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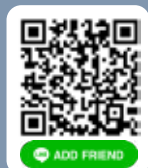
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# Will It Be Better in 2025?

As we close 2024 and look toward 2025, the economic outlook for Southeast Asia presents a mixed picture. The ASEAN region has proven resilient in navigating the post-pandemic recovery, but challenges persist, particularly in global trade and domestic economic policies.

Key ASEAN economies like Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam continue to lead regional growth. Indonesia's steady domestic consumption and investments in strategic sectors such as electric vehicles are projected to sustain growth near 5% in 2025. Similarly, the Philippines, benefiting from resilient remittances and a vibrant services sector, is expected to achieve growth around 6%. Vietnam, recovering from global demand shocks, is likely to see robust manufacturing and export recovery.

However, other nations face more significant headwinds. Thailand's economic rebound has been uneven, with growth forecasts at a modest 2.7–3% for 2025. While tourism has surged - anticipating nearly 39 million visitors in 2025 - structural challenges in manufacturing, investment, and domestic productivity hinder broader growth. Inflationary pressures and high household debt continue to limit consumer spending, impacting small businesses and wage earners disproportionately.

Inflation and high costs of living weigh heavily on Thai consumer confidence, leaving many average wage earners feeling disconnected from GDP growth figures. Small vendors and informal sector workers, dependent on discretionary spending, continue to struggle under reduced purchasing power.

Donald Trump's election as U.S. president adds a layer of uncertainty for Southeast Asia. His potential focus on renegotiating trade agreements and reprioritizing

supply chains could disrupt existing economic dynamics. The U.S.-China trade tensions, likely to escalate under Trump's administration, could ripple through Southeast Asia, where many countries have benefitted as alternative manufacturing hubs.

For countries like Vietnam, this might translate into increased opportunities, as global firms seek to diversify away from China. However, nations with significant reliance on Chinese trade or investments, such as Thailand and Malaysia, may face complications. The potential for heightened U.S. protectionism and shifts in global demand underscores the importance of regional economic cooperation and self-reliance within ASEAN.

For Thailand and others facing slower growth, the imperative is clear: embrace structural reforms, foster innovation, and invest in human capital to remain competitive in an evolving global landscape.

The year 2025 may not bring immediate relief to all, but it offers an opportunity to recalibrate and build a more inclusive, sustainable economic future for Southeast Asia.



**Gregers Moller**  
*Editor in Chief*

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# Danish Embassy in Singapore celebrates MoU between Copenhagen Fintech and the GFTN



The Embassy of Denmark in Singapore recently announced a significant milestone in fintech collaboration with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Copenhagen Fintech and the Global Fintech Network (GFTN). Ambas-

sador Jakob Brix Tange attended the event, marking a partnership aimed at driving innovation and expanding market opportunities for fintech companies across borders.

The MoU emphasizes sustainable and inclusive financial technology solutions while supporting startups and facilitating access to global markets. This collaboration is expected to foster impactful fintech innovations that benefit economies and communities in Denmark, Singapore, and beyond.

As part of the agreement, GFTN and Copenhagen Fintech will co-organize Nordic Fintech Week 2025, an annual conference connecting Nordic fintech expertise

with global markets. Managed by Thomas Krogh Jensen and his team in Denmark, the event will serve as a platform to bridge local and international fintech sectors.

The Danish Embassy encourages inquiries from those interested in fintech opportunities in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Deputy Head of Mission Rasmus Bjørnø and Commercial Advisor Masayu Octora are available to discuss potential collaborations and market insights.

This agreement sets the stage for enhanced fintech development and cooperation, signifying a promising direction for shared growth in this dynamic sector.

# Philippine president backs port upgrades to strengthen cruise tourism

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has praised the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) for modernizing ports and expanding facilities for cruise ships, with the goal of making the Philippines a top cruise destination in Asia.

PPA General Manager Jay Daniel Santiago emphasized that these upgrades are essential to meet the growing demand in the cruise industry. The improvements will attract more ships, boost local economies, and enhance the experience for international tourists.

Recently named Asia's Best Cruise Destination, the Philippines has already welcomed over 80,000



cruise passengers from major lines such as Norwegian Cruise Lines. With upgrades at ports in Manila, Bohol, Palawan, and Ilocos, the government expects over 100,000 cruise arrivals in 2024.

These efforts support the National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2028, which focuses on enhancing visitor satisfaction and solidifying the Philippines' reputation in global cruise tourism.

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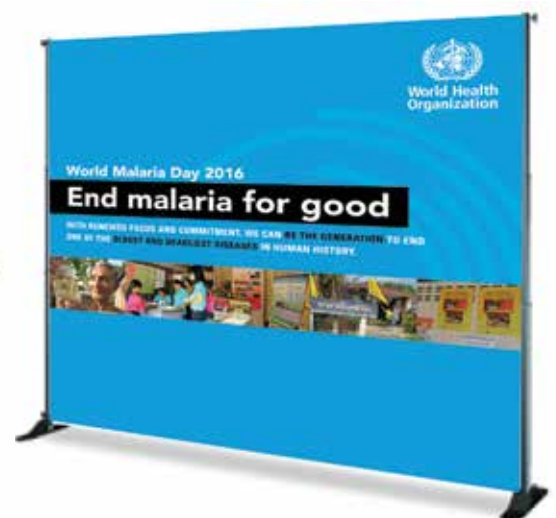
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# Norwegian airline launches direct Thailand route from Arlanda



premium yet budget-friendly option on one of the most in-demand long-haul routes,” says Bjørn Tore Larsen, CEO and Founder of Norse Atlantic Airways.

In recent years, Arlanda has

lost several long-haul routes as SAS chose to move them to Copenhagen Airport Kastrup or discontinue them entirely. Norse Atlantic Airways, founded in March 2021, specializes in long-haul flights.

The Norwegian airline Norse Atlantic Airways is establishing operations at Arlanda. Ahead of the winter season, the company is launching a direct route to Bangkok, Thailand, according to a press release from Swedavia.

Starting October 29, 2025, Norse Atlantic will operate the route between Stockholm Arlanda Airport (ARN) and Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Int'l (BKK). The new route will operate twice a week, on Wednesdays and Sundays.

“With our establishment in Sweden and the launch of our Stockholm-Bangkok route, Norse Atlantic Airways is redefining long-haul travel and challenging a market long dominated by legacy carriers. This new route gives travelers a

# Finnair marks 10 years of Helsinki-Phuket flights

Finnair marked 10 years of direct flights between Helsinki and Phuket, celebrating its inaugural journey on November 14, 2014. Initially launched as a three-times-weekly service, the route has grown in popularity and now operates five times per week, with daily flights planned from January 2025.

The route, originally flown using Airbus A340s, now features the advanced A350 aircraft, offering lie-flat Business Class seats, a new Premium Economy cabin, and upgraded Economy Class.

The service connects travelers to Phuket’s world-class beaches and complements Finnair’s double-daily flights to Bangkok, ensuring seamless travel from Europe.



# Finnair cancels 300 flights due to pilot strike

Finnair is canceling around 300 flights due to a strike by pilots on 9th and 13th December 2024. The strike will affect flights to several destinations, including Scandinavian cities and popular Asian locations like Bangkok, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

This disruption is expected to impact around 33,000 passengers during the busy pre-Christmas season.

"It is disappointing that the Finnish Air Line Pilots' Association has chosen to strike rather than negotiate. This unfortunately disrupts the travel plans of thousands of our customers during the pre-Christmas season. We are doing everything we can to serve our customers well, even in this difficult situation. And



we will offer alternative flights to as many customers as possible," says Finnair's Chief Operating Officer Jaakko Schildt.

Finnair is working to rebook passengers on other flights, but due to the large number of cancellations, some may face delays.

Customers will be informed

about cancellations and new flight options through Finnair's booking service and mobile app. If no suitable rerouting is available, passengers can request a refund. The airline apologizes for the inconvenience and asks for patience as its customer service handles the high volume of inquiries.

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# Norwegian Maritime Authority approves new seafarer's Doctor in Myanmar



The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Yangon has announced the approval of Dr. Pyi Thit Naing from the White and Green Medical Centre as a seafarer's doctor. This approval, granted by the Norwegian Maritime Authority, will take effect on November 12, 2024, and is valid for five years.

As a result, Dr. Naing can now provide essential medical services specifically designed for international seafarers in Myanmar. The White and Green Medical Centre, which was established in 2006 and registered with the Ministry of Health, focuses on offering comprehensive health services for seafarers.

The facility has built a strong reputation for optimizing healthcare for maritime professionals. It offers a wide range of services under one roof, helping meet the unique healthcare needs of seafarers. In addition, the center provides medical certificates through thorough physical examinations, psychological assessments, and laboratory tests. All procedures comply with relevant regulations, including the International Convention on Standards of

Training Certification and Watch-keeping for Seafarers (STCW78) and the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) 2006 of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Moreover, embassy officials expressed support for this approval, emphasizing the importance of accessible and high-quality healthcare for seafarers. This initiative aims to improve health and safety standards for those in the maritime industry while contributing to the overall wellbeing of seafarers from Myanmar.

As the maritime industry continues to expand, certified medical professionals like Dr. Naing play a key role. Ultimately, this development reflects Norway's commitment to maritime safety and the welfare of maritime workers worldwide.

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# AstraZeneca breaks ground on Singapore facility, creating 800 jobs

The Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical concern AstraZeneca is building a US\$1.5 billion manufacturing facility in Tuas South, Singapore. This will create over 800 jobs in engineering, technical services, and supply chain roles. Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong attended the groundbreaking event on November 7. Covering 23 hectares, this will be AstraZeneca's largest initial investment and its first full-scale production site for antibody drug conjugates (ADCs).



Pam Cheng, AstraZeneca's executive vice president for global operations and IT, and chief sustainability officer, stated that the facility will be designed to achieve zero carbon emissions from day one of its operations.

The facility, set to open by 2029, will produce ADCs that directly target cancer cells while sparing healthy ones. AstraZeneca's expansion in Singapore aligns with the country's goal to become a key hub in the biopharmaceutical industry.

# Red Cross launches free mobile clinic in Myanmar



The Myanmar Red Cross Society has officially launched a free mobile clinic in the Sagaing Region. This initiative aims to provide essential medical care to temporarily displaced individuals and local residents who cannot afford hospital visits.

This project directly addresses urgent healthcare needs within the community. Supported by the Norwegian Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross, the mobile clinic will cater to 1,511 displaced individuals. The aim is to deliver vital primary health care services to underserved populations.

## Ko Nyein Chan Oo: A committed volunteer

“When there are difficulties, it’s incredibly convenient that they open a mobile clinic,” said Ko Nyein Chan Oo, a long-serving Red Cross volunteer. With 32 years of dedication, he received the Outstanding Red Cross Award

in 2002 for his commitment to charity work. He stated, “Since I became a Red Cross member, I have saved money to buy medical supplies like bandages and wound dressing medications to care for anyone injured. I feel delighted to provide that support.”

At the clinic, Ko Nyein Chan Oo takes on critical roles, including recording patient data, measuring blood pressure, and conducting diabetes screenings, significantly enhancing its efficiency.

Operating in Sagaing, the clinic addresses healthcare challenges for individuals affected by displacement and conflict. This marks a crucial step in improving health outcomes for vulnerable communities, reflecting the Red Cross’s dedication to humanitarian aid in Myanmar.



# Novo Nordisk launches Wegovy in China

Novo Nordisk has launched its weight loss medication Wegovy in China, opening access to a potential 500 million candidates by 2045. Chinese authorities approved Wegovy in June, and the first prescription will be issued in Shanghai this week.

To qualify for the medication, individuals must have a BMI of 30 or higher, with at least one weight-related health condition. There are currently 184 million severely overweight people in China, a figure projected to rise to 500 million by 2045.

Despite competition from local manufacturers, Novo’s strong reputation in diabetes treatment and its substantial investment in production capabilities help secure its position in the market. Initially, Wegovy will be available to out-of-pocket patients, with plans to include it in subsidy programs as production grows.

Novo’s \$500 million investment in its Tianjin facility aims to expand its production and impact on the fight against obesity in China.

# Swedish and Norwegian Ministries warn travelers in Laos



Both the Swedish and Norwegian Ministries of Foreign Affairs warn travelers in Laos after cases of methanol poisoning.

The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a warning to Swedes in Laos to exercise caution

when consuming alcohol. The advisory follows reports of fatal methanol poisoning linked to counterfeit spirits served in the tourist hotspot of Vang Vieng.

Five tourists, including nationals from Denmark, the UK, and the

U.S., have died, while others remain hospitalized. Victims reportedly consumed drinks containing lethal methanol, a substance indistinguishable from safe alcohol.

Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also warned its citizens to be cautious.

"Norwegian travelers should generally avoid alcohol of unknown origin," said Mathias Rongved, a ministry spokesperson. He added that no Norwegian citizens have been affected so far.

The Swedish embassy stressed the danger of consuming cocktails and spirits in the region, urging travelers to avoid potentially adulterated beverages. Similar warnings have been issued by New Zealand, highlighting the recurring threat of methanol poisoning in Southeast Asia.

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# UNHCR raises concerns over Finnish family reunification proposal

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has raised concerns about Finland's proposed changes to the Aliens Act, which would tighten family reunification rules, particularly impacting foreign workers and refugees.

Starting November 1, new income requirements make it harder for foreign workers, like practical nurses from the Philippines, to bring their families to Finland. The new rules also hit refugees, adding further barriers to family reunification for those seeking safety and stability in Finland. UNHCR warns that these amendments also lower protections for refugees, threatening their well-being, integration, and safety.



The changes introduce a minimum residence period, an age requirement for spouses, and financial demands on underage sponsors' families, impacting both refugees and workers from countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam.

UNHCR advises Finland to ensure fair family reunification access for all displaced persons, including refugees and those under temporary protection, and to avoid blanket restrictions that could hinder integration.



## Identities of Danish victims in Laos methanol case

The identities of the two Danish women who tragically died in Laos on 13 November 2024 were Anne-Sofie Orkild Coyman, 20, and Freja Vennervald Sørensen, 21.

The two young women, originally from Roskilde, Denmark, enjoyed a journey across Southeast Asia when they consumed alcohol contaminated with methanol in Vang Vieng, Laos. In a series of alarming text messages sent to a friend, they revealed they had been violently vomiting blood for more than 13 hours before they fell silent.

### They planned to meet a Belgian friend

The tragedy unfolded at Nana Backpackers in Vang Vieng, Laos, where the two women had arranged to reunite with a Belgian traveler. After receiving no further contact from them for over three days, their friend initiated a search, only to discover the devastating news of their passing.

This incident is part of a larger tragedy that has claimed at least six lives, including two Australian teenagers, Holly Bowles and Bianca Jones, while 11 more foreign nationals remain hospitalized in critical condition. The Laos government has recently acknowledged the situation, which has raised serious concerns about the safety of tourists in the region.

### Six tourists died

The suspected methanol poisoning event has linked six deaths so far, including two Australians, a 28-year-old British woman, Simone White, an American man, James Louis Hutson, 57, and the two Danish women, Anne-Sofie Orkild Coyman, 20, and Freja Vennervald Sørensen, 21.

Authorities believe all affected tourists consumed drinks laced with methanol at Nana Backpacker hostel.

According to a Laotian police document, responders found the American victim dead in his hostel

room next to two empty bottles of vodka, while rescuers discovered the two Danish women unconscious on their bathroom floor.

### Operated 9 days after the death

Authorities alleged in the report that the Nana Backpacker Hostel continued to operate for nine days following the discovery of Hutson.

Authorities are investigating the circumstances surrounding this mass poisoning, with many calling for stricter regulations to ensure the safety of travelers in popular tourist destinations. The tragic loss of Coyman and Sørensen serves as a stark reminder of the potential dangers lurking in seemingly innocuous situations while traveling.



The bars are completely empty

# From Party Town to Ghost Town

Vang Vieng, once hailed as a vibrant party destination, now resembles a ghost town as the shadows of recent tragedies loom large. The streets surrounding the hostel where two Australian women lived before tragically losing their lives echo with silence and uncertainty. Looking down those deserted streets, I might as well be in a ghost town.

By Karoline Rosenkrantz Paasch

## Where parties once roared

As I wandered toward the top 10 bars on Saturday night, the once-vibrant atmosphere of Vang Vieng felt like a distant memory. What should have been a lively celebration of youth and freedom morphed into an eerie tableau of emptiness. Instead of laughter and music spilling into the streets, I found a desolate scene that resembled a haunting provincial town, where the pulse of nightlife had flatlined. The bustling revelry that had once poured out from bars and filled the air with energy had been replaced by an unsettling calm that seemed to choke the very spirit of the place.

Even one of the top rated nightlife places Mad Monkey, a party hostel known for its electrifying atmosphere, failed to ignite any excitement. As I approached, the pulsating bass I had hoped to hear from the street only fueled my fleeting optimism, leading me to believe that perhaps life still thrived within those walls. However, my optimism quickly faded. The bar, adorned with colorful lights and nearly empty chairs, painted a stark contrast to the lively scene I had anticipated. Instead of a crowd of eager backpackers dancing and laughing, I found just two girls sipping bottled water and a solitary guy ordering a beer from the bar.—just three backpackers in what should have been a party hotspot.

## Street food buzz

The only place buzzing with activity was a nearby street food stall. Here, I noticed a stark shift in behavior among the backpackers. Around 50% of the young backpackers clutched water bottles, 35% enjoyed bottled beer, and only a mere 15% opted for fruit shakes. Not a single person indulged in drinks or shots—a significant change from the typical party habits that once filled the air with cheer.

Only one group of young people, with beer bottles in hand, seemed in the spirit to party. I watched them as they approached what I thought was a bar, but instead of turning right, they turned left into a 7-Eleven, where they purchased beers and cider to drink in their rooms. A palpable tension enveloped the crowd as many young travelers made their way back to their hostels by around 9 PM, water bottles firmly clutched as though shields against lurking fears. Outside the hostels, in the common areas, groups gathered, chatting quietly or FaceTiming family and friends, seeking comfort amid the uncertainty.



*We've received a lot of free alcohol from bars and hostels on our travels so far without even thinking it could be dangerous.*



*- Mette Lehmusmetsä.*



*The street food market where most people gather*



*I will absolutely remember this horrible case and will be a lot more careful while drinking, especially if the drinks are free.*



*- Mette Lehmusmetsä.*

## The hidden dangers of cheap alcohol

The current situation in Vang Vieng feels unusually tense. Southeast Asia has long been documented as the worst region for methanol poisoning. Local producers aiming to create cheap alcohol often fail to properly reduce the toxic levels in the production process. According to Doctors Without Borders (MSF), thousands of incidents occur each year in the region, yet tourists remain largely unaware of the dangers posed by poisonous alcohol.

## Government response and investigation

Amid these events, a delegation from Laos' Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism arrived in Vang Vieng on Saturday to investigate further. Their presence signifies the government's commitment to addressing the growing safety concerns.

In a statement, the Government of the Lao PDR expressed profound sadness over the loss of foreign tourists in Vang Vieng District, Vientiane Province. They extended sincere sympathy and deepest condolences to the families of the deceased. The government reaffirmed its dedication to conducting thorough investigations to determine the causes of these incidents and to bring any perpetrators to justice in accordance with the law. Importantly, they emphasized their focus on the safety of both domestic and foreign tourists.



Outside hostels people are chatting quietly or FaceTiming friends and family while drinking water or a bottled beer



*Saana Korhonen and Mette Lehmusmetsä*

## Vang Vieng – no party

As I walked past a restaurant, I spotted two Finnish girls, Mette Lehmusmetsä and Saana Korhonen, enjoying a quiet meal. They arrived in Vang Vieng on Thursday, just two days after the news of the Danish women's deaths broke. Despite not partying too much while traveling together for two months, they had chosen to avoid partying at all in Vang Vieng, a decision influenced by the recent tragedies.

"We don't usually party too much," Saana mentioned. "But this has definitely affected us." She added, "I haven't drunk any mixed alcohol or shots, just beer." Mette recounted her one-time experience of drinking a vodka cola, a choice she immediately regretted, questioning her decision in light of recent events.

The duo has actively steered clear of the free shots that are typically expected in hostel life. Mette revealed, "We've received a lot of free alcohol from bars and hostels on our travels so far without even thinking it could be dangerous. It could just as easily have been us."

Saana chimed in, explaining the difficulty in discerning what was in the shots offered by hostels. "They often come in unlabeled bottles and mix with soda or juice," she noted.

## Looking ahead

However, there remains hope for the future. "I will absolutely remember this horrible case and will be a lot more careful while drinking, especially if the drinks are free," Mette says. "But I really hope that it was just a one-time thing, so in a couple of weeks I think I will be drinking cocktails again."

Mette plans to continue her travels for one month, while Saana will explore Southeast Asia for one to two additional months before returning to Finland. The girls plan to leave Vang Vieng on Tuesday to continue their journey through Southeast Asia, eager to see what other adventures await them.

As night descended, the ghostly quiet of Vang Vieng contrasted sharply with the lively, carefree party atmosphere that had once characterized the town. Empty streets and shuttered bars painted a stark picture of the ongoing changes. The sadness in the air was palpable, as most travelers remained hesitant to embrace the previously popular nightlife that flourished in the area.

In the weeks to come, awareness surrounding alcohol consumption will be critical for the safety of tourists in this region. With ongoing investigations and renewed attention on safety measures, there is optimism that Vang Vieng will once again embrace the vibrancy it is known for, albeit with a more cautious approach.

Warnings issued by the foreign ministries of Australia, Sweden, and Norway have been updated to advise travelers to exercise caution when consuming alcohol. This heightened awareness may serve as a vital step in preventing similar tragedies and ensuring a safer environment for all who seek to enjoy the beauty and adventure that Vang Vieng has to offer.



# Sweat, smiles and sustainability at Bangkok's Nordic Run 2024

The Nordic embassies in Thailand have joined forces once again, drawing 500 runners to Benchakitti Park for the second year in a row.

*By Miriam Soukaina Nenni*

At 7:00 AM on Saturday, November 16, 2024, Governor of Bangkok Chadchart Sittipunt sounded the horn, starting the Nordic Run 2024. Five hundred participants from around the world got up early to run or walk distances of either five or ten kilometers. As the sun rose, the participants registered, gathered for pictures, and did warmups.

The event, which debuted last year, was organized by the four Nordic embassies in Bangkok – Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden – coming together to promote a healthy lifestyle. Last year, the event was a huge success with over 500 people, and the second year was no exception, with public registration filling up immediately.

“

*We Nordics love nature, we wanted to bring a piece of that to Thailand and invite people out to move and take care of their health.*

”



### Supporting the spirit of running

The initiative came from the Nordic countries' strong tradition of being in nature, and the embassies wanted to bring a piece of that to Thailand.

“We Nordics love nature and are always surrounded by it. Walking, running, and skiing in our forests, fields, and mountains, and sailing in our lakes and oceans is a way of life for us. Hence, we wanted to bring a piece of that to the most beautiful park in Thailand and invite people out to move and take care of their health,” said Ambassador of Finland, H.E. Kristiina Kuvaja.

Among the participants were Tom Trommestad from Norway, his husband, Ratchapon Prasitphan, and his

cousin, Panisa Thiendam, both from Thailand. They all ran the 5km distance together.

Tom Trommestad, who has lived in Thailand for 38 years, felt that it was important to support the embassies' event.

“I'm here to take part in the fun and support the spirit of running in Bangkok and the embassies,” Trommestad said.

“Last year, I felt like the occasion was very active and welcoming to everyone. I like that it's bringing people together. For example, my cousin and I haven't seen each other for quite some time, and now we're here,” added Ratchapon Prasitphan.

### Promoting health and sustainability

In organizing the event, the embassies aimed to bring attention to topics such as sustainability and healthy living.

“We want to promote a holistic approach to city development and healthcare for the well-being of its citizens and reduce environmental impacts by encouraging active transportation and adaptable urban planning. It's important to build cities that encourage people to walk, run, and enjoy the outdoors,” said Ambassador of Denmark, H.E. Danny Annan.

Tom Trommestad and his husband, Ratchapon Prasitphan, agreed that a focus on healthy living was a good thing.

“It's good to keep a focus on a healthy lifestyle, and it's nice that the governor of Bangkok is here to support it along with a lot of colorful people,” Trommestad said.

“This isn't about the race, but coming together, doing this together, and being healthy. It's not about crossing the finish line but about the journey along the way. And the free food!” added Ratchapon Prasitphan, laughing.

This year, the event showcased Nordic companies offering solutions for a balanced, green, and happy life, as well as a new exhibition on Sustainable Nordic Cities and the innovation lessons they had to offer. The Nordic countries have the world's most ambitious carbon emission reduction targets and have placed combating climate change at the heart of their foreign policies.

“As nature is important for us, we also wanted to make this a sustainable event where we have thought about the environment at every step of the planning. We believe that climate change is the biggest challenge our world faces, and we want to take care of the beautiful nature of Thailand,” added Ambassador of Sweden, H.E. Anna Hammargren.

After the race, participants could enjoy both food and drinks or chat with the many Nordic sponsors present, including Arla, Saab, Novo Nordisk, AstraZeneca, and Plan International.





# From Ice Hockey to Luxury Gym Equipment: Henrik Olofsson's Journey with Fysik

By Joakim Persson

From working as a personal trainer in Hanoi to establishing a high-end gym equipment manufacturing business in Bangkok, Henrik Olofsson's entrepreneurial journey has been one of adaptation, exploration, and vision.

His company, Fysik, has carved out a niche in the upmarket fitness segment, focusing on creating low-tech, beautifully designed gym equipment that blends seamlessly into high-end interiors and luxury spaces.

## A Unique Path to Fitness Entrepreneurship

Henrik's career began far from fitness entrepreneurship. Initially, he pursued a path as an ice hockey player in the U.S. but decided to step away from that dream at twenty. He later trained as a fitness instructor in Norway, learning the fundamentals of coaching and personal fitness.

When the chance came to join his parents, who were living in Hanoi, Henrik decided to take a leap of faith and explore a career as a freelance personal trainer in Vietnam.

"I just wanted to test the waters, see if I could make a living as a personal trainer for expats," Henrik recalls.

With limited options for Western-style fitness training, Henrik quickly became popular, especially among Hanoi's expatriate community.

Henrik's time in Vietnam also sparked his interest in custom-made gym equipment. A fan of CrossFit, he needed specific gear not widely available in local gyms. Inspired by Hanoi's thriving handicraft culture, Henrik tapped into local resources to create his own equipment, having custom items made in motorbike repair shops and local workshops.

"Growing up in Sweden, where design is in the DNA, creating my own equipment just felt natural," he says, referring to his upbringing in Älmhult, the birthplace of Ikea.

"Designing something that also looks good was essential to me," he adds, explaining that Swedish culture often emphasizes both function and aesthetics.

## Finding Opportunity in Bangkok

After a year in Hanoi, Henrik sensed that Bangkok might offer even greater growth potential. He had visited Bangkok a few times and noted that the city was expanding at a faster pace, with more entrepreneurial opportunities than in Hanoi.

His instincts were on point—within days of arriving in Bangkok, he secured a job at a downtown gym.

"I went there with no arrangements, and I just knocked on the door of one of the downtown gyms. The Australian owner offered me a job within a week," Henrik recalls. This opportunity led to a significant turning point in his career:

"Within six months, I became a business partner at the gym," Henrik says, a role he would hold for five years.

It was during this time in Bangkok that Henrik met his Thai partner, Amm Tarasansombut, who shared his interest in fitness and design. The two got married and soon began planning their own venture.

"The life cycle of a personal trainer is typically around 3-5 years, after which you move on to the next step. For me, that step was to open my own space and realize my own ideas," he explains.





*After moving from Hanoi to Bangkok, Henrik met his Thai partner, Amm Tarasansombut, who shares his interest in fitness and design. The two got married and soon began planning their own venture.*



## Creating a Unique Brand with Fysik

In 2016, Henrik and Amm opened a showroom-style gym in Bangkok's Phra Khanong district, using it to introduce their unique equipment designs. They wanted to break away from the common gym setup by focusing on a different look—beautiful, high-quality materials and a clean design that would attract high-end clients.

"Our dumbbells have wooden grips and leather finishes—they're something you don't want to hide in the closet when guests visit," Henrik explains.

This design-centric approach quickly attracted attention, not only from fitness enthusiasts but also from luxury resorts and hospitality clients like Soneva resorts and Twinpalms Phuket.

Henrik's concept was to create equipment that would appeal to people beyond the gym.

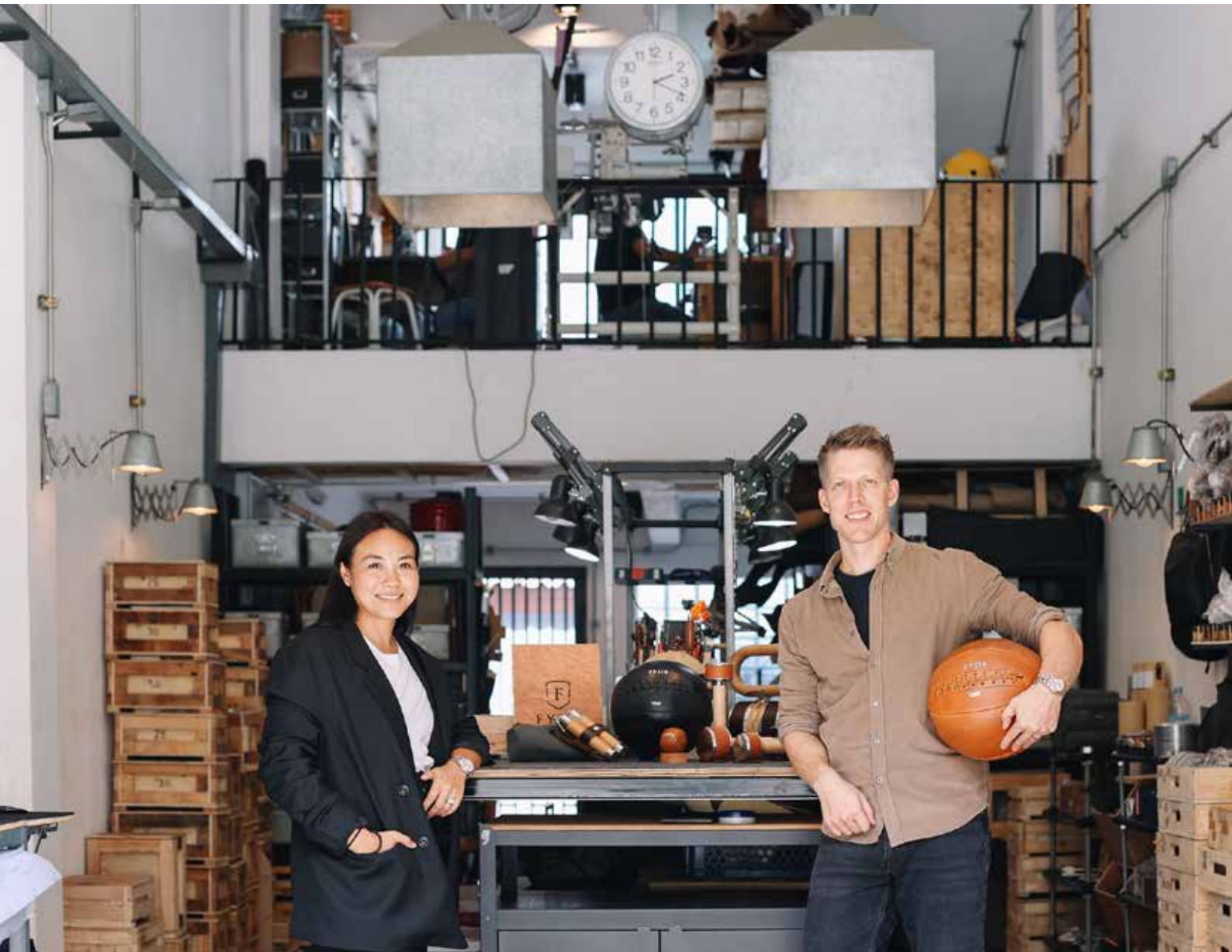
"Almost all gym equipment producers are focused on functionality and performance. Design comes second. Our niche is to make gym tools that can fit in a living room, so you don't have to hide them," he says.

## A New Business Direction During Covid

Although the showroom gym received positive feedback, the financial challenges of running a gym became apparent, and with the arrival of Covid, Henrik and Amm faced a pivotal decision.

"When Covid hit, the gym business was no longer viable. We had to focus on the equipment side," Henrik says. They were inspired by a surprising response to their designs posted online.

"We started getting emails from people in the U.S. who'd seen images of our equipment on Pinterest. Orders started coming in, and we were honestly surprised people trusted us that much," Henrik recalls. This response gave them the confidence to invest fully in their unique, high-quality equipment designs.



## Scaling Up: The Path Ahead

Today, Fysik produces both consumer and commercial-grade models to meet the growing demand. As the business expands, so too does the need for a larger production facility.

“Our 2024 goal is to set up a dedicated factory floor for our wood, leather, and steel departments. If everything is under one roof, we can speed up production significantly,” Henrik says.

His plans reflect a commitment to quality and sustainability, adding, “Compared to a tech business, ours is more old-school; it takes time to build a supply chain and get the right resources.”

Henrik’s patience has paid off. Fysik’s distinctive designs have been featured in Hollywood movies, including the upcoming *Red One* film, which he believes has boosted the brand’s appeal.

“It’s interesting that today, brand value can be higher than physical assets, thanks to visibility in films and high-end hotel gyms,” Henrik notes. This visibility has also helped them attract international clients and luxury

hospitality groups, solidifying Fysik’s presence in both the local and global markets.

With a slowly evolving catalog that now includes both home-use and professional models, Henrik and Amm are excited to see where Fysik will go next.

“We’ve been expanding little by little, purchasing new equipment each quarter and refining our designs,” he says. Looking forward, their priority is to bring all manufacturing in-house.

“If we can get everything onto the same manufacturing floor, we’ll be able to scale much faster,” Henrik explains. “In the meantime, we’re taking it step by step.”

Through resilience and a commitment to quality design, Henrik Olofsson and Amm Tarasansombut have turned Fysik into more than a gym equipment brand; it’s a fusion of craftsmanship, design, and fitness—offering products that redefine the gym experience for high-end spaces and homes alike.

For full version of story, please visit <https://scandasia.com/fysik-swedish-thai-designer-and-producer-of-bespoke-fitness-gear/>



# Hemming Van: From Daloon in Nyborg to coconut plantation in Thailand

*By Karoline Rosenkrantz Paasch*

## Hemming Van

Hemming Van is a man of many titles: the spring roll heir, a second-generation immigrant, a businessman, and Hero of the Year in Funen. However, becoming the successor of his father Sai Chiu Van's spring roll factory in Nyborg was never a foregone conclusion. With two older siblings who chose different paths, Hemming recognized the importance of forging his own identity. Considering his options, he decided it was wise to pursue a business education. At the age of 26, he moved to England and established a Daloon factory there, while his father continued to lead operations back home.

Hemming Van served as the CEO of Daloon from 1989 until 2015, when he sold the company to the Dutch food conglomerate, Izico.

While some may speculate that Hemming Van sold Daloon to prove his worth as an entrepreneur like his father, that was not the case. "When I decided to sell Daloon, it was because I believed the company didn't have a chance of surviving as an independent business anymore," he explains.

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*When I decided to sell Daloon, it was because I believed the company didn't have a chance of surviving as an independent business anymore.*

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## Could I have done what my father did?

Reflecting on his career, Hemming often contemplates the weight of expectations tied to family legacy. “It’s one thing to take over a business from your father,” he muses. “But could I have done what my father did?” This question lingered in his mind, especially when he considered starting from scratch.

“If I had resigned from my job to start anew with six gas burners and six frying pans, given the condition Daloon was in during the late '90s, people would have thought I was crazy,” he chuckles at the thought. “And they would have been right.” This sentiment left him feeling somewhat trapped, grappling with the challenge of living up to a legacy while navigating his own aspirations.

## The birth of Easyfood

Then came Flemming Paasch, who proposed the idea of launching a new venture together: Easyfood, a company focused on providing convenient, high-quality food options for busy consumers. “It felt like a perfect compromise,” Hemming recalls. “This would allow me to explore new opportunities without risking everything I had.” The partnership provided a safety net while allowing him to honor the foundations laid by his family.

Through Easyfood, Hemming gained his footing as an independent entrepreneur. “Flemming needed something that he couldn’t achieve where he was, and I thought it would be exciting to pursue this new direction alongside Daloon,” Hemming Van shares. Trusting Flemming’s expertise, they wasted no time in getting started,



blending their visions and skills to carve out a niche in the market.

Hemming’s journey as an investor and entrepreneur began in earnest with Easyfood, where his background in the food industry merged with Flemming’s insights and experience, creating a recipe for success. This venture allowed Hemming to tap into his creative potential while providing innovative food solutions that catered to evolving consumer needs.



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*The coconut bottling factory generates revenues between 210 and 270 million, employing about 130 people.*

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## A new coconut venture

From Easyfood to his future projects, Hemming's experiences continued to shape his entrepreneurial journey. After selling Daloon, he embarked on a new adventure in Thailand. Initially, Hemming traveled to China, Hong Kong, and Thailand to express gratitude to his suppliers for their support. During this trip, he became aware of the booming demand for coconut water, particularly in the USA and the Middle East. His Thai business partner introduced him to this emerging opportunity, prompting Hemming to inquire about local suppliers' ability to secure enough raw materials to meet such significant demand.

"I asked, can we secure the raw materials needed to meet this demand?" Hemming recalls. While he can't remember who first proposed the idea, a quick consensus formed to establish a coconut plantation, ensuring a reliable supply of coconut products. Recognizing the potential, they purchased 35 hectares of rice fields, transforming them into a lush coconut plantation—an ambitious project resembling a large-scale nursery.

## Building a coconut plantation in Thailand

The process of planting coconut trees was both exhilarating and challenging. "You plant the trees, and after some time, they begin to grow," Hemming explains. However,





nature can be unpredictable. In 2021, just as the plantation started to bear fruit, the fields were flooded, significantly delaying progress. This setback coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which further complicated matters as travel restrictions made it impossible for him to visit the site.

"At that time, no one could move about freely," he recalls, emphasizing how communication became his only link to the situation on the ground. "I would call them and ask, how's it going? The response was often, 'It's okay, but we're hoping for better results next month...'" This uncertainty tested his resolve, yet Hemming remained steadfast in his commitment to the plantation's vision, confident that perseverance would ultimately lead to success.

## Coconut bottling factory in Thailand

After getting started on the plantation, Hemming became involved in his Thai business partner's coconut bottling factory. "First, we established the coconut plantation, and then I got involved in the bottling company because I could help manage the operations," he explains.

Hemming emphasizes the factory's significance, stating, "The coconut bottling factory generates revenues between 210 and 270 million, employing about 130 people."

"I believe that land in Southeast Asia never loses

value over the long term," he asserts confidently, reflecting his outlook on strategic growth in the region. This belief drives his dedication to nurturing both the plantation and the bottling operations, ensuring they perform well in an increasingly competitive market.

## Conclusion: A vision for the future

Hemming Van's entrepreneurial journey showcases his resilience and adaptability in navigating the complexities of business while honoring the legacy of his family. From his time at Daloon to his current ventures in Thailand, he exemplifies the spirit of innovation and seizing opportunities.

"Every challenge presents an opportunity to learn and grow," he asserts, embodying the wisdom gained from his rich experiences. His adventure is far from over; he continues to manage the coconut plantation, owns a share in a salmon farm near Ningbo, and actively collaborates with Danish firms like Cocohagen and P.A. & Sønner. Recently, Hemming received the honor of "Årets Helt" (Hero of the Year) in Funen for his significant contributions as the chairman of GOG Sport A/S. Hemming looks confidently toward the future, ready to embrace whatever opportunities lie ahead.



# Danish band ‘Michael Learns to Rock’ on Asia tour: “It feels like a second home to us”

Danish soft rock band Michael Learns to Rock began their “Take Us to Your Heart” Asia tour on November 1 in Nusa Dua, Bali. A month into the tour, the band continues to reconnect with their loyal fans across Asia.

*By Miriam Soukaina Nenni*

Fans erupted in excitement at the opening show when Jascha Richter (vocals/keyboards), Kare Wanscher (drums), and Mikkel Lentz (guitar) took the stage. The crowd’s anticipation was high, and the band set the tone by starting with their iconic hit “Someday.” Fans sang along, their voices echoing through the venue.

While Michael Learns to Rock has visited Asia before, this tour feels especially significant. They’ve upgraded the show, enhancing both its visuals and scale. “It’s the biggest and most beautiful show we’ve ever toured with, so we’re excited to see what it can do,” the band says.



"We always look forward to coming to Asia and meeting the incredibly loyal audience here," they add.

The band's connection to Asia runs deep.

"Even though we've been here many times, it's always special to travel to the other side of the world and feel as welcome as we do here. It truly feels like a second home."

Since forming in 1988, Michael Learns to Rock has built a huge fanbase in Denmark and internationally. They've sold over 11 million records, achieving gold and platinum status in several countries. Their music has struck a chord especially in Scandinavia and Asia, where they have a dedicated following.

### A Special Connection with Asia

The band credits their popularity in Asia to their consistent presence in the region, their melodies and relatable lyrics, which have connected with listeners of all ages.

"Since our first visit in 1994, when we saw massive success across Southeast Asia, we've focused on prioritizing Asia. We've toured here frequently and visited cities that many Western bands don't, helping our music reach a diverse audience. Our songs are melodic, easy to sing along to, and simple to understand—even for non-native speakers, which has played a big part in our success."

Their appeal ties into local culture as well, the band explains:

"We believe Asians relate to our romantic love songs. We've also heard our songs are popular in karaoke clubs across Asia. This tradition has helped keep our songs alive and relevant."

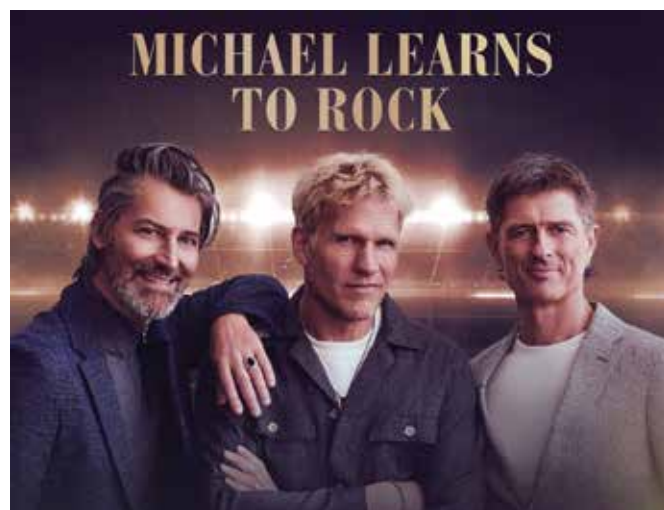
Two weeks have passed since the tour launched in Bali, and the band is thrilled with the results so far.

"All shows have sold out, and the audiences have been amazing. We're seeing multiple generations in the crowd, and they're all singing along."

After 30 years in Asia, some might wonder if the band will retire soon, but the band's answer is clear:

"We're on the biggest tour of our career, so there's no reason to stop anytime soon."

With their timeless music and heartfelt connection to fans, Michael Learns to Rock continues to prove their relevance in the global music scene.



“

*It's always special to travel to the other side of the world and feel as welcome as we do here. It truly feels like a second home.*

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Agneta's  
World  
*Agneta de Bekassy*



# Busiest month of the year!

Welcome December, the probably busiest month of the year!

**A**s I already announced in November, SWECHAM hosted its 35th anniversary with a really great party at the Landmark Hotel. Over 100 guests participated, most beautifully dressed up. Before taking your seat in the ballroom, you could enjoy a chilled glass of wine in the reception hall, Prosecco, or an ABSOLUT Vodka, one of the sponsors, together with a delicious cold-cut offering from Vivin Grocery.

SWECHAM's new director, Anna Olsson Moore, and the President, Peter Björk, welcomed the guests before the MC took over. No event can be successful

without sponsors, and this evening the three big sponsors were EQHO, SKF, and Ericsson.

The food was delicious, as were the wines, and last but not least, the live band brought most of us to the dance floor, singing and playing the beloved ABBA songs.

It was, from start until the end, an absolutely delightful evening. Well done, SWECHAM!

On December 20th, El Gaucho, the Argentinian steakhouse on Sukhumvit Soi 19, celebrated its 12th anniversary. As always, it was crowded, the wine was flowing, and the steaks and lamb chops were to die for.



This is an event that El Gaucho's faithful visitors and meat lovers don't want to miss out on, even if you can hardly move around, as the whole place is full of people. A most generous event.

On the 23rd of December, the Swedish community came together at the Swedish residence to celebrate one of our most beloved festivities, Santa Lucia. This evening began with a welcome speech by H.E. Ambassador Mrs. Anna Hammargren and was followed by a short service held by our Swedish priest, Olov Olsson, assisted by his wife, Marie.

The Santa Lucia procession was lovely, with many children of different ages under the direction of Lina and Matthias from the Swedish embassy. The children had practiced the most popular Lucia carols for quite some time. When you looked around, you could see many proud parents with wet eyes.

On the 28th of November, the Michelin Guide Ceremony 2025 took place at the Siam Kempinski Bangkok, a yearly popular event for all food lovers. After attending this very special award event (proudly representing ScandAsia), you can't stop thinking that Thailand is amazing. There were four different categories, many focusing on Sustainability – Go Green, newcomers, Service, and Young Chef.

I was happy to see my neighbor, Chef Vincent Thierry from The Chef's Table/Le Bua, receiving a new star. Khun Jai Fai also received a new star for her street food. If you haven't tried her crab omelet, you have to. There were restaurants I had never heard about and so many young chefs, both male and female. Legendary "Le Normandie/Mandarin Oriental" was something you expected to receive another star, as well as Sühring, the two creative and talented brothers.



*It was, from start to finish, an absolutely delightful evening. Well done, SWECHAM!*



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*Until then, I wish you  
all, dear readers,  
A MERRY CHRISTMAS  
& A HEALTHY,  
HAPPY NEW YEAR!*

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To mention all the restaurants would need a whole chapter, but I have to applaud the restaurant and chef Zorn, who received a 3rd star, the first in Thailand if I understood it right. He was unbelievably happy and hugged his young son with tears of happiness and pride.

On the 28th, the most popular, British Dr.Med. Donna Robinson, hosted the Grand Opening of The Med Consult Clinic's New Aesthetic Department on Sukhumvit soi 49, the same building as the popular Raquet Club.

Dr. Donna is a well-known and beloved doctor among many of us foreigners in and around Bangkok. It's easy to drop by and get your vaccination or maybe a Botox treatment while having a nice chat with the always-friendly Dr. Donna. Special guests on this day were Miss Universe 2005 Natalie Glebova and Miss Thailand 2023 Tharina Botes.

On Friday, the 29th, SWEA Bangkok hosted a combined Christmas and pool party at Shiva Tower. This time, our partners were invited to join us.

In all, 24 happy fellows attended, and some really dared to take a dip in the beautiful pool. Fresh salmon salad from Little Vikings by Clair and Kent, wine, beer, and soft drinks, along with lots of laughter. A happy end to a successful SWEA year.

Of course, there are many more happenings in December before we can say goodbye to the year 2024 and welcome the year 2025.

I will tell you in the January issue how the year ended.

Until then, I wish you all, dear readers,  
A MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HEALTHY, HAPPY  
NEW YEAR!



# Swedish luxury brand Golden Concept expands to Malaysia

Swedish luxury lifestyle brand Golden Concept recently opened its first Malaysian boutique in Pavilion Mall, Kuala Lumpur. Known for premium Apple Watch and iPhone cases, the brand targeted consumers seeking exclusivity and refined design.

The boutique offered customizable options, including diamond accents and engravings, with Apple Watch cases priced from RM5,200 to RM130,000. Crafted from titanium, leather, and carbon fiber, the collection blended technology with high-end craftsmanship.

Golden Concept's CEO, Puia Shamsossadati, called Malaysia "a natural fit" for the brand, citing its vibrant culture and luxury market. The launch marked a milestone in the brand's Southeast Asian expansion.

The grand opening on December 5, 2024, featured Duli Yang Teramat Mulia Tengku Amir Shah as a guest, alongside Malaysian celebrities. With plans for regional growth by 2025, Golden Concept aimed to redefine luxury tech accessories.



# Carlsberg Malaysia invests RM343 million to enhance brewery and promote sustainability



Carlsberg Malaysia is celebrating its 55th anniversary with an impressive investment of RM343 million to transform its brewery. This initiative aims to boost growth and integrate sustainable practices into its operations.

The investment focuses on advanced brewing technologies that will help reduce environmental impact while enhancing efficiency. This includes updating bottling and canning lines, high-precision filtration

systems, and energy-efficient production technology. According to Stefano Clini, managing director of Carlsberg Malaysia, "This investment reflects our commitment to quality, sustainability, and future growth."

Carlsberg Malaysia is the first Carlsberg brewery established outside of Copenhagen. Since its founding in 1969, it has become a significant player in the region. Clini mentioned, "This transformation sets new standards for responsible brewing and environmental stewardship."

Ambassador Kirstine Berner, who attended the launch event, praised Carlsberg's commitment to sustainability. She stated, "Carlsberg's efforts show Denmark's values of responsibility and innovation in action."

The brewery plans to align its operations with the global sustainability program, Together Towards Zero and Beyond (TTZAB). This program aims for zero carbon emissions at breweries by 2030 and net-zero emissions in the entire value chain by 2040.

With these advancements, Carlsberg Malaysia aims to meet rising consumer demands and explore new market opportunities. The investment not only showcases the company's dedication to strengthening its presence in Southeast Asia but also highlights the importance of sustainable manufacturing.

As Carlsberg Malaysia prepares for a greener future, its initiatives emphasize the need for responsible production methods in addressing the challenges of climate change.

# Danish Royal Warrant loss: Impact on exports to Asia



Several Danish companies with ties to the Royal Family are now adapting to the news that they will lose their royal warrants, which have symbolized quality and prestige for decades. This decision significantly affects their standing, especially in Asian markets.

Recently, the Danish Royal Court announced that the titles “Supplier to the Royal Danish Court”

and “Royal Warrant Holder” will phase out by the end of 2030. This change will impact 104 companies, with 44 operating in the food sector. Among these prominent brands are Danæg and A.C. Perchs, both known for their quality products.

The royal title has long provided Danish companies with a prestigious branding advantage, particularly in emerging markets. Deputy Director General Thomas Bustrup from the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) highlighted the importance of this recognition, especially in places like China. There, the royal connection can significantly influence purchasing decisions and consumer trust.

As this phase-out approaches, companies have begun to reevaluate their branding strategies. They are

focused on ensuring their commitment to quality and sustainability remains evident to consumers. While the royal warrants have granted substantial prestige, companies now have to seek new strategies to maintain their competitive edge.

The upcoming changes are prompting these firms to analyze their market presence, prepare for shifts in branding, and identify ways to adapt. This adjustment is particularly crucial in navigating the complexities of international trade and maintaining their reputation within an increasingly competitive environment.

As these Danish companies prepare for the transition, they reinforce their dedication to high standards and sustainability, which consumers increasingly value.

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# Philippines lifts import ban on Danish poultry

The Philippines has ended its two-year ban on poultry imports from Denmark, imposed after an avian flu outbreak.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) announced the decision on November 12 through Memorandum Order No. 50. Danish authorities confirmed to the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) that the outbreak was resolved, with no new cases since September 12.

The ban, in place since December 2022, covered poultry meat, eggs, chicks, and other bird products. Imports are now allowed but must follow strict food safety guidelines,



the DA said.

The directive takes effect im-

mediately, reopening the Philippine market to Danish poultry.

# Saxo Bank appoints new leaders in Singapore for Asia-Pacific expansion

Danish investment company Saxo Bank has appointed Damian Hitchen as the new leader for the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions. Hitchen, who has been with Saxo since 2021, now has a bigger role overseeing growth across both areas. He has 20 years of experience, including as CEO of Swissquote in Singapore.

Meanwhile, Mahesh Sethuraman, who joined Saxo in 2018, is now the CEO of Saxo Singapore. He will work closely with Deputy CEO Thomas Hansen to strengthen the company's business in Singapore.

Commenting on his appointment, Sethuraman said: "Having been in Singapore since 2006, Saxo has grown substantially over the years but given the strength of our comprehensive offering, we still



have a long way to go. I am excited to drive the next phase of growth for Saxo Singapore together with Thomas and the wider team."

Saxo Bank's CEO, Kim Fournais, shared that he trusts the new leaders to help Saxo grow and make investing more accessible. Fournais

added that Saxo's goal is to help "curious people be invested in the world." Hitchen and Sethuraman are taking over from Adam Reynolds, who helped Saxo expand in Asia over the last ten years.

# TikTok sparks outrage from Danish Minister



The Danish Minister of Digitalisation has expressed outrage at TikTok for failing to remove harmful content targeting children.

A recent DR investigation revealed that Børns Vilkår, a Danish children's rights organization, asked TikTok to remove 700 harmful videos. Shockingly, only 20 were taken down.

Most of the videos contain self-harming content with guides and young girls showing their bandages, combined with popular music aimed at young people.

"We are dealing with social media platforms that are not living up to their responsibilities, and I am, to say the least, furious and disappointed," says Minister Caroline Stage.

She points to the EU's Digital

Services Act (DSA), which mandates online platforms to protect minors and enables fines for non-compliance.

The minister plans to submit Børns Vilkår's evidence to the European Commission, urging tougher enforcement. She highlighted the need for stronger penalties and improved content removal. As well as algorithm regulation, and age verification, she states that current measures fall short.

"This is a David versus Goliath battle," she concludes, calling for urgent action to prioritize children's safety over profits.

# Cambodia hosts first-ever South-East Asian school meals coalition summit



On November 18, 2024, Cambodia hosted the inaugural South-East Asian School Meals Coalition summit in Siem Reap province. The three-day event aimed to promote human capital development and transform food systems across the region, according to a joint press release.

The summit included high-level stakeholders from South-East Asia, China, Japan, and South Korea. The

School Meals Coalition, co-chaired by Finland, plays a pivotal role in enhancing children's health and education through sustainable school meal programs.

"This summit represents a crucial opportunity for South-East Asian nations to collaborate on policies that promote children's health, education, and future potential," stated the press release. Furthermore, it aims to ensure that every child in South-East Asia receives a healthy and nutritious school meal every day by 2030.

Finland strongly supports the School Meals Program, funding initiatives through the World Food Programme and co-leading the coalition's task force. Finland's Minister for Foreign Trade and Development serves as a coalition champion and

co-chair, advocating for global school meal access.

In Cambodia, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport runs a Home-Grown School Feeding program, currently benefitting two-thirds of targeted schools and aiming to provide meals to over 300,000 students by 2028.

Cambodian Education Minister Hang Chuon Naron emphasized, "This summit underscores Cambodia's dedication to nurturing human capital, fostering economic growth, and ensuring the well-being of children."

Participating nations seek to establish partnerships to tackle hunger, promote health, and ensure access to nutritious meals for children across the region.

# Denmark and Vietnam expand green cooperation

Denmark and Vietnam are deepening their collaboration in key areas to promote a green and sustainable future. During a visit to Copenhagen, Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Tran Hong Ha met with Danish leaders, including Parliament Speaker Soren Gade and Climate Minister Lars Aagaard. The meeting focused on discussions on partnerships in renewable energy, green growth, and climate change adaptation.

Denmark pledged to share technology and expertise to support Vietnam's energy transition and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Both sides agreed to foster business cooperation in areas such as smart infrastructure and



climate resilience.

A joint action plan for 2024-2025 was signed under their Green Strategic Partnership, focusing on sustainable development. Denmark is also committed to supporting Vietnam as it hosts the 2024 P4G

Summit (the upcoming global conference, focused on driving green growth).

The visit underscores the two nations' shared commitment to addressing global environmental challenges while enhancing bilateral ties.

# Swedish Embassy delivers 1,000 helmets to Hanoi's children

The Swedish Embassy in Hanoi delivered over 1,000 helmets to children at Nam Trung Yen Primary School. The event, organized with the Cau Giay District People's Committee, marked the 55th anniversary of Sweden-Vietnam diplomatic relations (1969-2024) and aimed to promote road safety.

As a global leader in road safety, Sweden is committed to ensuring safe travel for children, especially in Hanoi, where motorcycles dominate the roads.

Ambassador Johan Ndisi stressed the importance of helmets. "Motorcycles are the primary mode of transport in Hanoi and throughout Vietnam," he said. "Helmets are a simple yet vital protection for both children and adults. A quality helmet, properly worn, can save lives in the event of a crash."



He also expressed gratitude to Swedish companies such as ABB, AstraZeneca, Atlas Copco, Electrolux, Ericsson, Hestra Gloves, Hitachi Energy, IKEA, Niteco, Oriflame, Polarium, SKF, Tetra Pak, and Volvo Cars for their support.

"Together, we are building a safer future for children in Vietnam," he said.

The event reinforced the push for a safety-conscious culture and the commitment to ensuring that all children travel securely.

# Finnish Ambassador advocates school meal program as a model for cooperation with Indonesia



The Embassy of Finland Jakarta has highlighted Ambassador Pekka Kaihilahti's article in *The Jakarta Post*, showcasing Finland's successful school meal program. This

initiative, started in 1948, is the first globally to provide free meals to all students. It ensures nutrition, boosts school participation, and contributes to Finland's high happiness rankings.

"We celebrate our partnership with Indonesia and hope to share the benefits of our school meal program as a framework for collaboration in nutrition and education," said Ambassador Kaihilahti.

The program addresses children's nutritional needs while promoting gender equality by enabling parents to work. Finnish students enjoy locally prepared, healthy meals,

with lessons on maintaining healthy diets. The program adapts to feedback, ensuring diverse and nutritious offerings.

Finland co-chairs the Global School Meals Coalition, striving to provide healthy school meals for all children worldwide by 2030. This goal, supported by over 100 countries, reflects a global commitment to improving child nutrition.

As Finland and Indonesia deepen ties, the school meal program offers a model for collaboration, benefiting both nations and fostering healthier futures.

# UN agreement: Norway supports human rights in the Philippines



Norway has strengthened its commitment to human rights in the Philippines through a partnership with the United Nations (UN). The collaboration aims to bolster legal and justice sys-

tems while safeguarding civic space in the country.

The Norwegian Embassy in Manila and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights signed the agreement at a ceremony in Manila. Key speakers included Norwegian Ambassador Christian Halaas Lyster, UN Resident Coordinator Gustavo Gonzalez, and Philippine Commission on Human Rights Chairperson Richard Palpalatoc.

Ambassador Lyster highlighted Norway's recognition of the Philippines' progress in human rights, praising President Marcos' policy to

pursue a "bloodless" fight against illegal drugs.

Gonzalez emphasized that human rights promotion aligns with the Philippines' sustainable development goals. Philippine Commission on Human Rights Chairperson Palpalatoc thanked Norway for its support, calling the collaboration a step towards a more inclusive and rights-respecting society.

This partnership underscores the importance of global cooperation in addressing complex human rights challenges in the region.

# Diplomatic tensions erupt over Yi Peng 3 in Kattegat

China holds the decisive role in the standoff involving Yi Peng 3, a vessel anchored in the Kattegat and under watch by Danish, Swedish, and German patrols. Linked to sabotaged data cables, the vessel highlights the limits of Denmark and Sweden's authority in international waters, explains Birgit Feldtmann, a maritime law professor at Aalborg University.

Feldtmann emphasizes that the flag state principle grants China jurisdiction over the ship, placing responsibility for investigations or legal action firmly in its hands. However, this framework struggles in scenarios involving sabotage or hybrid threats.

Despite the vessel being observed since November 19, international law prevents any direct action without Beijing's consent. Diplomatic contacts between Denmark and China are ongoing, with negotiations



focused on resolving suspicions diplomatically.

This situation presents a complex challenge for Denmark, which must balance protecting maritime infrastructure with adhering to legal norms. Authorities cannot board the vessel or question its crew without permission, increasing reliance on diplomatic channels.

The timeline for resolution

remains uncertain, as the investigation hinges on China's cooperation. Feldtmann underscores the importance of holding the flag state accountable while navigating the delicate diplomatic landscape.

Denmark and neighboring nations must carefully manage their approach to safeguard regional security without undermining international maritime law.

# Swedish PM calls for Chinese ship Yi Peng 3 to approach Sweden

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson has called on the Chinese cargo ship Yi Peng 3, currently anchored in Denmark's economic zone, to move closer to Swedish waters.

"We have contacted the vessel and China to express our wish for it to approach Sweden. This will enable better cooperation on understanding what has happened," Kristersson said during a press conference.

The Yi Peng 3, anchored in the Kattegat, is being monitored by the Danish navy. However, Danish defense officials have not commented on why the ship remains stationary or the reasons behind the surveillance.

The vessel is central to an investigation into the suspected sabotage

of two undersea cables in the Baltic Sea. Swedish police have opened a preliminary investigation under the charge of sabotage. The case is being handled by the national operations

department (Noa), with support from the military, coast guard, and security service.

China has denied any involvement in the damaged cables.



## China denies involvement in Baltic Sea cable damage

China has rejected any connection between a Chinese vessel, named "Yi Peng 3",

and the recent damage to two undersea data cables in the Baltic Sea. The cables, linking Finland and Ger-

many, as well as Sweden and Lithuania, were damaged, leading several countries to suspect sabotage and launch investigations.

A spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lin Jian, dismissed the allegations:

"China has always fulfilled its obligations and demands that the country's vessels strictly adhere to maritime law," he said, emphasizing that China adheres to international laws and prioritizes the protection of underwater infrastructure.

Swedish authorities are continuing their investigation, evaluating whether the damage was accidental or intentional. Denmark has not yet been requested to provide legal assistance.



# Nordic ambassadors' forum in Manila explores sustainable partnerships with the Philippines



The Nordic Ambassadors' Forum, hosted by NordCham Philippines, was held on November 14 at BDO Valero Towers in Makati City. This year's forum focused on fostering sustainable partnerships between the Nordic region and the Philippines, with an emphasis on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and climate adaptation.

The event was attended by Ambassadors Franz-Michael Mellbin (Denmark), Saija Nurminen (Fin-

land), Christian Halaas Lyster (Norway), and Harald Fries (Sweden).

Moderated by Ping Manongdo from Eco-Business, the forum featured panelists from Novo Nordisk, Ikano, WWF Philippines, and River-Recycle. Participants explored new avenues for collaboration aimed at addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable growth.

# Nordic embassies stand against gender-based violence

Nordic embassies across Southeast Asia highlight their support for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism campaign. The initiative focuses on combating violence against women and girls, with this year's theme addressing femicide—gender-related killings.

Nordic embassies — Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway — in Myanmar took to Facebook to show support:

"We unite today to raise awareness and show solidarity with the survivors. We honor the tireless efforts of our partners who are working to promote gender equality and human rights in Myanmar."

## The world in orange

For 16 days, the world lights up in orange to mark the #16Days of Activism against gender-based violence. The campaign runs annually from



November 25 — the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women — to December 10, Human Rights Day.

The Danish Embassy in the Philippines urges people to come together and raise their voices to raise awareness.

"We are committed to promote gender equality and support initiatives that combat violence in all its forms. Denmark stands firmly for

a world where respect, dignity, and safety are universal rights."

Meanwhile, the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok showcased staff wearing orange scarves and ties, and the Finnish Embassy in Hanoi temporarily changed its Facebook profile picture to orange.

The initiative is part of UN Women's efforts to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

# Growing espionage fears prompt Sweden to deport suspected Chinese agents

Recent developments in Sweden have raised significant alarms as the government increases its focus on national security by expelling suspected spies. This shift comes in the wake of the decision to deport the Chinese journalist Xuefei Chen Axelsson, whose activities in Sweden have sparked discussions about espionage and intelligence operations in the country.

In the past five years, Sweden has issued twelve deportation orders against individuals deemed security threats, transitioning from a primary focus on terrorism to addressing espionage-related concerns. In April this year, Xuefei Chen Axelsson faced expulsion due to her potential risk to national security, with the decision made under the specific law concerning the control of certain foreigners (LSU). This law allows deportation if the Security Police (Säpo) assess that the individual may commit crimes under terrorism laws or pose a serious threat.

## From 1 case to 15

A review by Uppdrag Granskning and Göteborgs-Posten reveals a notable trend in these cases. Prior to 2019, only one recorded instance of deportation was unrelated to terrorism—a case from 1995 involving a suspected Russian spy. However, since October 2019, the Swedish government has acted on 15 cases, with twelve linked specifically to espionage, raising concerns about foreign intelligence activities targeting Sweden.

Tony Ingesson, a lecturer in intelligence analysis at Lund University, suggests that this trend may reflect a changing security landscape reminiscent of Cold War dynamics. He notes a surge in intelligence opera-



tions directed at Sweden, complicating the national security environment. Ingesson explains that Säpo's primary objective is to protect the country, which sometimes leads to prioritizing expulsion over criminal prosecution.

## Questionable activities

The case of Xuefei Chen Axelsson has drawn particular scrutiny. Despite her public persona as a journalist who enjoys cooking and gardening, investigations reveal that she had been involved in activities that raise questions about her true intentions in Sweden. Chen Axelsson has attended numerous events critical of China, filming and interviewing participants without publishing any reports. Fredrik Hallström, operational chief at Säpo, expresses concern that the Chinese regime employs individuals posing as journalists to gather intelligence.

Chen Axelsson has denied these allegations, stating, "I was not there to monitor anyone. I attended to hear different opinions and to see if something was worth reporting." However, emails indicate that she sought to involve Swedish academic

institutions in delegations linked to Chinese military interests, raising further alarms.

Additionally, Chen Axelsson previously worked at the Chinese newspaper People's Daily alongside Lei Da, identified in two previous espionage cases in Sweden as an intelligence officer for the Chinese security services. Chen Axelsson maintains that she was unaware of Lei Da's activities and refutes any claims that she poses a security threat to Sweden.

## Deportation process

The deportation process under the LSU law involves Säpo submitting a request to the Swedish Migration Agency, which can be appealed to the government—the final authority. So far, the government has always supported Säpo's original requests.

As Sweden strengthens its stance on suspected espionage, the growing number of deportations highlights crucial questions about balancing national security measures with civil liberties. The recent trend underscores the ongoing challenges of managing foreign influence and ensuring the safety of Sweden's citizens.



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