption from China to Norway occurred in 2017, with 145 children adopted in 2007, according to NTB. Both Norway and Denmark have raised concerns about international adoptions, particularly regarding cases of falsified documents and procedural violations.

In Sweden, Chinese children were the second largest group of adopted children in 2022, with just under 3,200 adoptions, according to Statista Research Department.



## Adoption seekers to sue Norwegian state over halt in foreign adoptions

A group of around 60 prospective adoptive parents is preparing a lawsuit against the Norwegian state after the Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) suspended adoptions from several countries. The group includes families who had planned to adopt from Thailand, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

Advocate Mette Yvonne Larsen, representing the group, claims that Bufdir's decision to suspend adoptions is a bureaucratic overreaction. According to Larsen, the halt has left many families in limbo, with their adoption processes abruptly stopped.

The suspension follows investigations into potential ethical issues in international adoptions, including cases of kidnapping and falsified documents. Although the Norwegian government opposed the halt,



Bufdir has the authority to withdraw adoption approvals and has done so for several countries.

The families affected are calling for a reversal of the decision, warning that the adoption freeze could

permanently block opportunities for international adoptions. If their complaints are not addressed, they intend to take legal action against the state.

# Maersk shifts focus as Singapore gains six Europe routes

Singapore is set to gain six new Asia-North Europe shipping routes, while Maersk-controlled Tanjung Pelepas in Malaysia will lose two, as part of a global reshuffle in shipping alliances. This reorganization involves the restructuring of the Ocean Alliance, THE Alliance, and 2M into the Gemini Cooperation, Premier Alliance, and standalone MSC.

Danish shipping giant Maersk is adjusting its strategy by reducing direct routes under the Gemini network, focusing on improving schedule reliability. Key ports in Southeast Asia are affected, with Vietnam's Cai Mep gaining two new routes. In Europe, Antwerp will lose four services as shipping activity shifts to Rotterdam and Wilhelmshaven.



This reshuffle reflects evolving strategies among shipping leaders, like Maersk, aiming to enhance efficiency through hub-and-spoke operations. The changes will impact

logistics between Southeast Asia and Europe, offering more services in some regions but fewer direct options for others.

# Shipping company Mærsk breaks internal ban on routes



Danish shipping company Mærsk has broken an internal ban on shipping through Russia. Mærsk admits the mistake to ShippingWatch.

The company Shanghai Tiejang Multi-Modal Transportation (TMT) Co. Ltd., in which Mærsk holds a nearly one-third stake, has been handling the transportation.

According to the reports, the shipment involved two containers of powdered milk being transported from Kazakhstan to China. The route passed through Russia.

"This was a clear mistake due to a lack of capacity on the direct route. We have instructed TMT to ensure this does not happen again," said Maersk's Chief Compliance Officer, Alexandra Belmonte.



“

*I consider myself extremely lucky to combine my work with my personal interest in foreign policy.*

”

# Danny Annan: The New Danish Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia

Danny Annan is the newly appointed Danish Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia. During his posting, he will be joined by his wife, Carinne, and two of his children, Markus and Eva. His oldest son, Karl, is currently studying in Copenhagen.

*By Gregers Møller*

**D**anny Annan's name may not sound typically Danish, and when asked about it, he explains:

“People with this last name are usually either from Ghana or Scotland. But in my case my father is from Lebanon,” he shares.

“My mother is Danish. They met in Lebanon but then moved to Denmark, where I grew up in the Copenhagen suburb Vanløse,” he adds.

Danny's background likely contributed to his early interest in foreign affairs. The Civil War in Lebanon broke

out in 1975 when Danny was just five years old and lasted until he was 20. Over the years, he followed his father's deep personal interest in the conflict, which grew into his passion for foreign policy.

When the war ended, Danny was already studying law at the University of Copenhagen with aspirations of joining the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His focus was on human rights, EU law, and international law, all with a long-term goal of shaping a career in diplomacy.

Driven by curiosity about the world, Danny took two separate year-long breaks from his studies to travel.



In 1991, he visited Thailand for the first time, also traveling to Malaysia and Indonesia during the same trip. By 1995, he traveled to Latin America, China and Southern Africa. Later travels brought him three more times to Thailand. In 1996, after graduating, he immediately began working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"I was very fortunate to be accepted to work at the Ministry," Danny says humbly.

"I consider myself extremely lucky to combine my work with my personal interest in foreign policy."

Danny's diplomatic career quickly accelerated. Three years after joining the Ministry, he was appointed Deputy Head of Mission at the Danish Embassy in Damascus, Syria. More recently, he served as Denmark's Ambassador to Turkey and Azerbaijan, and earlier as Ambassador to Iran.

Having worked in the Ministry for 28 years—19 of which were spent abroad—Danny is now starting a new chapter as the Danish Ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia.

"I find it a refreshing change of environment, and the work here is fascinating," he says.

## Tasks at the Danish Embassy

Among his responsibilities in Bangkok, the Embassy handles visa applications not just for Thailand and Cambodia, but also for Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji.

"Bangkok is one of our busiest embassies worldwide for consular cases," Danny explains, attributing the high volume to the large number of Danes visiting beautiful Thailand.

"We haven't quite reached the pre-COVID numbers of Danish visitors, but we're getting close. One tour operator, TUI, reported a 78% increase in the number of Danish travelers in the autumn this year compared to last year, and that trend is continuing."

Another key area of focus for the Embassy is promoting trade between Denmark and Thailand.

"Last year, Danish exports of goods and services to Thailand totaled 6.1 billion DKK, with an 8.5% increase in volume, which is quite impressive," Danny points out.

"This year, for the first seven months, we've seen a 5.2% increase."

He also highlights the impact of Danish investments in Thailand, with 47,000 Thai employees working in businesses linked to Danish companies. Although he previously promoted Danish trade in Turkey, Danny emphasizes that his role is not about selling one country over another.

"My job is to provide a truthful and objective assessment of market opportunities to Danish companies," he says.

Monitoring political developments in the region is another priority, especially given the internal political tensions in Thailand.

"To help me form my understanding of the current situation, I've met with several of my Nordic ambassador colleagues and I am also in the process of meeting my

fellow EU ambassadors as well as many other diplomatic colleagues.

I will also continue to reach out to the Danish business community in Thailand in order to get a better understanding of the opportunities they see and challenges they face on the local market.

The Ambassador also emphasizes the excellent cooperation between the Nordic Embassies in Thailand. Every year, they organize the Nordic Run & Walk event in Bangkok, which helps strengthen ties with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and the Governor of Bangkok. In addition, the four embassies have decided to replace the individual National Day celebrations with a single Nordic Reception, where they celebrate their national days together. Another highlight of their collaboration is the Nordic Film Festival, which will kick off with the screening of the first film in the garden of the Danish Ambassador's residence next to the office building of the Embassy.

## New key staff at the Embassy

Danny leads a largely new team at the Danish Embassy in Bangkok, with key staff recently appointed. Dennis Blicher is the Head of the Visa Section, Charlotte Duelund leads Consular Affairs and Administration, and the new Deputy Head of Mission, Martin Hybel Havelykke, comes from a similar role in Moscow. Additionally, Ole Lindholm heads Commercial Affairs, and the new Danish Church Pastor, Nicolaj Stubbe Hørlyck, serves as the Social Attaché.

"I couldn't be more satisfied with this highly skilled team," Danny says.

Despite the recent staff changes, Danny reassures that the structure of Danish embassies worldwide allows for smooth transitions.

"All Danish embassies are set up in a way that allows a new team member to step in and immediately take over," he explains.

Another strength, he says, is the commercial sector expert structure that focuses on Denmark's high-priority areas in the region: Energy, defense and maritime, health-care, and food and agriculture. The Danish Embassy in Bangkok also has commercial sector experts in all these areas.

Over the coming year, Danny plans to meet with Danish residents in various parts of Thailand. These meetings will combine visits to Danish companies with events that offer local Danes an opportunity to meet the Ambassador and the consular team where they can address different issues they may have.

The first of these "consular outreach events" is planned for November, and likely with similar events to follow in Chiang Mai and Udonthani/Nongkhai.

This goes well in hand with his passion for traveling.

"I love experiencing something new. It doesn't have to be traveling far away. Right here in Bangkok, it is fascinating just to walk around in the different areas of Bangkok and experience their different characteristics. And tasting the differences as well, I might add," he laughs.



# How to select the best Kindergarten for your child

Kindergartens are not just a place for children to learn; they are places where expatriate families build connections, create memories, and find a sense of belonging. With thoughtful consideration and an open mind, you'll find a kindergarten that's the perfect fit for both your child and your family.

Raising children abroad presents unique challenges, especially when it comes to choosing the right educational environment. For expatriate families living in the bustling capitals of SouthEast Asia, the options can be both exciting and overwhelming. They all boast an array of international kindergartens, each offering different educational philosophies, curricula, and learning environments.

Selecting the best kindergarten is not just about finding a place for your child to play; it's about nurturing their development in a setting that aligns with your family's values and lifestyle. Let's look at some key factors for expats in Asia to consider when selecting a kindergarten, while also offering practical tips to ensure the process is as smooth as possible.

## Understand Your Child's Needs

Before diving into the various options, take a step back to reflect on what your child truly needs. Each child has unique qualities and developmental needs that should be central to your decision-making process. Start by asking yourself these questions:

- What is your child's temperament? Are they introverted or extroverted?
- How do they handle transitions? Are they adaptable, or do they need more time to adjust to new environments?
- What are your child's strengths and areas for growth? Do they have any special interests or talents that you'd like to nurture?

By understanding your child's individual needs, you'll be in a better position to evaluate which kindergarten will provide the right balance of stimulation, care, and opportunities for growth. Some children thrive in highly structured environments, while others flourish in more play-based, exploratory settings. It's essential to find a kindergarten that matches your child's learning style and pace.

## Understand Your Own Needs

As expatriate parents, your personal needs and lifestyle play a significant role in the decision-making process. You'll want a kindergarten that not only suits your child but also fits into your daily routine. Consider the following:

- **Location:** How close is the school to your home or workplace? In cities like Bangkok and Singapore, traffic can be unpredictable. A nearby school can reduce commute time and make school drop-offs and pick-ups more convenient.
- **Language and Communication:** Do you feel comfortable communicating with the school staff? You'll want to ensure that the teachers and administrators speak English fluently and can communicate clearly with you about your child's progress.
- **Community:** Does the school have an active parent community? Many international kindergartens host events and activities that bring expatriate families together, fostering friendships and support networks. For expatriate parents, having a social circle is often a key part of settling into a new country.
- **Tuition Fees:** Schools can vary significantly in cost. Be clear about your budget and what level of investment you're willing to make. However, don't let cost be the sole deciding factor; sometimes, a higher price tag reflects added value in terms of facilities, teacher quality, or smaller class sizes.

## Explore Different Educational Philosophies

International kindergartens in Bangkok and Singapore offer a wide variety of curricula, each with its own educational philosophy. Understanding the differences between



*Understanding the differences between the approaches can help you determine which style is best suited to your child.*



these approaches can help you determine which style is best suited to your child.

### **a. Montessori**

The Montessori method emphasizes child-led learning, where children are encouraged to explore their environment and learn through discovery. Teachers act as facilitators, providing children with the tools and guidance they need to develop independence and critical thinking. Montessori kindergartens are often preferred by parents who value a focus on practical life skills, self-directed learning, and a strong sense of autonomy.

### **b. Reggio Emilia**

Reggio Emilia schools emphasize collaboration, creativity, and exploration. The curriculum is flexible and project-based, often driven by the children's own interests. Teachers work as co-learners alongside the children, encouraging them to express their ideas through art, music, and imaginative play. This approach is ideal for parents who want their child to develop social and emotional skills in a nurturing and open-ended environment.

### **c. British Curriculum (EYFS)**

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a popular curriculum offered by many international kindergartens in both Bangkok and Singapore. The EYFS focuses on structured play and learning across seven key areas, including communication, physical development, and literacy. If you plan to enroll your child in a British international school later, starting with an EYFS-based kindergarten can ensure a seamless transition.

### **d. American Curriculum**

American international kindergartens follow a play-based approach that often includes a balance of structured learning and creative exploration. There is a strong emphasis on social development and fostering a love of learning. Many American curriculum schools offer well-rounded programs that also include physical education, art, and music.





*It ultimately comes down to trusting your instincts. You know your child best, and as a parent, you'll have a sense of whether a particular kindergarten feels right for them.*



#### **e. IB Primary Years Programme (PYP)**

The International Baccalaureate (IB) PYP framework focuses on inquiry-based learning, encouraging children to ask questions, think critically, and become global citizens. The PYP is ideal for parents looking for an internationally recognized curriculum that nurtures curiosity and intercultural understanding.

### **Visit the Kindergarten or Pre-Schools**

Once you've narrowed down your options based on curriculum, location, and community, it's time to visit the schools. This step is critical to understanding the school's culture and environment. Most international kindergartens in Bangkok and Singapore offer open house days or private tours where parents can meet the teachers, explore the facilities, and ask questions.

#### **During your visit, pay attention to:**

- **Classroom Environment:** Are the classrooms bright, clean, and inviting? Do they provide a variety of learning materials and play areas that stimulate your child's curiosity?
- **\*\*Teacher-Student Ratio\*\*:** A lower teacher-to-student ratio generally allows for more personalized attention. Ask about the school's policy on class sizes and how teachers manage group dynamics.
- **Interaction Between Teachers and Students:** Observe how teachers interact with the children. Are they warm, engaged, and supportive? Do the children appear happy and involved in activities?

- **Play Spaces:** Outdoor play is essential for young children's physical development. Check if the Kindergarten has safe, well-maintained outdoor areas where children can run, climb, and explore.

Don't hesitate to ask the school about their safety protocols, emergency procedures, and how they handle issues like bullying or behavioral challenges.

### **Consider the Logistics**

While the curriculum and environment are important, practical considerations can significantly impact your family's day-to-day life. Here are some logistical factors to keep in mind:

#### **a. Opening Hours**

Do the Kindergarten or Pre-School's hours align with your work schedule? Some kindergartens offer half-day or full-day programs, while others have after-school care or extracurricular activities. Ensure that the school's schedule accommodates your family's needs.

#### **b. Transportation**

If the school is not within walking distance, check if they offer a school bus service. In most cities in Asia, traffic can be a major concern, so a reliable transportation option can save you time and stress.

#### **c. Meal Plans**

Does the school provide meals or snacks? If so, ask about their meal plan and whether they accommodate dietary restrictions. In multicultural cities like Bangkok and Singapore, many schools are accustomed to catering to different cultural and dietary needs.



#### **d. Transition Programs**

Starting kindergarten can be a big transition for young children, especially if they're moving from a home environment. Some schools offer transition programs, where children gradually increase their time at school to help them adjust. Ask if the school provides any support for children (and parents!) during the transition phase.

### **Take Advantage of Parent Networks**

Expatriate communities in all the major cities in Asia are incredibly diverse, and many parents have already navigated the process of finding the right kindergarten. Reach out to other expatriate families for advice and recommendations. Social media groups, online forums, and even local expatriate clubs can be excellent resources for gathering firsthand insights.

During your search, you might come across kindergartens that have glowing reputations within the expat community. While recommendations are valuable, remember that every family's needs are different. What worked well for one child may not be the best fit for yours, so it's important to balance advice with your own priorities.

### **Trust Your Instincts**

After doing your research, visiting schools, and seeking advice, it ultimately comes down to trusting your instincts. You know your child best, and as a parent, you'll have a sense of whether a particular kindergarten feels right for them. If you leave a school tour with a strong sense of

excitement and comfort, that's a positive sign.

Conversely, if something feels off, even if you can't quite put your finger on it, trust that feeling and explore other options. Remember, finding the right kindergarten is about more than just ticking boxes – it's about choosing an environment where your child will feel safe, supported, and happy.

### **Flexibility in Expectations**

Finally, it's important to remember that your first choice may not be your only choice. Children grow and change, and so do their needs. Be open to the possibility that what works for your child today might not be the best option a year or two down the road. If you find that your child isn't thriving in a particular setting, don't hesitate to explore other options.

Many expatriate parents make the decision to change schools based on their child's evolving needs, and that's perfectly okay. The most important thing is to remain flexible and responsive to your child's development.

Choosing the right kindergarten or pre-school is a deeply personal decision that involves balancing your child's needs, your family's lifestyle, and practical considerations. By taking the time to explore different educational philosophies, visiting schools, and seeking advice from the expatriate community, you can make an informed choice that will set your child on a positive path for the future.



# Student Agency in the Early Years

By Sarah Gaughan, Bangkok Patana School

At Bangkok Patana School, our youngest children are actively encouraged to lead their own learning through play and exploration. We often refer to learning as being 'Child Led' or 'Child Initiated' but why is student agency so important?

The more engaged young children are in their own learning, the more they focus their attention for sustained periods. We have all experienced the attention span of a toddler when we try to push our own agenda! The sustained attention that children demonstrate in play is remarkably longer. Play motivates sustained thinking, which leads to strong neurological pathways being formed in the brain; both physiological and cognitive.

## Education as a social process

An Early Years education model must be based on providing the fundamental foundations of lifelong learning. Early Years education has to be a social process, based on real-life experiences and relationships in a community that is inclusive and democratic - a community where everyone teaches, and everyone learns. We now recognise that all children have their own 'Funds of Knowledge' (Moll 2005), or 'expertise' to share with the community. These are based on individual experiences and interests outside of school. It's important to give children the opportunity to express themselves, their interests and talents through representational play.

'Free flow' play or 'learning in the moment' allows adults to facilitate this knowledge-sharing in context. Perhaps examples are the best way to explain:

- A child with a new baby at home will demonstrate their new knowledge and experience of caring for babies through role play which will enrich and extend the role-play of other children playing alongside them as they watch and listen to the 'expert' play.
- A child who enjoys cooking pancakes at the weekend can share their pancake making expertise with other children in the kitchen, explaining their knowledge and understanding to support others in their learning.

These are the moments in the



Foundation Stage when children are at their most confident and demonstrate their capabilities. Children thrive when given an opportunity to show what they already know. These are also the best moments for adults to observe and assess children. This more accurate assessment informs adults of children's genuine next steps (unlike relying on the results of a test). Adults become experts on where individual children are in all aspects of development and how



to extend their learning and development even further using their interests and fascinations as a vehicle.

This is why in the Foundation Stage at Bangkok Patana School, we follow children's interests, observe their play and do everything we can to give children a voice in their early education. If they love insects, we plant more flowers; if they love to build, we provide more interesting blocks; if they love to sing, we provide a stage.

It is also why we value our home/school partnerships so much. The more we learn about who chil-

dren are outside of school, the more we can understand and interpret what we see in their play. When we truly listen to children, we have their attention. Then, we not only engage their brain but also their heart. Children love nothing more than being listened to by attentive, supportive adults who respond and help to make their play fantasies come true as they play and learn together. We refer to this as the 'ethics of care' (Gilligan 1980) and 'professional love'. It is why we aim to put agency at the heart of our vision for early years education here at Patana.



# Nurturing Young Minds: ISB's Early Childhood Education Program



The Early Childhood Education Program at International School Bangkok (ISB) is a thoughtfully crafted journey that nurtures young learners through a child-centered, holistic approach. Emphasizing cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and creative development, the program thrives in a multicultural setting that sparks curiosity and joyful learning. Drawing inspiration from the Reggio Emilia philosophy, ISB views children as capable explorers, problem solvers, and investigators, who express their ideas through various symbolic languages, such as painting, sculpting, and drama. By striking a balance



between structure and freedom, the program empowers children to take risks, make discoveries, and connect their learning to the real world.

In August 2022, ISB elevated its Early Childhood Program with the appointment of Honey Tondre as Vice Principal: Early Childhood Specialist and Sarah Bailey as Atelierista. These additions underscore ISB's unwavering commitment to providing exceptional educational experiences for its youngest learners.

Honey Tondre's role is pivotal in refining the program to align with the latest best practices in early childhood education, ensuring a cohesive and innovative learning environment. Sarah Bailey, with her expertise in early childhood education and a background in art and dance, has dedicated the past two years to integrating expressive languages into classroom environments. She works closely with small groups of

students and coaches teachers on developing expressive language studios. These studios allow children to explore and communicate their ideas through symbolic languages such as painting, dance, wire, clay, paper, and drama, fostering creativity, collaboration, and a deeper connection to learning.

The PreK program at ISB emphasizes guided inquiry, offering children opportunities to learn through investigative experiences. With an array of materials at their fingertips, children are encouraged to explore concepts, make connections, and achieve key cognitive milestones, including building positive learning dispositions, enhancing memory skills, and developing symbolic communication.

The program is thoughtfully structured around clear learning objectives and developmental outcomes in the following areas:

- Language and Literacy Development
- Mathematics
- Inquiry & Cognitive Development
- Social Emotional Development
- The Arts
- Physical Development

Through this comprehensive approach, ISB creates a nurturing and stimulating environment that supports the holistic development of each child. Our dedicated teaching staff, in collaboration with Honey Tondre and Sarah Bailey, ensures that our youngest Panther Cubs are equipped with the skills, confidence, and curiosity they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

*Written by Honey Tondre,  
Elementary School Vice Principal*





## Nurturing Young Minds: NIST's Play-Based Curriculum

With our play-based curriculum, supportive community, and focus on diversity and language learning, NIST Early Years offers a truly unique and enriching learning experience that prepares students to thrive in a global community.

### A Haven of Learning: NIST's Play-Based Approach

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to forget the simple joy of play. At NIST International School, play is not just a pastime; it's a powerful tool for learning. This innovative educational approach, known as play-based learning, is designed to nurture young minds and prepare them for the challenges of the future.

In this interview, we sit down with Lauren Hateley-Crowe, Vice

Principal for Early Years to Year 1 at NIST International School, located in the heart of Bangkok. Lauren shares insights into what sets their teaching methods apart and how they create an engaging learning environment for their youngest students.

### A Playground for Curious Minds: A Student-Centred Approach

Our play-based curriculum encourages exploration, curiosity, and cre-



ativity. We provide children with a safe and stimulating environment where they can learn through play, fostering a love of learning that will last a lifetime. As children play together, they learn to collaborate, share, and empathize. These essential life skills are as important as academic achievements, and they lay the foundation for future success.

Our curriculum is also designed to be adaptable as we carefully observe each child's progress and tailor our guidance accordingly.

This approach helps bridge the gap between home and school, making the transition to formal education a seamless experience.

In a world that is constantly changing, the ability to think critically, problem-solve, and adapt is more important than ever.

## A Nurturing Environment Beyond the Classroom: A Sanctuary of Familiarity and Support

In the ever-changing world we live in, the transition for young children to come to school can be particularly daunting. Our play-based approach helps to ease this transition by providing a familiar and supportive environment. By fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging exploration, we help children feel com-

fortable and confident in their new surroundings. Our focus on social-emotional development also equips them with the essential skills they need to navigate the challenges of the real world, whilst allowing them to feel safe, valued, and encouraged to explore their interest. From morning meetings that build a sense of belonging to outdoor learning experiences that connect children with nature, NIST creates a nurturing environment where curiosity can flourish.

## Language Learning & Diversity: A Gateway to Global Citizenship

Language learning is a cornerstone of our educational model. Beginning in the Early Years, our students are exposed to the Thai language and immerse themselves in Thai culture. In Year 1, all students learn Thai and



as they progress to Year 2, they have the opportunity to further enrich their language journey through our World Language Programme choices, which include 12 Home Languages (Danish and Swedish are among our World Languages) and another 4 Language Acquisition options. We support the Finnish language by offering our facilities on Sundays to the Finnish Language School in Bangkok as part of the Finnish community in Thailand. This diverse language curriculum equips our students with the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

For more information, please visit <https://www.nist.ac.th/>, call +66 (0) 2 017 5888, or email us at [nist@nist.ac.th](mailto:nist@nist.ac.th).





## Ready for School: The Crucial Role of Playgroup in Early Learning

*Kate Chang, Bangkok Prep Playgroup Leader*

Children under five are in a crucial stage of rapid brain and skill development. They need a stimulating environment where they can play, learn and so-

cialise with their peers. Bangkok Prep Playgroup provides exactly that, offering a rich variety of early learning experiences designed for babies, toddlers and young children. It's not only a place for children to develop essential social skills and make new friends but also a community for parents and caregivers to connect, share experiences and build lasting friendships.

Children learn to communicate effectively, take turns, share and resolve conflicts in a supportive environment. With parents and caregivers nearby, children feel secure and are able to express their emotions freely, fostering the development of social and emotional skills at their own pace.

Engaging in activities like sensory play, painting, arts and crafts and both indoor and outdoor games, children refine their fine and gross motor skills, a key aspect of physical development. These hands-on experiences also support cognitive growth, helping children think critically and creatively.

Regular attendance creates consistency and structure, which is vital for young children's sense of security and overall well-being. By nurturing creativity and imagination, Playgroup prepares children for their next steps in Early Years education, ensuring they are well-prepared and confident as they transition into school life.





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# Teacher Led Playgroup



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Music, Movement & Sensory

**Toddler ( 1 - 2 years old )**

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Baby Explorer

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**School Ready ( 2 - 3 years old )**

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Little Explorer, Little Scientist and Little Artist



## Understanding the importance of political engagement

In a rapidly changing world, young people are increasingly called upon to engage with political issues, not just as a civic duty but as a crucial part of shaping their future. The social and economic challenges they will inherit require them to be informed, proactive, and resilient. Involvement in political discourse equips them with the tools to navigate these complexities and to influence the direction of the societies they will one day lead. The challenges facing today's youth are multifaceted, ranging from climate change and economic inequality to social justice and public health.

These are not abstract issues; they are real-world problems that will affect young people's lives, their communities, and the global landscape. Engaging in political issues allows young people to understand the mechanisms of change, to develop critical thinking, and to become active participants in the decision-making processes that will



shape their futures. By grappling with these issues early on, young people learn to navigate the complexities of the modern world. They become more than just passive recipients of policies; they become influencers of change. Political engagement helps young people develop a sense of agency, enabling them to advocate for their interests and those of their communities.

### Brighton College Bangkok's Model United Nations Conference

One of the most effective ways for young people to immerse themselves in political issues is through participation in Model United Nations (MUN) conferences. Brighton College Bangkok hosts the largest MUN conference in Southeast Asia,

with over 600 delegates and advisers attending from nearly 50 schools. This platform offers a unique opportunity for young people to step into the shoes of diplomats, debating global issues, and negotiating resolutions. Participation in MUN develops a wide range of skills that are essential for navigating political landscapes. Delegates are required to research complex issues, understand different perspectives, and articulate their positions clearly and persuasively. These skills are invaluable not only in political arenas but also in any field that requires critical thinking, communication, and collaboration.

Moreover, MUN fosters a deep understanding of international relations and global governance. By simulating the workings of the United Nations, students gain insight into how decisions are made on a global scale and the challenges of achieving consensus. This understanding is crucial for young people who will need to address global issues such as climate change, poverty, and conflict in their lifetimes. The conference also emphasises the importance of

empathy and compromise—qualities that are essential in both politics and life. By engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds, students learn to appreciate different viewpoints and find common ground, even in the face of disagreement. These experiences not only prepare them for future leadership roles but also help them become more responsible and informed global citizens.

### Brighton College Bangkok's Aspiring Medics Conference

Another example of young people engaging with pressing social issues is Brighton College Bangkok's Aspiring Medics Conference, held in February 2024. With over 200 attendees, this conference provided a platform for future healthcare professionals to explore the challenges and opportunities within the medical field. Healthcare is one of the most critical sectors where young people can make a significant impact. The conference offered students the chance to delve into the realities of the profession, from the ethical



dilemmas faced by doctors to the complexities of public health systems. By engaging with these issues, students were encouraged to think about the future of healthcare and their potential role in addressing its challenges.

This experience is particularly relevant given the ongoing global health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference highlighted the importance of being medically qualified in a world where public health challenges are becoming increasingly complex. It also underscored the vast range of opportunities available to those in the medical field, from clinical practice to research and public health policy. By participating in such conferences, young people not only gain a better understanding of the healthcare industry but also develop a sense of responsibility towards society. They are inspired to be part of the solution to the problems they will inevitably face, whether that involves improving healthcare access, advancing medical research, or shaping health policy.

### Involved and equipped

Involvement in political issues is not just about understanding the world; it's about actively shaping it. Through platforms like the Model United Nations and the Aspiring Medics Conference at Brighton College Bangkok, young people are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and motivation to tackle the social and economic challenges they will inherit. These experiences prepare them to become the leaders and innovators of tomorrow, ready to address the complex problems of the future with confidence and compassion.





# Regents International School Pattaya introduces Forest School in Early Primary



**F**orest school is a holistic approach to learning that engages children in powerful learning experiences in an outdoor environment and Regents International School Pattaya is proud to introduce these learning opportunities to their youngest learners.

Mrs Sarah Emeny, Head of Enabling Environments and Level Three Forest School Leader at Regents International School Pattaya explains, "Forest School uses the natural world as a resource that enables children to develop and refine the Characteristics of Effective Learning including being Active Learners, Playing and Exploring

and becoming Creative and Critical Thinkers."

Forest School is a long-term process of frequent and regular sessions in a natural environment. During the Forest School sessions at Regents, children are involved in long uninterrupted periods of learning in a natural environment. The Forest School leaders work to plan and facilitate experiences that recognise every child as a unique learner and promote each child's well-being, social, emotional, spiritual, cognitive, physical and communication development.

The curriculum provides learners with the opportunity to take

supported, calculated risks in a managed environment. Children are encouraged to be self-aware and understand their own capabilities and to become aware of risks and to make supported risk assessments.

"Forest School is run by qualified practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice, which is true also at Regents. Our Forest School leaders provide the environment, opportunities, tools, and equipment to facilitate our children's learning. The role of the Forest School leader is to allow the children to meet risk and challenges appropriate to their age, personality, and stage of development and to ensure their safety. Forest School leaders aim to foster learners' meaningful connection to nature, spark their innate curiosity and build a sense of awe and wonder of the natural world." Mrs Sarah Emeny ensures.

To find out more about the Forest School at Regents International School Pattaya, please contact their Admissions team at [admissions@regents-pattaya.co.th](mailto:admissions@regents-pattaya.co.th) or +66 (0) 93 135 7736



# New HEI School in Phuket

The new HEI school, located in Phuket, recently opened its doors. Chargé d'affaires Miika Tomi and Special Advisor Kimmo Pekari from the Embassy of Finland in Bangkok attended the opening ceremony.

This international preschool, based on Finnish educational principles and Nordic design, provides high-quality education from early years to primary school, with plans to expand to secondary levels.

The Finnish education system, renowned for its focus on equality, skilled teachers, and play-based learning, is now more accessible in Thailand, offering students a unique and holistic learning experience.



# CANNASEN Danish Pain Patch approved in Malaysia



CS MEDICA A/S, a Danish MedTech company specializing in pain management, autoimmune diseases, and stress-related disorders, has reached a significant milestone with the approval of its Cannasen Pain Patch as a general medical device in Malaysia.

“The approval of the Cannasen Pain Patch is another essential step in our Asian expansion strategy. It supports our goal to introduce innovative healthcare solutions across the region, starting with Malaysia,” says Lone Henriksen, CEO of CS MEDICA.

The Pain Patch is designed to manage joint and muscle pain,

providing a cooling sensation and long-lasting relief. It is ideal for alleviating muscle, neck, back, and shoulder pain, as well as treating sprains, sports injuries, and arthritis.

In addition to the product approval in Malaysia, CS MEDICA has also achieved trademark registration for its Cannasen brand in Thailand.



# Two sisters founded project to empower deaf people in Bangkok

Two Thai-Danish sisters Anika Jagota (16) and Annetta Jagota (14) recently founded an outreach project, which they have named the Rock Bottom Project. Their mission is to empower deaf individuals facing severe discrimination in Bangkok’s job market.



From left to right - Annetta Jagota, Anika Jagota, Khun Ning, CEO of Vpada Sandals and Khun Kru Kwan.

The inspiration for the project began with a tragic discovery in 2022 when they came across three suicide victims in an underground community of 40 deaf people living beneath the Rama 9 bridge.

“That was the moment everything changed for us,” Anika said.

“We realized their struggles weren’t just about finding jobs, it was about surviving.”

It all began when Anika and Annetta decided to organize art therapy sessions to provide the deaf community with emotional support. Recognizing that these individuals needed a way to express their feelings and share their pain, the sisters reached out to their former kindergarten art teacher, Kru Kwan, an experienced art

teacher & art therapist from ELC – Early Learning Center.

They also arranged for a sign language translator volunteer to ensure clear communication. With this team in place, the first session began, offering a safe space for the deaf community to express themselves through art.

“The art therapy gave these people a way to express themselves without words. That’s when we realized just how alone they felt,” Annetta explained.

“It wasn’t just that they couldn’t speak; they were stuck in a world that wouldn’t listen, and it made them feel hopeless.”

Spending many summers in Denmark, they had seen how much better vulnerable communities are supported there through the social welfare system compared to Thailand. This made them deeply frustrated with the inequalities they saw in their everyday life in Bangkok.

In 2023, the art therapy program gained recognition from the Rotary Club of Thailand after Anika and Annetta presented their project to Dr. Lakhana Ditsyasin, Charter President of Rotary Club Sukhumvit. With support from both Dr. Lakhana and the Rotary Sukhumvit team, they were able to expand the program further.

“Getting that recognition and support was huge for us,” Anika said.



“It showed us that people believed in what we were doing, and it helped us reach even more people.”

Beyond creating job opportunities, the Rock Bottom Project also aims at assisting the deaf community in pitching for a government initiative. Working alongside the Thai Health Promotion Association, an organization under the Ministry of Health, the community was selected to join a program that highlights inspiring communities across Thailand, allowing them to further develop their initiatives.

The project’s mission is simple: to create real jobs for deaf people all over Thailand. From handmade products to skills training that helps them make a living, the project is becoming a symbol of strength and hope.

“We didn’t want to just give them charity. We

wanted to help them build something real that lasts,” Anika said.

“We want them to stand on their own and feel proud.”

One notable collaboration that arose from the project was with Vpada Sandals, a well-known shoe brand. Khun Ning, the CEO of Vpada, was inspired by the project and decided to incorporate handmade embroidery from the deaf artisans into her next design collection. A sustainable business model was created, where Vpada would purchase the handcrafted items from Rock Bottom’s artisans, providing them with consistent income and greater exposure for their work.

The Thai-Danish sisters had been studying art for years with their former kindergarten teacher, Kru Kwan from the Early Learning Center, who was also a passionate volunteer. But it wasn’t until they saw how shut out the deaf community was that they knew they had to do something.

“I’ve always believed art can help people heal, but this time it wasn’t just about feeling better; it was about giving them a future,” Anika said. Annetta felt the same way.

“I understood how unfair it was that people ignored them, even though they had so much to offer,” she said.

“It didn’t sit right with me. We had to figure out a way to help.”

The Rock Bottom Project focuses on teaching deaf individuals skills that help them make money, like crafting handmade goods and receiving training in digital marketing. They also incorporate art therapy into the nature of the work environment, promoting healing alongside skill development.

“We want to build a community where they can grow together and succeed on their own,” Anika said.

The project is also aiming to help deaf artisans sell their products worldwide through online platforms, giving them financial freedom and a chance to showcase their talents.

Looking back, Anika and Annetta know there’s a lot more to do.

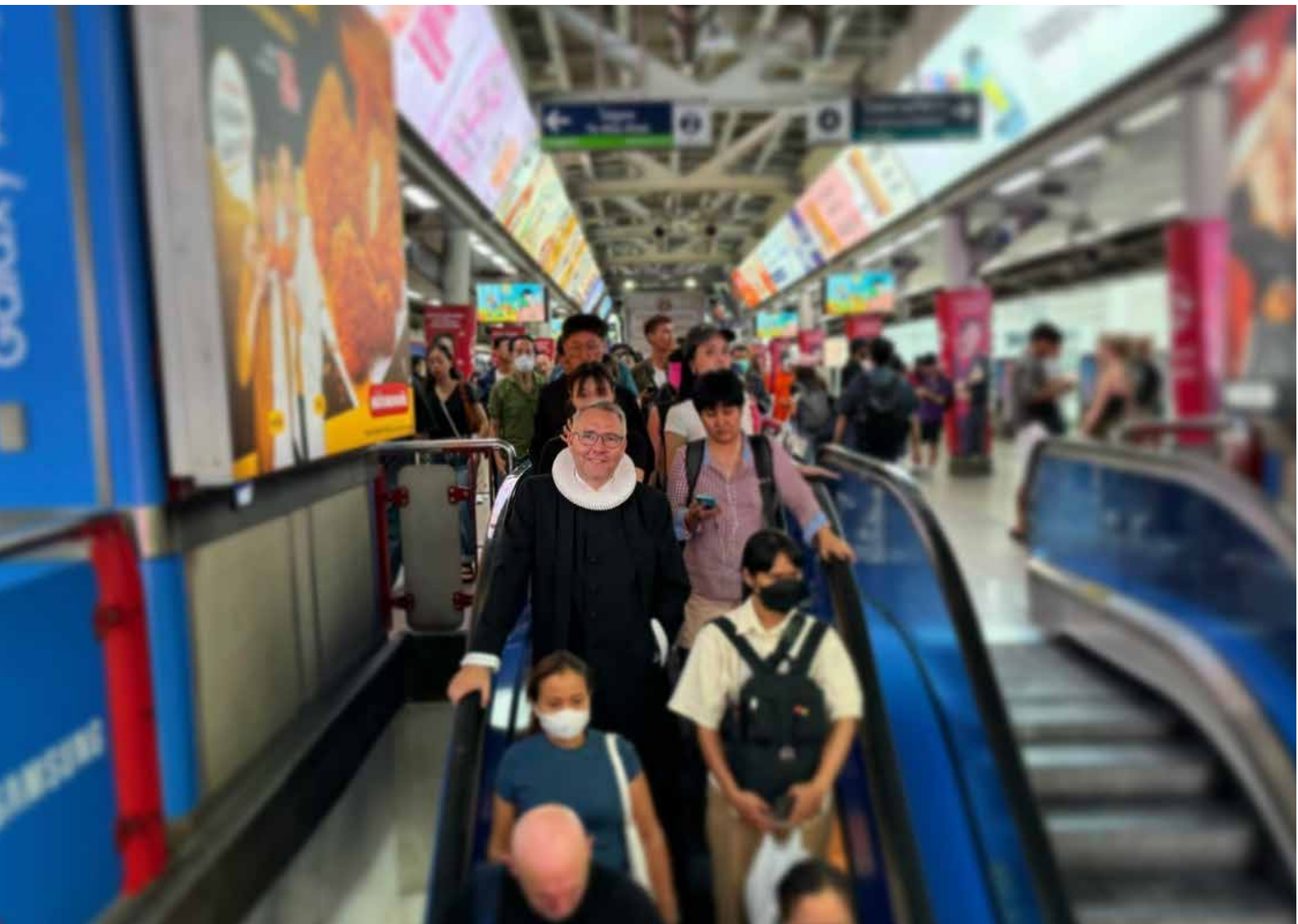
“We’ve probably only done a fraction of what we can,” Anika said.

“But it’s not about finishing everything, it’s about staying with them and continually finding new ways to overcome the challenges they face.” Annetta added,

“We’re not just trying to help; we want to change the whole system that keeps them out. We’ve got big plans, and we’re not stopping until every door is open for them.”

The Rock Bottom Project isn’t just about giving deaf people jobs; it’s about building a future where they’re respected and included.

“We believe that if we push hard enough, we can change their lives and the way the world sees them,” Anika said.



# Meet Bangkok's new Danish pastor with a one-way ticket!

In the heart of Bangkok, the new Danish pastor is ready to step into an important role for the Danish community in Thailand. Nicolaj Stubbe Hørlyck and his wife, Anna, have moved to Thailand indefinitely.

*By Karoline Rosenkrantz Paasch*

“I have a one-way ticket to Thailand,” he says, smiling. “I don’t expect this to be a job that can be finished quickly.”

Nicolaj and Anna have two sons who have remained in Denmark. They find it exciting that their parents have moved to Thailand, although the youngest, Anker, needed a moment to adjust to leaving home earlier than expected.

“He had to find a youth apartment and live on his own, so it has been a big change for him,” Nicolaj explains. Their youngest, 18-year-old Anker, studies at a gymnasium in Copenhagen, while 22-year-old Eske lives and studies in Aarhus.

Anna Stubbe Hørlyck may not hold an official title at the church, but her solid background as a social worker in church-based organizations in Copenhagen gives her unique insights into the challenges faced by some Danes in Thailand. She is a vital resource for Nicolaj, helping to ensure the church is a welcoming haven for the community.

### A journey of experience and empathy

Nicolaj graduated in 2003, and this is not his first time moving abroad for work. When his children were young, they spent four years in India working for Danmission, a Danish mission, aid, and development organization. “That was a completely different assignment,” he says. “There, it was much about interfaith dialogue and encounters between different beliefs. Anna worked with destitute women, child laborers, and in other social work.”

Later, Nicolaj worked as a youth pastor at Brorsons Church in Nørrebro for 12 years. “The average age in that part of Copenhagen is 34 years, so I haven’t had much interaction with elderly people,” he explains. However, he is not anxious about meeting the many Danes who have moved to Thailand to spend their retirement. “As a pastor, I’m used to talking to people in crisis for one reason or another, so it’s not new for me, and I myself have become older.”

“

*We hope this can become a kind of community house where all Danes are welcome, regardless of their beliefs*

”

Nicolaj has also brought valuable experiences from his time in India, which he previously integrated into his work in Copenhagen, where he used yoga and mindfulness as part of church life. In a grief counseling group he led in Copenhagen, they combined group counseling with yoga to help process grief physically. “I’ve been thinking about whether there could be interest in counseling and self-help groups here in Thailand,” he says. “These could be for people who have recently lost a relative, those in intercultural marriages, or for those living far from their families. I think many people miss a sense of community.”



“

*I've been thinking about whether there could be interest in counseling and self-help groups here in Thailand*

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## The Danish Church House: A gathering point not just on Sundays!

The Danish Church House in Bangkok is not just a venue for the church's monthly service, held on the first Sunday of each month. Nicolaj Stubbe Hørlyck views the house as an important gathering point for the Danish community.

“We hope this can become a kind of community house where all Danes are welcome, regardless of their beliefs,” Nicolaj says. From confirmation classes and children's birthday parties to Scandinavian association meetings, he envisions the house buzzing with activity. “We're still brainstorming what activities we can host. I have plenty of ideas, but I want them to come from the people who live here and know what the needs are.”

One thing's for sure: Nicolaj wants it to be a cozy space for Danish traditions. “I hope it becomes a place where people can tune in to watch our newly appointed Danish king's first New Year's speech—while munching





on some Danish pastries, of course!" Whether people come to participate in worship, community meals, Danish cultural evenings, concerts, or other events, Nicolaj wants the house to be a place where everyone feels at home.

"We're starting slowly and seeing what interests people. So far, the door is open, and there's plenty of space on the calendar."

If any organization or individual has ideas or requests for events, they are very welcome to contact Nicolaj at [nsh@km.dk](mailto:nsh@km.dk) or by phone at +66 (0)63-191-7501.

## Hymns, robes, and rituals

The house was originally designed for residential use, giving services here a different feel compared to a large church. However, Danish traditions remain strong, with priestly robes, well-known liturgy, rituals, and hymns.

"We have fantastic classical musicians from the conservatory in Bangkok who play Danish hymns. They don't know a word of Danish, but when they get the sheet music, they play it, and we sing along. It works really well," Nicolaj shares.

Nicolaj aims to preserve the Danish traditions that many miss when living abroad, whether they are backpackers or long-term residents seeking a community and a pastor to baptize their newborns.

Nicolaj envisions his church duties as providing counseling and confidential conversations, as well as offering baptisms, confirmations, marriage blessings, and memorial services. He also assists the Danish embassy. "I'm a bit like the embassy's warm hands. As a pastor, I can provide a different kind of support, visiting Danes in their homes, hospitals, or prisons."

## Nicolaj's fast-track to local life!

Despite having called Thailand home for only fourteen days, Nicolaj has quickly immersed himself in the local culture. He has already found his go-to grocery store, discovered a charming food market that excites his culinary curiosity, and even taken rides with Muvmi, the innovative electric share-tuk-tuk service, navigating the bustling streets of Bangkok.

"My favorite food market is Khlong Toei; I highly recommend it," he shares with enthusiasm. "You can find everything from a pig's head to skinned frogs, if you need that! The vibrant atmosphere, the aromas of fresh produce, and the hustle and bustle of vendors create an unforgettable experience. It's a great place to explore local flavors and ingredients."

## Visit Nicolaj and share your ideas!

Although Nicolaj has only been in Thailand for a short time, he has already become an integral part of Bangkok's vibrant life. With a heart for service and a vision to create a gathering point, he looks forward to transforming the Danish Church House into an oasis of culture and community. His mission is clear: to create a home away from home where all Danes can find comfort, community, and joy in their daily lives.

"Please come by the house and say hello or share your ideas for what the house should offer," he encourages. Mark your calendars for October 16 to attend Nicolaj's initiation service, where the Danish ambassador, Mr. Danny Annan, will read a personal letter from the King of Denmark. Attendees can also enjoy performances by flutist Cecilio Songsak Ngamsri, aka Khun Patrick, and pianist Khun Morris, who will play Danish hymns.



“

*I believe in living life without boundaries. Ceasing life while you can. Working without anything limiting your way of being, worldview, or love.*

”

# Live “Without Boundary” and experience Peter Ringgaard’s exhibition in Bangkok

Wooden sculptures, vibrant colors, and bold contrasts greet visitors at AP Space 86 in Bangkok, where Danish artist Peter Ringgaard’s exhibition “Without Boundary” is showcased until October 28.

*By Miriam Soukaina Nenni*

A faceless woman, carved in wood, steps toward a window, raising her hands as if trying to speak, yet unable to do so. Surrounding her are other wooden sculptures of women. The room also features vibrant paintings full of contrasts, and the longer you look, the more details emerge.

From his studios in both Denmark and Chiang Mai, Danish artist Peter Ringgaard created his solo exhibition “Without Boundary,” now on display in Bangkok. While he prefers not to explain the meaning behind his work in too much detail, he shares that the exhibition is based on personal experiences and, in a way, reflects his own approach to life.



## Inspiring places and faces

Peter Ringgaard was only 17 years old the first time he traveled to the East, employed on a ship. From a young age, he had felt the pull of wanderlust, wanting to experience a world beyond Denmark, and even Europe.

"I was completely captivated by the East when I first arrived. And I've been captivated ever since," Peter Ringgaard says, adding that he feels extremely inspired by Buddhist culture and enjoys the spirituality he first experienced 60 years ago.

Since then, Peter has traveled and lived around the world, writing, producing, and directing both films and documentaries. In 2020, he was about to make a BBC documentary about Vikings when COVID-19 suddenly shut everything down. The cancellation forced Peter Ringgaard to rethink his next move.

"Ever since I was little, I have loved painting. When the world shut down, I started painting again and have been doing it ever since," the artist says, remembering how he used to mimic Van Gogh growing up.

Four years ago, he opened a studio in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he spends nearly half of the year. He doesn't think he'll go back to making films again.

"A film costs a lot to make, so there was always huge pressure and many people involved. Now things are much calmer, and I can do things at my own pace," the artist says.

The environments he finds himself in personally inspire the Danish artist, and he's drawn to subjects that speak to him in some way.

"I often use my phone to take pictures of anything and everything I encounter—animals, flowers, people, even cars. It could be anything. I save all of it on my computer, and occasionally, I go through it," the artist says.

The wooden sculptures in the exhibition are remarkably detailed. Made from Thai jamjuree wood, a type of acacia, they convey expressions that make you

stop and reflect. Some of these women are even based on real people who caught Peter Ringgaard's interest in some way, he explains.

"I find people, either local friends or just someone I find very sculptural, and I ask them if they would like to participate. Some are eager to join, while others are not interested at all. I get to know them a bit, take a lot of photos from various angles, capturing close-ups of their hands, fingers, eyes, and so on."

He describes the creation of the wooden sculptures as an exciting and immensely creative process that wouldn't be possible without a collaborative effort with skilled artisans in Chiang Mai.

"Chiang Mai is well-known for its craftsmanship, so when I got an idea for a sculpture, I tried to find people who could help me. It took me two months to find the right people, which turned out to be an older man and his son," Peter Ringgaard says.

He always enjoys his time in Chiang Mai, creating art, talking with monks, and connecting with the locals. In fact, the people he has collaborated with for almost three years have begun to feel like family.

## Living Without Boundary

When asked about the meaning behind his work as both a filmmaker and artist, Peter Ringgaard finds it hard to put into words, saying he doesn't want to ruin people's experience by imposing his own thoughts and opinions.

Still, he admits that some of his beliefs may shine through in his works. He points out a naked woman with a small cloth over her eyes.

"I see it as my small attack on the parts of the world where women suffer. I've been to many countries like that, and I'm very much against the way women are treated. This is my modest way of drawing attention to it," Peter Ringgaard says.

There is a small link between the liberation of women and the exhibition's title "Without Boundary," but the title mostly reflects his personal approach to life, the artist explains.

"I believe in living life without boundaries. Seizing life while you can. Working without anything limiting your way of being, worldview, or love," says Peter, adding that he's been fortunate to travel and work worldwide.

"I've experienced many different cultures, and while people may differ, their needs are quite similar. People want a good life for themselves and their families. In reality, it's a small group of people in the world who create limitations and make things difficult for others," he says.

Peter Ringgaard acknowledges that not everyone can live freely and without boundaries, but he believes it's worth trying. And perhaps that's the message behind the exhibition.

You can experience "Without Boundary" at AP Space 86 in Bangkok until October 28. Later this year, the exhibition will also be shown in Singapore and Copenhagen, and in 2025, New York.



# Chinese EV manufacturers shift production to Europe in response to EU tariffs



Several Chinese electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers are moving production to Europe. This is in response to the European Union's increased import tariffs on EVs made in China. The EU's new tariffs, ranging from 17.0% to 36.3%, will add to the existing 10% import

duty by the end of October. These increases will significantly impact the profitability of Chinese carmakers in Europe.

Major Chinese manufacturers like Geely, BYD, SAIC Motor, and Xpeng are acting to mitigate the financial hit. Geely, known for its Volvo, Polestar, and Zeekr models, explores production options in Europe. They received a relatively low tariff increase of 19.3%. BYD, China's largest EV producer, announced in January plans to build a large factory in Hungary. SAIC Motor, facing the steepest tariff of 36.3%, also plans to shift production to Europe.

Other companies like Leapmotor and Chery are following suit. Leapmotor already partners with Stellantis to produce its T03 model in Poland. Chery, a lesser-known name in Europe, decided to build its first European factory in Barcelona.

This strategic move by Chinese EV manufacturers aims to safeguard their competitiveness in the lucrative European market amid the EU's protective trade measures.

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# EU rejects Chinese EV price adjustments, raising trade tensions

The European Commission has rejected proposals from Chinese electric vehicle (EV) makers to adjust their prices in an attempt to avoid steep tariffs. The tariffs follow a months-long investigation led by commission president Ursula von der Leyen, which found that China-made EVs are unfairly subsidized, undercutting European manufacturers. Despite offers from Chinese exporters, the commission stated that none met the requirements to address the harm caused by subsidies or could be properly enforced.

The decision raises concerns of an escalating trade dispute between the EU and China. The commission remains open to negotiations, with key talks between China's commerce minister and the EU trade



commissioner set for next week. EU member states are expected to vote on the tariffs by the end of October. Meanwhile, divisions within the EU have emerged, with countries like

Spain reconsidering their stance, aligning with Germany's opposition to the tariffs. The outcome could shape broader EU-China trade relations.

# China boosts Norway's frozen cod imports as EU shifts toward farmed supplies

Norway's frozen cod exports to China have surged through late summer, while the EU has increasingly relied on farmed cod to address a sharp decline in fresh wild cod imports. According to the latest data from the Norwegian Seafood Council (NSC), China remains Norway's largest export market for frozen cod, while EU demand for farmed cod continues to rise.

In August, Norway exported 2,706 tonnes of frozen cod valued at NOK 194 million. Though the value fell by 6% compared to last year, China saw the greatest growth. Exports to China reached 884 tonnes, a 109% rise from the same period

last year, with a value increase of NOK 42 million. This growth comes as China looks for alternative suppliers following the US import ban on Russian cod, which has impacted the Chinese processing industry.

Meanwhile, Norway's fresh cod exports reached 2,341 tonnes in August, with farmed cod exports growing by 84%. The EU market, particularly Denmark, the Netherlands, and Latvia, has been increasingly turning to farmed cod as fresh wild cod exports have dropped by 18%, marking 11 consecutive months of decline due to reduced quotas. Farmed cod now represents 33% of the export value of fresh cod from Norway.



With China's demand for frozen cod rising and the EU shifting to farmed supplies, Norway's seafood industry continues to adapt to changing market dynamics.

# Singapore adopts flexible work policies inspired by Scandinavian success

Singapore's decision to implement flexible work arrangements (FWA) mirrors successful strategies seen in Scandinavian countries, where work-life balance is a key contributor to happiness and productivity. Starting December 1, 2024, the Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests will encourage Singaporean employers to adopt practices such as remote work, staggered hours, and job-sharing. This formal process ensures that FWA requests are handled fairly, aiming to balance organizational needs with employees'

personal lives.

In Scandinavia, countries like Finland, Denmark, and Sweden have long embraced FWA, with major cities like Copenhagen and Helsinki ranking among the best for work-life balance. Finland, the world's happiest country according to the 2024 World Happiness Report, credits its happiness to such policies, with almost half of jobs offering hybrid or remote work. Similarly, Denmark and Sweden also emphasize flexible work options, contributing to their high rankings on global happiness indexes.

By following this path, Singapore aims to improve productivity, reduce absenteeism, and foster a more family-friendly and sustainable workplace culture. The Scandinavian experience shows how such policies can lead to greater employee satisfaction, talent retention, and even environmental benefits, as reduced commuting lowers pollution. With this move, Singapore strengthens its position as a forward-thinking nation in the global workforce, while enhancing the well-being of its workers—just as Scandinavia has done for decades.

# EU urged to address Indigenous rights violations in Sarawak under new anti-deforestation law

The European Union is being called upon by a coalition of environmental and human rights groups to classify Sarawak, Malaysia, as “high risk” under its new anti-deforestation law. Organizations like Human Rights Watch, SAVE Rivers, and RimbaWatch argue that Sarawak’s extensive deforestation and Indigenous rights violations demand stricter scrutiny.

The EU Deforestation-Free Products Regulation, effective from January 2025, aims to block imports linked to deforestation. Sarawak’s



millions of hectares of rainforest are at risk due to timber and palm oil plantations, with Indigenous communities facing challenges in securing land rights.

A “high risk” classification would increase EU customs checks and demand tougher due diligence from importers. The EU imports significant amounts of timber and palm oil from Sarawak, raising concerns about sustainability and human rights compliance. Critics highlight Malaysia’s weak enforcement of certification schemes and lack of transparency in Indigenous land use, emphasizing the need for greater oversight.

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# Norwegian crime fiction author Jørn Lier Horst in Manila



Best-selling Norwegian crime fiction author Jørn Lier Horst recently shared his experiences in writing crime novels as part of a campaign to promote Norwegian

literature. The event, organized by the Department of Literature at De La Salle University, aimed to inspire students and aspiring crime fiction writers.

During the session, students actively participated in a Q&A, eager to learn more about the genre from Horst. They explored the intricacies of crime fiction writing and the unique storytelling techniques that define his work.

Horst was joined by Anthony Balisi from the National Book Development Board of the Philippines and Filipino crime fiction writer Rom Factorin. Together, they discussed the distinct nuances of crime fiction in Norway and the Philippines, offering a cross-cultural perspective on the genre.

The event was part of the Manila International Book Fair (MIBF), where visitors could explore the Norwegian literature booth on the second floor of the SMX Convention Center.

# Swedish funds linked to Myanmar military junta

A recent report by the UN's special rapporteur reveals troubling connections between Swedish fund manager Länsförsäkringar and the default pension fund AP7, indicating they hold shares in companies supplying military equipment to Myanmar's military junta. This disclosure, reported by Dagens Industri on September 23, 2024, raises concerns about ethical investments amid ongoing human rights abuses in Myanmar.

Despite international trade sanctions aimed at curbing military supplies, the junta continues to acquire weapons and aviation fuel through channels in Russia, China, India, Singapore, and Thailand. The findings underscore the complexities surrounding investment practices and accountability, especially in nations facing significant political turmoil. As Swedish funds navigate



these challenges, calls for increased transparency and ethical investing practices grow louder, emphasizing

the need for financial institutions to reconsider their roles in global conflicts.

# Veronica Lin documentary gains massive attention in China



The SVT documentary series Veronica and the Chinese Millionaire has gained significant attention among Chinese-speaking audiences after the Canadian YouTube channel M2Story released a Chinese summary of the series.

Ray Pan, the YouTuber behind M2Story, noted that he did not expect it to reach 15 million views.

Originally aired by SVT in 2021, the documentary covers the tragic case of Veronica Lin, who was found stabbed to death in a Gothenburg apartment in 2003. The 27-minute

summary quickly gained over 1 million views on YouTube and later reached 15 million views on Douyin, China's version of TikTok.

Producer Jonas Magnusson also remarked that it's rare for an SVT series to have such an impact in another country.

The story resonated deeply with viewers, particularly in relation to Lin's son, Marcus Lindgren. Despite being over 20 years old, the case's response highlights the lasting appeal of true crime stories across borders.

# Norwegian Embassy and UNOPS donate \$500,000 for Myanmar flood relief



The Norwegian Embassy in Yangon, in partnership with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), announced a donation of approximately \$500,000 to support relief efforts in Myanmar following the devastating floods caused by Typhoon Yagi. The funds were used to

provide immediate assistance to the most affected communities, offering essentials such as shelter, food, clean water, basic medicines, and emergency relief items.

Myanmar experienced its worst flooding in recent history, according to the United Nations. The disaster, which also impacted Viet-

nam and Thailand, claimed at least 226 lives, with around 80 people still missing. Thousands were displaced, and many lost their homes and livelihoods.

The Norwegian Red Cross, in collaboration with the Myanmar Red Cross Society, delivered non-food items, cash for health services, and food parcels to those in the hardest-hit areas.

On its Facebook page, the Norwegian Embassy expressed its commitment to working closely with partners to assess ongoing needs and ensure aid was delivered promptly. "We are deeply saddened by the devastating floods in Myanmar that have left so many homeless and without livelihoods," the embassy stated, adding that they stood in solidarity with those affected by the tragedy.

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## EU provides €1.2 million in emergency aid for flood-hit Myanmar

The European Union extended its support to Myanmar following the devastating floods caused by Typhoon Yagi. In a statement, the EU delegation expressed condolences to those affected and pledged €1.2 million in emergency assistance to aid ongoing humanitarian efforts.

The funding was directed toward providing essential relief to the most vulnerable communities. The EU coordinated with local partners to ensure efficient distribution of resources and aid. This support



reflected the EU's commitment to assisting Myanmar during the crisis and helping those in dire need.

# Panda duo in Finland going back to China due to rising costs

Finland will return two giant pandas, Lumi and Pyry, to China in November, eight years earlier than planned, citing high upkeep costs, according to The Straits Times. The pandas, brought to Ähtäri Zoo in 2018 after a 15-year agreement was signed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit, are set to leave following three years of negotiations.

Ähtäri Zoo, which invested €8 million in their facility, faced annual costs of €1.5 million. The zoo struggled financially, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic curbed travel, and in 2023, Finland's government declined to provide state funding. Rising inflation added further pressure, prompting the early return. The zoo emphasized that the decision will not affect Finland's relations with China.



# Danish rapper finds new path in Borneo wildlife conservation



Jens Kjær Larsen, known as MC Zipp from the rap group Cut'n'Move, has shifted gears from a turbulent chapter at Danmarks Radio (DR) to a passionate role in wildlife conservation. In 2021, he was fired over allegations related to his satirical book *Mediefilejs*, which critics claimed harmed some DR managers.

After facing a challenging job search, the 60-year-old is now thriving as a communications officer for Red Orangutangen in Borneo. "I'm thrilled about this job. It makes sense on a whole new level," he tells Ekstra Bladet during a call from the jungle.

Larsen recently secured funding for an innovative project involving Danish sixth-graders and indigenous children from Borneo. They will collaborate on a rap competition focused on climate anxiety and biodiversity, aiming to highlight the interconnectedness of our planet.

Reflecting on his career upheaval, he humorously recalled a bleak job-seeking period, though he admits that things weren't as dire as he portrayed. Now, in Borneo, he is determined to make a real impact for both orangutans and young people.

# Finnish owned brand find growth in China despite consumer caution



Several international brands are successfully navigating the challenging Chinese market, with a particular focus on premium offerings. Finnish-Chinese owned com-

pany Amer Sports, which owns the outdoor apparel brand Arc'teryx, reported a remarkable 54% year-on-year revenue increase in Greater China. This growth highlights the brand's effective localized marketing strategies and strong understanding of Chinese consumers.

Arc'teryx, positioned as a luxury sportswear label, benefits from backing by Chinese sports conglomerate Anta Sports. Amer Sports CEO James Zheng noted that the premium sports and outdoor markets are among the fastest-growing

consumer segments in China, driving success for brands like Lululemon, Descente, and Hoka.

Meanwhile, Adidas has adapted its approach in China, reporting a 9% revenue increase in the first half of the year. The brand's focus on lifestyle products, particularly its Adidas Originals line, has resonated well with consumers.

These brands demonstrate that, with a strong understanding of the market and consumer preferences, growth is possible despite cautious spending in China.

# Lime Petroleum boosts stake in North Sea oil

Lime Petroleum, a Norwegian subsidiary of Singapore's Rex International, is increasing its stake in the North Sea oil field operated by Repsol Norge. This move follows a deal with OKEA, which is divesting non-core assets to focus on its primary operations.

The Yme field resumed production in October 2021 after a 20-year hiatus. The Norwegian Petroleum Directorate granted Repsol permission to restart operations based on a revised development plan.

Previously, Lime acquired a 10% stake in the Yme field for \$68 million. Now, it is purchasing OKEA's 15% interest for a post-tax consideration of \$15.65 million. This acquisition raises Lime's total stake to 25%. While Lime will cover all decommissioning costs, it will also pay OKEA \$9.2 million in 2027 in four installments. This deal, effective Janu-



ary 1, 2024, is expected to finalize by year-end, with funding sourced from cash reserves.

CEO Svein J. Liknes of OKEA expressed satisfaction with the agreement, noting that it allows OKEA to concentrate on its core areas. This collaboration benefits

both Lime Petroleum and OKEA, supporting their growth strategies.

Located in production licenses PL 316 and PL 316B, the Yme field sits in the southeastern part of the Norwegian sector of the North Sea. Although initially discovered in 1987, the field's production began in 1996.



# Norwegian KLP boosts efforts with Chinese mining firms

Amid rising geopolitical tensions, many investors are withdrawing from China. However, Norway's \$78 billion pension fund, KLP, is pursuing a different strategy. Instead of pulling out, KLP has increased its engagement with Chinese mining companies that may be violating labor rights and responsible extraction practices.

Kiran Aziz, head of responsible investment at KLP, emphasized the importance of engagement. Last year, she visited China to connect with companies in the MSCI China Index. Aziz believes that building relationships and trust is key to influencing corporate behavior.

Despite these efforts, KLP has faced significant challenges. Of the 32 Chinese metal and mining companies in its portfolio, only eight responded to KLP's outreach, and just five engaged in meaningful dialogue. This highlights the difficulty of en-



gaging with investor-shy companies, especially in China.

KLP's approach contrasts with other investors who have chosen to exclude China from their portfolios. By continuing its engagement efforts, KLP aims to drive positive

change in corporate practices rather than simply walking away from the challenges. This strategy underscores KLP's commitment to responsible investment and its belief in the power of dialogue to influence corporate behavior.

# Saxo Bank close Hong Kong and China offices

Denmark-based Saxo Bank, headquartered in Copenhagen, has announced plans to close its offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai, while scaling back operations in Tokyo, according to Nikkei Asia. The decision to exit Hong Kong and shut the Shanghai office will affect approximately 10 staff members. This strategic move follows a review prompted by concerns over China's sluggish economy and diminishing prospects in Asia. Despite backing from Chinese auto group Geely, the European investment bank is focusing on its core business areas.



S&P upgraded Saxo Bank's rating to A- from BBB, reflecting its strong financial position. To enhance operational efficiency, the Saxo Bank Group is restructuring its distribution model in the Asia-Pacific region. It has recognized EUR 6 million in restructuring costs, which include the ongoing closure of the Shanghai

office and an evaluation of opportunities in Japan and Australia. The restructuring has led to total costs of DKK 44 million, impacting staff and administrative expenses. Adjusted net profit reached DKK 508 million, as stated in Saxo Bank's Interim Report for the first half of 2024.

Saxo has declined to provide additional comments on the restructuring. Vera Lau, Communications and PR Manager for Saxo Singapore & Hong Kong, stated that she is unfortunately unable to share further details at this time but will inform us if anything changes.

# Denmark and Singapore strengthen robotics ties



The Odense Robotics cluster visited Singapore to explore new collaboration opportunities in robotics and automation. Organized by the Danish Embassy in Singapore, the visit aimed to assess how Danish expertise in robotics could align with Singapore's initiatives for smart manufacturing 5.0.

The delegation met with key industry players and government

organizations, including the National Robotics Program, Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Advanced Remanufacturing and Technology Centre (ARTC), and Economic Development Board (EDB). Discussions focused on how both countries could enhance partnerships in research, development, and market innovation.

A highlight of the three-day

visit was the signing of a Letter of Intent between Odense Robotics and Singapore's National Robotics Program. Danish Ambassador-designate Jakob Brix Tange attended the signing, emphasizing Denmark's growing role in the robotics and automation sectors in Singapore.

The visit also underscored Singapore's position as a regional hub for innovation, offering strong government support, ease of doing business, and access to emerging technologies. Denmark's reputation among Singaporean stakeholders was noted as a key factor in fostering future collaborations.

The event marked a step forward in strengthening ties between Denmark and Singapore, with the potential for further growth in robotics and automation solutions.

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# Thailand and Sweden lead sustainable urban farming revolution

Thailand and Sweden are advancing urban agriculture with innovative vertical farming technologies. In Thailand, DiStar Fresh is pioneering a hyper-local farming model, addressing the challenges posed by the tropical climate. By utilizing advanced environmental controls, their indoor farms carefully regulate factors like temperature, humidity, and light to optimize plant growth. The construction of vertical farms with heat-insulating walls helps reduce energy use. Additionally, their operations conserve 99% of the water compared to conventional farming, while eliminating the need for washing the produce, further enhancing sustainability.

Meanwhile, in Sweden, SweGreen is implementing similar technology within supermarkets. By building vertical farms directly inside stores, they are tackling issues such as water shortages and reducing transport emissions. SweGreen's hydroponic system, which grows plants without soil, allows each platform to yield the equivalent of three hectares' worth of crops in a compact space. This approach provides fresher produce with a longer shelf life, and customers can observe the entire growing process within the stores.

Both DiStar Fresh in Thailand and SweGreen in Sweden showcase how urban farming can be adapt-



ed to meet local needs sustainably. From the urban centers of Bangkok to eco-conscious supermarkets in Sweden, these innovative farming models represent a global shift toward smarter, more resource-efficient agriculture, setting the stage for the future of food production worldwide.



# Thailand makes ETA mandatory for 93 visa-free nations, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden

Starting December 1, 2024, Thailand will require citizens from 93 visa-free countries, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, to obtain an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) before their visit. This follows the decision on July 15, 2024, to grant visa-free entry to all 93 nations, a move aimed at promoting tourism while enhancing border security.

The new ETA system will apply to arrivals by air, sea, and land, with the goal of streamlining immigration processes.

The application process will be entirely digital and free of charge, in line with Thailand's existing visa-free policy. Once approved, the ETA will be valid for 60 days, with an option to extend it for an additional 30

days. While the pilot program will begin in December, the system is expected to be fully operational by June 2025.

To further streamline the process, Thailand plans to introduce automated immigration gates at entry points, allowing travelers to use QR codes for quicker and smoother clearance. This initiative is intended to reduce wait times and ensure a more seamless experience for visitors from the 93 countries.

Thailand's ETA will apply to citizens and residents of the following countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Hong Kong, India, China, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates,

the United Kingdom, Spain, France, the Netherlands, South Korea, Italy, Japan, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Maldives, Mauritius, Monaco, New Zealand, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Fiji, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Malta, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Romania, Uzbekistan, Taiwan, Macau, Mongolia, Russia, Albania, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Jordan, Kosovo, Morocco, Panama, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Tonga, and Uruguay.



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