

JAN 2526

# Scand Asia



## Michaela Friberg Storey leads UN work in Thailand

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### **INTERNATIONAL:**

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# Contents



16

**Swedish diplomat,  
Michaela Friberg Storey**



20

**Danish business executive,  
Allan Jensen**



24

**When Rice Came to Thailand**



28

**Inside the overland  
life of Anne Linde  
and David Powonzka**



32

**Thinh bakes  
with a Danish heart  
in Hanoi**



34

**Finding a piece  
of home inside  
Legoland Malaysia**

## ScandAsia stories

- 8 Norway voices concern over human rights situation in Myanmar
- 14 UN panel rules Gui Minhai's detention arbitrary and presses China to act
- 41 Finland opens 800 job opportunities for Filipino workers
- 43 Danish Christmas Bazaar brings festive spirit to Bangkok



8



14



41



43



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# Subsea cables: Our digital vulnerability

Recent damage to undersea telecommunications cables in the Baltic Sea should not be seen as a distant European problem. From an Asian perspective, these incidents point to a worrying global trend that deserves far more attention.

Subsea cables are among the most critical yet least visible elements of modern infrastructure. They carry the vast majority of global internet traffic, financial transactions and digital communications between Asia, Europe and North America. Asia is linked to Europe and the United States through dozens of major cable systems crossing the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. These cables quietly underpin trade, banking, cloud services and everyday digital life.

What is concerning is not a single damaged cable, but the pattern that appears to be emerging. In the Baltic Sea, several cable disruptions in recent years have been described by authorities as deliberate or suspicious. While investigations remain cautious and attribution is complex, the broader lesson is clear: subsea cables are vulnerable, difficult to monitor, and relatively easy to disrupt.

This vulnerability is now being discussed more openly. The protection of subsea cables has increasingly featured in security and digital infrastructure forums within NATO and the European Union, as well as in Asia-focused dialogues under ASEAN and broader Indo-Pacific frameworks. Officials and industry experts have warned that repeated cable disruptions — including those seen in the Baltic Sea — show how damage in one region can have cascading consequences across global communications and financial systems.

For Asia, the stakes are high. Many of the world's busiest data routes run through politically sensitive or heavily trafficked waters. Any sustained interference — whether driven by geopolitical tension, hybrid tactics, terrorism or criminal activity — would expose a systemic weakness with global repercussions.

The Baltic incidents should therefore be treated as early warnings. In an era where digital connectivity is as vital as shipping lanes or energy supply, safeguarding the world's subsea cables is fast becoming a shared security challenge — for Asia as much as for Eur



**Gregers A.W. Møller**  
Editor-in-Chief, ScandAsia

## ScandAsia

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# Denmark updates Thailand travel advice amid worsening Cambodia border dispute



Denmark's Foreign Ministry has updated its travel guidance for Thailand after an escalation in the Thailand–Cambodia border dispute. It now advises

against all travel to a 50 km zone along the Cambodian border. This revelation comes after Sweden updated its travel advisory last week.

The red travel warning also

covers islands in Trat province, including Koh Chang, Koh Kood, and Koh Mak. The ministry says the security situation is unstable and can deteriorate without warning.

The advisory warns of possible military clashes, missile impacts, and the introduction of curfews. Travelers are told to stay informed through local media and Thai authorities, and to follow instructions.

The change matters for Scandinavians living in Thailand and Nordic tourists heading to border areas or Trat's islands. The ministry advises travelers to raise trip questions with their tour operator or insurance company, and to contact Denmark's Global Watch Center for urgent assistance.

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# Norway voices concern over human rights situation in Myanmar

Norway has expressed concern over the human rights situation in Myanmar as the military regime continues preparations for elections despite ongoing conflict.

In a statement on Tuesday 10 December, State Secretary Andreas Kravik said civilians are facing "extensive and persistent human rights violations and a severe humanitarian crisis," nearly five years after the coup.

He noted that millions have been displaced and that humanitarian access remains limited. Norway has repeatedly urged all parties to respect fundamental rights, protect civilians and release political prison-



ers, including Aung San Suu Kyi, in line with ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus.

Kravik warned that elections held under current conditions "will

not solve the fundamental challenges facing Myanmar," and stressed that Norway will continue to support efforts towards a peaceful and inclusive political future.

# Danish CHRISTMAS BAZAAR 2025

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# Boys, Masculinity and Wellbeing

By Grant Robertson, Bangkok Patana School, Assistant Principal – Student Welfare



Raising boys today is both a privilege and a challenge. Voices online tell boys how to act, friends influence how they think and feel, and society sends mixed messages about who they should be and how they should behave. In the midst of all this, boys are trying to work out what kind of young men they want to become.

This is where parents and educators matter most. Despite what is commonly thought, influencers, algorithms and online trends are secondary influences. Boys first look to the adults in their real lives for guidance. They pay attention to how we speak, how we argue, how we handle stress and how we treat people. They learn from our presence far more than from our advice. Cru-

cially, they care deeply about what we think, even when they pretend not to.

This term, three of our Year 10 students spoke to staff about how their peers understand masculinity. Their message was simple and powerful: all forms of masculinity can be celebrated when they do not cause harm or exclude others. They encouraged us to support boys in exploring who they are becoming, without telling them that they must be tough or emotionless or rigidly stoic to count as real men. Their insight reminded us that boys, like their female peers, are watching, listening and learning from the messages we send.

We often hear the phrase toxic masculinity. Although it was originally

intended to describe harmful behaviours such as domination, emotional suppression or misogyny, many boys hear it as criticism of masculinity itself. That is why many educators now prefer to talk about harmful or aggressive behaviours rather than using broad labels like toxic masculinity. This helps us stay focused on the actions that cause harm, not on masculinity itself.

Research strongly supports this more balanced approach. Sociologist Raewyn Connell's work on multiple masculinities shows that boys flourish when they can explore a wide range of identities rather than conforming to one model. A boy who is athletic and competitive should feel proud of that. A boy who is sensitive, artistic or introspective should feel equally proud. These qualities are not in opposition and it is limiting to frame them that way. In reality, many boys draw from several of these strengths at once. When we give boys permission to be themselves, they grow in confidence and compassion.

Cultural examples can help boys see this clearly. Muay Thai is often viewed as a traditional masculine pursuit because it values strength, physical skill and discipline. Yet Muay Thai also teaches humility, respect, emotional control and dignity in

both victory and defeat. Boys who train in Muay Thai often learn to regulate frustration, focus their minds and treat opponents with honour. It shows that conventional masculinity can express powerful positive qualities.

We must also recognise the influence of the online world. Research from the Centre for Countering Digital Hate ([counterhate.com](https://www.counterhate.com)) and from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue ([isdglobal.org](https://www.isdglobal.org)) shows that boys as young as eleven are exposed to influencers within the so-called manosphere. These individuals often promote aggressive and restrictive ideas about what it means to be a man. While most boys do not adopt these views fully, repeated exposure can start to shape what they believe is normal or expected.

This is why your influence remains far more powerful than anything online. Anonymous student



surveys still show that the most important role models in young people's lives are their parents, by a very large margin. This pattern is mirrored in findings from The Children's Society, whose work on trusted adults can be found at <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk>. Parents are still the people children listen to the most. The same is often true in adulthood. Many of us continue to care, even quietly, about the opinions and approval of our own parents. The next most influential role models are the teachers they respect, which aligns with survey findings from Teacher Tapp at <https://teachertapp.co.uk>, followed closely by peers. Real-life human relationships still matter more than digital ones.

The message this gives us is deeply encouraging. Your presence counts. The way you show up in your son's life matters more than any influencer with millions of followers. Boys care deeply about your views, even when they appear indifferent. They listen, even when it does not seem that way. The most transformative thing you can do is to listen, truly listen, with interest and without judgement.

Harvard University's Making Caring Common Project, which you can explore at <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu>, has found that boys who feel heard by the adults in their lives show greater resilience, form deeper friendships and cope better with stress. When boys have the language to talk about emotions, they manage frustration more effectively and express themselves with confidence. For those interested in exploring issues affecting young men and boys in schools, this website is an excellent resource: <https://www.danielprincipe.com.au/>

Raising great young men is shared work between home and school. It grows through the conversations we have, the examples we set and the relationships we build. In doing so, we help our boys become men who are confident in who they are, respectful of others and ready to contribute positively to the world they will shape.



# Denmark plans to boost presence in Vietnam and close embassy in Myanmar

Denmark will upgrade its office in Ho Chi Minh City to a consulate general as part of a new diplomatic reorganisation. The change is aimed at strengthening Danish efforts in southern Vietnam, where many Danish and Nordic companies are based.

According to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the consulate general will make it easier to promote Danish economic interests. It will also improve support and



guidance for Danish businesses and citizens operating in and around Ho Chi Minh City.

At the same time, Denmark

plans to close its embassy in Myanmar towards the end of 2026. Danish engagement in the country has been gradually reduced since the military coup in 2021.

The Ministry notes that working conditions in Myanmar have worsened and are unlikely to improve in the near future. Resources will instead be redirected to regions where Denmark sees greater possibilities to protect its political and economic interests.

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# Denmark–China seminar highlights cooperation on mental health



A Denmark–China exchange seminar on neuropsychiatry was recently held in China, bringing together policymakers, medical experts and industry representatives to strengthen bilateral cooperation on mental health.

The seminar was hosted by the Danish Embassy in China and focused on how Denmark and China can jointly advance innovation and patient care in the field of neuropsychiatry.

Danish Ambassador Michael Starbæk Christensen opened the session by underlining Denmark's long-term commitment to healthcare cooperation with China and the shared ambition to improve mental health outcomes.

"Danish life science companies have an important role to play. For years, they have been close partners with China, supplying innovative medicines and high-quality medical devices," says Christensen.

The programme included in-depth discussions with experts from leading Chinese hospitals and academic institutions, as well as Danish partners. Key topics included how integrated reforms across medical insurance systems and clinical services can support innovation in neuropsychiatry.

Lundbeck China also participated in the seminar, highlighting the company's global position in neuroscience and its ongoing support for mental health development in China.

According to the Danish Embassy, the seminar forms part of a broader effort to strengthen collaboration between Denmark and China within healthcare, research and innovation, with a shared focus on delivering better mental health services for patients in both countries.

# Norway backs youth-led HIV prevention efforts in the Philippines

The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Manila and Palawan-based NGO Roots of Health marked World AIDS Day on 1 December with a forum highlighting youth- and community-led initiatives as key to closing the Philippines' HIV prevention gap.

Since 2010, reported HIV infections in the Philippines have risen by more than 550 percent, with around 57 new cases recorded daily. Many involve young people aged 15 to 23. Norwegian Ambassador Christian Halaas Lyster said stigma, limited reproductive health education and reluctance to use condoms continue to hinder effective prevention.

Roots of Health Executive Director Amina Evangelista Swanepoel stressed the importance of normalising open conversations about sex



and relationships. Youth advocates from Puerto Princesa shared experiences with peer-led sessions, mobile HIV screenings and small-scale conversations that help reduce fear and shame.

A panel featuring representatives from Roots of Health, the Department of Health MIMAROPA,

ACHIEVE and TLF Share presented community-based solutions, including condom dispensers, local HIV screening and evening "sundown clinics." Speakers agreed that youth leadership, supported by sustained government funding, is critical to expanding prevention and early diagnosis efforts nationwide.

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# UN panel rules Gui Minhai's detention arbitrary and presses China to act

United Nations experts have formally ruled that Swedish publisher Gui Minhai is being arbitrarily detained in China and must be released. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted its opinion in August 2025 and made it public on 10 December 2025.

The Working Group found that Gui Minhai's case meets the definition of arbitrary detention under three separate categories. It criticised his disappearance from Thailand, the lack of legal basis for his early detention, and serious fair-trial



violations in his 2020 conviction.

In a key new step, the UN body called on China to immediately free Gui Minhai, grant him an enforceable right to compensation and other

reparations, and ensure an independent investigation into how his rights were violated. China has been asked to report back within six months on any release, compensation or inquiry.

Reporters Without Borders (RFS) and Gui's daughter Angela Gui welcomed the decision as long-awaited international recognition of the abuses in his case. They are urging Sweden, the European Union and other governments to use the UN ruling to increase pressure on Beijing to secure Gui Minhai's release.

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# Copenhagen cited in report on how to cut Hanoi air pollution

A recent report argues Vietnam could reduce air pollution by up to 80% by applying approaches used in Europe. The article links the discussion to recent haze and public debate in Hanoi.

The report highlights European investment in public transport and sustainable urban planning. It points to Nordic cities with electric metro lines and electric bus networks as examples.

The report also cites Copenhagen's "five-minute city" model, where daily services are within a short walk. It says this design can reduce private car use and support walking and cycling.

Green space planning is another measure mentioned, referencing World Health Organization guidance on access to public green areas. The report also cites a Barcelona study on creating green corridors by converting every third street.

The Netherlands is cited for extensive bike lanes and pedestrian links between housing areas and city hubs. The report presents these European examples as options for Hanoi as Vietnam develops longer-term air quality policies.



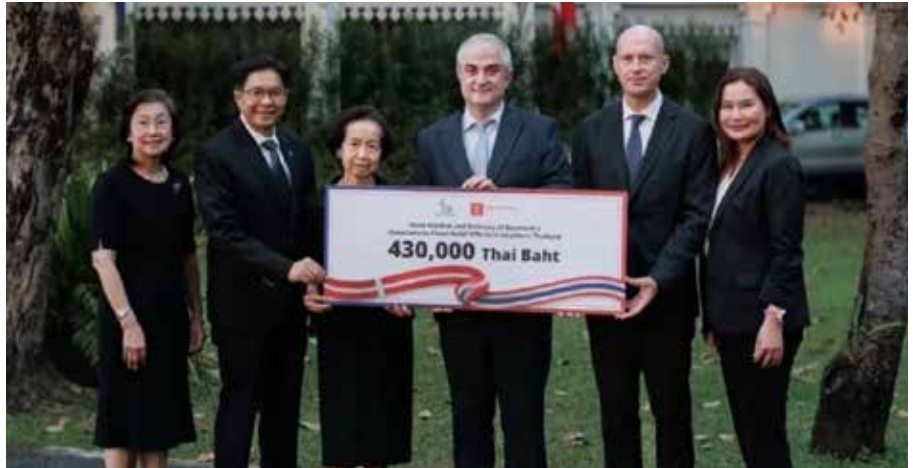
# Novo Nordisk and Royal Danish Embassy donate 430,000 THB for flood relief in southern Thailand

Novo Nordisk Pharma Thailand and the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Bangkok have donated 430,000 THB (about 86,000 DKK) to the Diabetes Association of Thailand. The money will support flood relief efforts in southern Thailand.

Thai authorities have said the floods are affecting nearly three million people. Hat Yai in Songkhla province is among the worst-hit areas.

The donation is meant to help provide medicines and equipment for people living with diabetes. Flood disruptions have affected medical supplies and access to healthcare providers.

The handover took place at the Danish Embassy in Bangkok. At-



tendees included Danish Ambassador Danny Anan, Novo Nordisk Thailand general manager Cihan Serdar Kizilcik, and leaders from the Diabetes Association of Thailand.

Novo Nordisk said it will also support packing and delivery of supplies in Hat Yai on 12 December 2025. This will be done with the Diabetes Association of Thailand.

# Telenor rejects key criticism in OECD review of Myanmar exit

Telenor has issued an official response to the Norwegian OECD National Contact Point's (NCP) final statement on the company's exit from Myanmar in 2022, following sustained scrutiny of its former operations after the 2021 military coup.

In its review, the NCP places primary responsibility for human rights violations on Myanmar's military regime and acknowledges the difficult conditions faced by companies operating in the country. However, Telenor disputes several of the NCP's conclusions.

The company states that the



safety of its Myanmar employees was the decisive factor in its actions, arguing that the NCP underestimates the security risks staff faced at the time. Telenor maintains that it did not activate lawful interception

technology and says transparency reporting continued until the coup made further disclosure impossible.

Telenor also says that parts of its internal risk assessments could not be shared with the NCP due to safety concerns, leading to what it believes is an incomplete assessment. While acknowledging that responsible exit planning is now more strongly emphasised in international frameworks, the company notes these requirements were formalised after its departure. Telenor reiterates its commitment to the OECD Guidelines and calls for a balanced assessment of its actions.



# Michaela Friberg Storey: Swedish diplomat leads the UN's work in Thailand

UN's top representative in Thailand, Michaela Friberg Storey, shares her remarkable life story with Agneta de Bekassy.

It was on a bright November morning that I met Michaela Friberg Storey — the tall, warm, and energetic Swede who today leads all United Nations work in Thailand. I hoped to learn a bit more about who this statuesque, blonde, and charming woman is in her private life.

After first taking the MRT for eight stations from Sukhumvit to Sam Yot, I continued by taxi to the UN building. It is an enormous complex, and it took the driver some time to figure out where to drop me off, but after a little over one hour, I found myself standing at the correct entrance, received a badge, and was met by an intern from Michaela's department.

Michaela welcomed me into her modern, bright office, and after exchanging a few personal remarks, I took out my pen and notebook and began asking Michaela my questions.

Michaela was born and raised on Östermalm in Stockholm.

Already at the age of 16, she felt ready to spread her wings, and unlike most Swedish teenagers who have the United States as their first choice for studies, Michaela wanted to go as far away as possible — and the natural choice became Australia.

She arrived in Melbourne and enrolled at Doncaster School outside the city. During her time in Australia, she took the opportunity to travel around the country, and she found the people somewhat unique. She came to understand clearly how all of us are shaped by our surroundings, our culture, and our traditions.

After her stay in Australia, she returned to Sweden and Stockholm and completed her upper secondary education (studenten) at Östra Real, and then enrolled at Stockholm and Uppsala University.

The next destination became France and Paris, where she studied the French language.



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*She came to understand  
clearly how all of us  
are shaped by  
our surroundings,  
our culture,  
and our traditions.*

”

“  
*Almost 10 years  
Michaela stayed  
and worked in the  
Balkans under UN  
peacemaking  
mandate.*  
”



After Paris followed Belgium and the Université Catholique de Louvain, a university of values (UC Louvain), one of the oldest universities in Europe, located about 30 kilometers southeast of Brussels. This is the largest French-speaking university in Belgium. Here Michaela took her master's degree in "humanitarian assistance" (katastrofhjälp).

She also worked for a short period for the EU (European Union) Commission and for "Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)," which was founded on December 22, 1971, in Paris.

In her mind, she saw herself travelling to a conflict zone in Africa to continue her professional career, but instead her first humanitarian field mission became Albania, where the pyramid scheme had just collapsed. We are talking 1998, and the country was in chaos.

Later, she became part of the MSF team that went into Kosovo during the NATO bombings in 1999.

She stayed in Kosovo, decided to leave Doctors Without Borders, and instead joined the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), another important organization that Michaela compares to a mini-UN. This organization was founded in 1972 under the name ESK. It is the world's biggest regional security organization, with 57 participating states, working for peace, security, and cooperation in Europe.

For almost 10 years, Michaela stayed and worked in the Balkans under a UN peacemaking mandate.

In Kosovo, Michaela met her husband, Adam Storey, who is a British psychologist and who also worked for the United Nations. Their first son, Jonathan, saw the light of day in Kosovo. The family stayed in Kosovo until 2008, when they returned to Sweden.

Michaela was offered a job at the Folke Bernadotte Academy, a specialist government agency focusing on peace and conflict issues.

In Stockholm, their second son, Winston, was born. Michaela went on to work for UD (the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) in Stockholm, until she, in 2015, received an offer from the Red Cross that she couldn't resist; she became responsible for the international programmes of the Swedish Red Cross around the world. With staff and operations in more than 20 countries, she travelled more days of the year than she was home.

In 2018, the family moved to Bangkok, and two years later Michaela was appointed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as his UN Resident Coordinator (UN RC) in Kazakhstan.

She stayed in Kazakhstan for four years, while Adam stayed with the two teenage sons in Bangkok. During these four years, the family was apart; Michaela could fully concentrate on her work, and Adam got to enjoy real quality time with both sons.

In September 2024, the UN Secretary-General appointed her back to Thailand as UNRC. In her position, she is responsible for everything the United Nations does



in Thailand. With Michaela's over 25 years of expertise in international humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding work, she was a more than suitable candidate.

So, has this busy woman any time for a hobby, I had to ask.

"Yes, I play golf on and off, and I like to stroll around in slightly secluded neighborhoods in Bangkok," Michaela answered.

The last book she read was *Klara and the Sun* by the Japanese author Kazuo Ishiguro, who also wrote the famous book *The Remains of the Day*.

She mostly prefers to read while holding a "real" book, but recently she listened to Hjalmar Söderberg's *Doctor Glas*, read by Krister Henriksson, which she warmly recommends us to listen to. Michaela loves the Swedish language, and she has always spoken only Swedish with both her sons, and her husband also speaks quite good Swedish after several years in Sweden.

Michaela enjoys her life in Bangkok and has been travelling around quite a lot. She likes the islands; Koh Tao she finds wonderful with its clear water and chilled atmosphere.

She finds the Thai people very friendly, and she thinks they have a strong driving force. All traffic accidents scare her, and she has, like myself, often difficulties with the very warm, humid weather. We both said in chorus, "We are typical winter girls," or better said, ladies.

She finds Thai food absolutely "aroy mak mak" (very

delicious), and she can eat spicy dishes, also something we have in common. I very often finish my interviews by asking this question: "If you could choose one person, dead or alive, to have dinner with, who would you pick and why, and where would you like the dinner to take place?"

Here, Michaela has to think for a second, but the first name she mentioned was the late Kofi Annan (United Nations Secretary-General from 1 January 1997 until 31 December 2006), most probably a very interesting gentleman to dine with. But she also added the late Nelson Mandela, not less interesting, and of course she mentioned two women, Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, and the late Astrid Lindgren. After another second, she added, "Oh, my mum of course, she can talk to everybody and always knows what to say."

I immediately thought, "like mother, like daughter."

The dinner Michaela wanted to take place in the Stockholm archipelago, where the family owns a summerhouse. The guests should be served self-caught Perch with Chantarelles, self-picked, sugar snap peas and fresh potatoes with a little dill.

That sounds like a superb dinner that no one can resist, a very typical Swedish summer menu.

The time flew by, and it was time for me to say goodbye, as Michaela had a meeting waiting and I had to find my way back home.

Thank you, dear Michaela, for a very pleasant talk and good luck with everything, until we meet again!



# A new lease of life: the third corporate adventure in Asia begins for Allan Jensen

He started the career as an employee of Denmark's largest company, Maersk, and was sent to China. Working for Danfoss' Southeast Asia operations followed, and now the well-known Dane Allan Jensen has reinvented his career to be at the helm of the German company Meiko Clean Solutions' operations in the same region. This gives his presence there a new lease of life – where he is highly motivated by the challenges with his new role. His Danfoss chapter has closed, while another just begun.

*Text and photos: Joakim Persson*

**Y**ou're going to China,' Maersk in late 1994 told its rising up-and-coming young man, who had just completed two years as Shipping Trainee at A.P. Møller's Shipping school, and was hoping to be sent to the United States – the country he loved over anything else.

"China! What am I going do there?" I exclaimed. I could probably find China on a map, a continent I didn't think I would ever visit, why would I?!" recalls Allan.

When being interviewed for a position, he had clearly tried to make his desire known – but to no avail. Maersk, after all, had presence all over the world.

Previously, Allan had been an exchange student in the U.S, and proudly obtained his driving licence as a 16-year-old.

"Cars and driving are my big passions, so that played a big part of it as well. And my first car had a roaring big V8 engine."

He was just so in awe of everything that the U.S stood for:

Allan had grown up in a in a middle-class family in a suburb of Copenhagen, and with a very local outlook on life.

"But there was something that attracted me to go overseas, especially the United States. And I had spent ten months there living with a wonderful family for whom education was central to their outlook – contrary to my family more centred on hard work."

And the American family convinced Allan that he ought to do something about his education, and opened their home once again, so he decided to return and study at college.

"That really changed my whole outlook on life. For the first time I loved being at school. I spent 2.5 years getting a college degree."

**T**hen, AP Moller was looking for management trainees, and Allan was accepted, taking his life onto a different trajectory.

Later, when he was being ordered to go to China, he again returned to the school desk – to learn Mandarin. He accepted China as a pathway to later make it to his desired destination – the U.S.

Meanwhile Allan gradually became more intrigued about the mysterious world over in the Far East. "Arriving via Hong Kong was quite a sight, coming into this massive city, which is very New York-like. With my still provincial outlook, I really didn't know Asia had such modern and large cities".

His first posting was as Sales Executive & Assistant Branch Manager at the Qingdao Branch.

"And everything was so different; intriguing and mind-blowing. There was this sense of excitement. 'I'm on an adventure now!' And to this day, it hasn't really left me; Asia is still an adventure."

That also included Allan meeting his wife to-be, Dora, on his very first day in China!

"Looking back, about every ten years, I see myself in many ways as a transformed person; at different stages in life. And I think it's very much the same for a company; it's in constant evolution and change," the Dane reflects.



“

*Looking back, about every ten years, I see myself in many ways as a transformed person at different stages in life*

”



Allan’s “school” was the container business, which included mergers with the biggest and the second biggest companies in the world.

“At first, I saw it purely as a net positive for Maersk. But you gradually learn...”

There were backdoor deals, changes in corporate culture and more.

“A shift in company culture can be unwitting and take the leadership by surprise, or it can be by design as the company needs to realign and bring in new DNA for a change in direction.”

The Dane transitioned to Danfoss in that way: “They had brought in my former regional Maersk boss to inject more dynamism, and he in turn brought me in to help accelerate that in the region.”

Among the lessons learned from his time with Maersk, was to view things from a customer’s point of view – as freight forwarders were eroding the shipping companies’ margins year after year, offering short-term wins, but viewed from a customer’s vantage point, the forwarders offered convenience.

“I later came to realise that such aggregators actually do add a lot of value across many different industries so one has to reconcile with that and keep what is best for the customer in mind, while ensuring that the business is profitable and keeps innovating and adding value,” he reflects.

Allan held various positions within Maersk in Asia; in China, and then in Jakarta, followed by Singapore – as Senior Director for Customer Service. That was the first time Maersk had a head of customer service in a region; something Allan had spotted was neglected following big mergers. The developments that South East Asia built for customer service, gained much attention at the

headquarters and led to the creation of a global head of customer service.

However, round 2008 Maersk Line wasn’t doing well globally and a reorganisation sent thousands of Maersk expats, including Allan, back to Denmark. There, he felt like a stranger in a strange land: “I had already been abroad for too many years. And I longed to get back to my Asia.”

Then, through good fortune, he managed to get back, along with three kids – having landed a position at Danfoss as Senior Director, Head of the AP Region, in 2012.

“And once again, I felt this sense of awe, inspiration and excitement; with appreciation of history and modernity in a unique blend full of opportunity, and of being back as an expat in a very welcoming country.”

His mission: To be the head office’s representative impeccable character with strong ethics out in the field, who would think long-term and ensure they operated in a compliant manner.

“Danfoss was somewhat low-key at the time; everything seemed to me to run a bit under the radar, just getting by and on the whole not acting very self-confident. Silo thinking also prevailed at the time. There wasn’t any holistic idea about where we should head with the region,” he recalls. In other words, there were plenty of challenges.

Allan set up regional quarterly meetings amongst the leaders in the different divisions. “Notwithstanding my more internal role in global services, my commercial background and Asia experience and the fact that I on and off was the only Danish Danfoss employee in the region always afforded me an opportunity to meet cus-



tomers and important stakeholders and play a unique role as DNA bearer for Danfoss in the region.”

Allan’s service division was the connection binding things together, while the others were not collaborating, despite potential synergies. Danfoss took note of his observations and started moving in a more collaborative direction.

We grew substantially but Covid-19 slowed things down and put a spanner in the works. Allan, meanwhile, had move back into a role as Danfoss Malaysia’s GM. Later he took the reins of SEA-North and at the end of 2024 a big strategic change meant that the regional president and country GM roles were dissolved. So, then he looked for a new role and was in a very timely manner hired by Meiko for its South East Asia and Korea operations.

Looking back at a “highly satisfying career” in Danfoss, the firm grew from a couple hundred employees in the region to closer to 1,000 and a very significant scale-up in sales and impact on customers, over the years.

“I think undeniably there was a cultural change during this time, where the employees got a lot closer to the customers, and turned a lot more aggressive in terms of the growth and in terms of thinking of the customers.”

**M**eiko is an established player within B2B dishwashing solutions and has a 98-year history.

“Meiko was also in change mode, not looking to get somebody from the industry doing more of what they had already been doing.”

And as things have turned out there is also a common thread among Allan’s three employers he has had while in Asia: They are all long-lasting, European foundation-controlled companies, and all with long-term

thinking with an industry leader mindset and a focus on sustainability.

As for Meiko, two things really attracted him. When its founder passed away his wife continued running the show and set up a foundation to run it in perpetuity: “Meiko can never be sold and has to remain for the good of the local community in Offenburg,” notes the Dane.

Similarly, both Maersk and Danfoss are deeply rooted in founding families that control the respective business through foundations.

Allan also highlights that within Danfoss sustainability isn’t something that is done separately; it is the business. “And I myself became greener and greener in my thinking and private life.”

Therefore, he was also happy to discover that his new employer, through its Meiko Green division, offers a food-waste treatment solution, which is already well deployed in Singapore and holds much promise across Asia.

“And in the latest generation of dishwashers, the water consumption was cut almost by half. The electricity consumption was also cut, using inverters and heat recovery, which I’m very familiar with from my Danfoss time.”

“Apart from my job roles, I have been involved in so many extracurricular activities over time; various chambers of commerce organisations, Overseas Shipowners Association and more. I came to realise at an early age that while I held busy and demanding roles in my professional life, it was often through extracurricular activities that I found great life satisfaction and inspiration. This has played a big part in the adventure and excitement that I have felt, and continue to feel, on my journey in Asia. And I can think of no better place to be than in Malaysia - as I continue this third act in my life.”

Footnote: for a longer version, go to [scandasia.com](http://scandasia.com).



Excavation at the Bang Site, Ban Kao. The Bang Site was named after the owner of the land plot. Photo: Per Sørensen, in Per Sørensen & Tove Hatting: *The Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition 1960-62. Archaeological excavations in Thailand, Volume II, Ban-Kao.* Munksgaard, 1967.

# When Rice Came to Thailand

November-December 2025 marked the 65th anniversary of the Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition 1960–62. The expedition travelled up the River Kwai and dug deep into Southeast Asia’s Stone Age.

By Uffe Wilken

The film ‘The Bridge on the River Kwai’, about the Death Railway, takes place in the jungle on the border between Burma and Thailand during World War II. The premise of the film is accurate: Allied prisoners of war were forced under horrific conditions to carve their way through the river’s cliffs to construct the railway for the Japanese occupiers.

One of those prisoners was the Dutch archaeologist Hendrik Robbert van Heekeren, who must have been quite astonished by what he saw in the gravel one day in March 1943. Among the many stones cascading down the slope, he recognised markings that could only have been shaped by a skilled and systematic craftsman at some point in the distant past. Both van Heekeren and the stones survived Japanese captivity and the war.

This discovery would years later prove significant for both Southeast Asian and Danish archaeology, and it became the direct reason why the Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition of 1960–62 became a reality. About its significance, Professor of Archaeology Rasmi Shoocongdej from Silpakorn University in Bangkok explains:

“For Thailand, it marked the beginning of using modern methods in archaeology. The most important results from the expedition showed that the researchers were pioneers who could link the prehistoric populations of the Ban Kao area in western Thailand with today’s Thai people, based on skeletal remains analysed by Professor Sood Sangvichien. This claim has been cited as evidence that the ‘Thai people’ have been here for at least 4,000 years.”

## Thai-Danish Collaboration on the Past

A half-hour drive from Kanchanaburi, the town by the bridge, lies Ban Kao — a small settlement with a new and beautiful archaeological museum which does an excellent job doing popular science communication. Most of the artefacts and the knowledge about them presented in the museum are thanks to the Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition of 1960–62.

Over three years, the expedition excavated, among other places, the layers of soil where prisoner of war van Heekeren had found and collected some of the stone tools. Both van Heekeren and eight stones survived the war, and van Heekeren later became affiliated with Leiden University in the Netherlands.

“For Thailand, it marked the beginning of using modern methods in archaeology.”

Another Dutchman associated with the same university was researcher J. J. Boeles. He had lived and worked for many years in Siam, as Thailand was then called, and was head of research at The Siam Society in Bangkok. In late 1959, he met Danish WW2 resistance fighter, journalist, polar explorer, and later Queen Margrethe’s Lord Chamberlain, Ebbe Munck, who at the time was the Danish Ambassador to Thailand. They discussed how cooperation between Thailand and Denmark in culture and science could be strengthened. As Thailand’s prehistory was largely unknown at the time, one result of their conversation was the Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition of 1960–1962.



Expeditions were expensive then as now, but substantial funds were gathered—particularly from the East Asiatic Company, which was deeply engaged in Thailand, from the Otto Mønsted Foundation, and from the Danish Expedition Foundation, a fund initiated by Ebbe Munck and other exiled resistance members at a meeting in Stockholm in 1944. The Thai-Danish Prehistoric Expedition was becoming a reality.



The Ban Kao Museum, a half hour drive from Kanchanabury. Photo: Uffe Wilken.

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*For Thailand, it marked the beginning of using modern methods in archaeology.*

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### Sacred Caves Were a No-Go

The first step was a reconnaissance expedition up the Kwai Noi River from Kanchanaburi to the Three Pagodas Pass on the border with Burma (Myanmar) in November–December 1960. Participants included palaeontologist Eigel Nielsen, archaeologist Per Sørensen, two Thai archaeologists, van Heekeren, and a team of police officers. The journey along the soil-brown Kwai Noi River was made by houseboat and elephant caravan, and film clips from the expedition show dense bamboo jungle occasionally giving way to small clusters of traditional stilt houses with curious villagers. As one of the museum panels in Ban Kao notes: “Jungle expeditions are part of an archaeologist’s job description.”

The reconnaissance led to a follow-up expedition in

the first months of 1961 to identify the most promising sites for test excavations before the main work began. Attention was focused on Ban Kao, the Sai-Yok caves further north, and two caves at Lawa. But at Lawa the archaeologists met unexpectedly fierce resistance from locals, who regarded the caves as sacred. The locals blocked one of the cave entrances with bamboo, no guide could be found, and the workers fell ill when they were supposed to report for duty. The Lawa caves were therefore abandoned. Yet the results from the other test excavations exceeded all expectations, and the main excavations could now begin.

The larger expedition from autumn 1961 to April 1962 brought in additional personnel. Among them, the polar explorer, archaeologist, and artist Count Eigel Knuth





temporarily swapped Arctic Northeast Greenland for the Sai-Yok caves, where he worked alongside van Heekeren to dig through the layers. In Ban Kao, Per Sørensen began uncovering the past together with archaeologist and curator at the Fine Arts Department in Bangkok, Chin Yu-di, and physician and anatomist Sood Sangvicien from Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok. The latter excavated 37 skeletons from the Ban Kao site, some of which can be seen at the Sood Sangvicien Prehistoric Museum at Siriraj.

## Where Did They Come From?

The results of the expeditions were published in 1967–69, and Per Sørensen's interpretation of the finds from Ban Kao's Late Stone Age, about 4,000 years ago, triggered an academic "shitstorm" from a group of American re-

searchers. They had conducted excavations in Northeast Thailand at the same time as the Thai-Danish expedition and argued that Southeast Asia had its own local cultural and chronological prehistory, independent of influence from China. Sørensen disagreed. He interpreted the skeletons and other finds from Ban Kao as culturally related to peoples in South China — something he believed was confirmed by later research in Chinese museums. He argued, as others have since, that Chinese rice farmers began moving south along major rivers such as the Mekong and the Salween during the Stone Age around 4,000 years ago. They settled along riverbanks in the valleys and began cultivating rice and other crops, as well as domesticating chickens and pigs.

Some of Sørensen's spectacular discoveries were the beautiful three-legged pots, several of which are displayed at the Ban Kao Museum. For Professor Rasmi Shoocongdej, they are important because they indicate a connection between western and central Thailand and Malaysia further south, where similar pots have been found.

But Thailand and this part of Southeast Asia were not uninhabited when the Chinese rice farmers settled and became agriculturalists in Stone Age Thailand. Research published in 2018 by both Eske Willerslev's DNA group at the Globe Institute, University of Copenhagen, and by David Reich from Harvard shows that as early as 65,000 years ago, a wave of hunter-gatherers migrated from South Asia into Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Some of these original peoples were pushed into more remote areas, but DNA analyses also show that there was intimate contact between the old and new migrants — something reflected in modern Southeast Asian populations.

Today, DNA research shows that with the complexity of countless peoples in Southeast Asia, the earlier models are too simplistic: both are correct, but each represents only part of the larger puzzle.



*Tripod pottery made by the Ban Kao Culture 4,000-3,000 years BP. Photo: Uffe Wilken.*



# From Frederiksberg to Bangkok: Inside the overland life of Anne Linde and David Powonzka

Now they have driven 40.000 kilometers, bought 27 SIM cards, wasted 40 hours at border crossings and seen 8 cultural shows.

*By Maria Xaver Dover*

But back in mid-April 2025, when the Danish couple Anne Linde and David Powonzka sat down in their Toyota Land Cruiser 100 on Frederiksberg, they looked at each other and laughed nervously. “Shit, now we’re really doing it.”

The moment marked the beginning of Expedition East: a self-planned overland journey from Denmark to Thailand. For Anne, 32, and David, 35, it was not just a long drive. The couple had been together for almost seven years, but they had never travelled together for more than three weeks at a time. The journey would therefore be a test of a lifestyle they had only explored in fragments before — and of a relationship pushed far beyond anything they had tried together.

Friends and family had asked the obvious question before they left: Would they really be able to stand each other for that long?

## Leaving Denmark behind

Anne works as a web developer, while David is a procurement manager. Both enjoy their jobs, and both were grateful that taking leave was an option.

“It mattered a lot to us that we didn’t have to quit,” David says. “Knowing we have jobs and an income waiting when we get back makes a big difference.”

They were granted leave from 1 April 2025 until the end of the year. With time secured, they bought a Toyota Land Cruiser 100 specifically for the journey and spent months preparing — watching YouTube videos, following



experienced travelers online and attending a talk in Copenhagen by a couple who had travelled in a similar way.

Before committing fully, they tested themselves with shorter trips. They drove around Iceland in 2020, explored Norway by car and took road trips to Bosnia and Croatia. Enough to spark a dream — but not enough to remove the sense of risk.

“It still felt like a big gamble to take such a long leave and commit fully,” David says. “What if we wanted to stop halfway through?”



“

*It still felt like a big gamble to take such a long leave and commit fully. What if we wanted to stop halfway through?*

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## Europe to the edge of the familiar

The route took shape: Denmark, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, China, Laos — and finally Thailand.

Much of Europe felt familiar. It was only after Turkey that the journey truly began to feel different.

“From there on, everything changed,” Anne says.

Landscapes, languages and daily routines shifted. The tempo increased. Days became defined by driving, navigating, exploring sights and finding places to sleep.

They quickly settled into the rhythm of overland travel. Many nights were spent in a tent mounted on the roof of the car, often far from any settlement.

Anne and David describe themselves as nature lovers, happiest parked somewhere remote with nothing but silence around them.

## Life on the road

As the journey moved deeper into remote landscapes, life on the road took on new realities. Distance brought constant questions: Where is the next petrol station? Where do we buy food? What do we do if there is no mobile signal — or no toilet?

Their solutions were methodical: a satellite phone, an extra jerry can of fuel, canned tomatoes, pasta, rice, eggs, freeze-dried meals and a capacity for 40 liters of water.

“There’s always a way to solve things,” David says.

At the same time, they learned that overland travel was not only about isolation.

“We also love good coffee, great food and museums,” David says. “And everything cities can offer.”

The contrast between remote landscapes and urban life became part of the appeal.

## Finding a community on wheels

Somewhere along the way, another aspect of the journey emerged: community.

Along the route, Anne and David repeatedly encountered other overlanders — often European — travelling in similar vehicles with similar goals.

“When we see overlanders in remote places, we go straight over and talk to them,” David says. “It’s always fun to hear about other people’s journeys and exchange advice. It really feels like a small community.”

Sometimes they would drive together for a while, agree to meet at the same place for the night, cook dinner together and share stories.

“It’s been really cozy,” Anne says. “There’s a whole lifestyle around travelling like this.”

## Rules, limits and deadlines

Despite the freedom, they imposed structure on the journey. They rarely stayed more than one night in the same place. They also made a rule: no more than three weeks in any single country.

The reason was China. Entry dates were fixed and missing them would have derailed the entire journey.

“In some places, locals told us, ‘You really have to see this,’” Anne says. “And we wanted to stay. But we also had to limit ourselves. Otherwise, we would never make it home.”

Russia and Laos were limited to just six days each, yet both left a strong impression. Kazakhstan and Mongolia, however, delivered the biggest positive surprises, particularly in terms of nature.

“They’re absolutely worth coming back to,” they both say.



## A tense border crossing

Midway through the journey, the biggest moment of uncertainty arrived.

Given the current political situation in Russia, it was not a country they particularly looked forward to travelling through, but it was unavoidable if they were to continue east.

At a military checkpoint, they spent five hours convinced they might end up in prison.

Shortly after a drone-related incident in Denmark had made headlines, a Russian border officer found a drone in their car — brought along to film their travels. Questions followed. Many of them.

“They asked if we had any connection to the Danish military, or if we were from the military ourselves,” Anne recalls.

In Russian eyes, the drone made them a potential threat.

When they were finally allowed to continue, the relief was overwhelming.

“We were incredibly relieved when they let us go,” Anne says.



## Long roads, small challenges — and the finish line

As the journey continued east, the challenges remained mostly practical. In Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia’s capital, it once took two hours to drive just four kilometers because of chaotic traffic. In Laos, the car needed to be repaired, which became a challenge, and in several countries the roads proved difficult and unpredictable.

Their longest driving days stretched to 14 or 15 hours.

“The unexpected keeps you awake,” David says. “Maybe an animal jumps onto the road. Anything can happen out here.”

Despite everything, breakdowns were few. They received exactly one parking fine during the entire journey.

“That’s not too bad,” David laughs.

After China came Laos, and from there Thailand. Driving in Thailand brought one final novelty.

“Driving on the left side for the first time was nerve-racking,” David says.

Arriving overland in Bangkok felt both intense and rewarding after months of open landscapes and long drives. Bangkok was the finish line of the overland journey.

From there, the journey shifted pace. After completing the expedition, Anne and David spent a week in Bangkok before travelling on for a beach holiday on Koh Samui with Anne’s family — a clear transition from expedition to rest.

“It feels like the perfect full stop,” Anne says.

The car was shipped back to Denmark by cargo ship. They simply did not have time to drive it home before returning to work after the New Year.

## Looking ahead

Along the way, they missed friends and family — and, more than anything, Danish rye bread.

“Exploring cultures and local foods was a big part of the adventure, but sometimes you miss the familiar things like bread and cheese,” Anne says. “In Central Asia especially, it can be a struggle to find breakfast that feels even remotely Danish.”

There are things you miss on a journey like this: friends getting married, friends having children, everyday life back home. But there is also a strong sense of gratitude.

## A dream has been fulfilled.

“We’ll enjoy Thailand and the warmth,” David says. “And then we’ll go home, hug our families and friends, eat good food — and a lot of rye bread.”

They already know one thing: this will not be their last overland journey.

“I decided this one,” David says with a grin. “So next time it’s Anne’s turn.”

Anne does not hesitate. Alaska to Argentina. Australia. Africa.

Where and when remains unknown. But the road, they have learned, is not just a way to get somewhere. It is a way of living — one they now know suits them very well.



# Think bakes with a Danish heart in Hanoi

Think Ngo loves baking. Always has. Always will. Baking brings him joy. He can combine flour, eggs, and sugar into the most delicious pastries that make people happy. Baking has brought Think from the busy streets of Ho Chi Minh City to the quiet suburbs of Odense. Now he has opened a bakery in the heart of Hanoi, where he mixes his Danish love of baking with his Vietnamese roots.

*By Alexander Vittrup*

Denmark was cold, even in July, Think thought, when he landed at Copenhagen Airport in 1988. His father had fled Vietnam with Think's older brother years prior, and the two of them had ended up in Denmark. In the summer of 1988, when Think was 11 years old, he, his mom, and his four other siblings joined them in the small suburb of Sanderum just outside Odense. This is where Think would grow up, in a small house on the forest's edge, far from the bustling streets of Ho Chi Minh City, which had marked his early childhood. Whether in Odense or Saigon, one thing remained constant.

Baking has always been a part of Think's family. His father baked and sold bread when the family lived in Vietnam, but his older sister was the real star of the show.

"My sister would bake beautiful cakes. She could make everything look pretty with buttercream," Think remembers.

She inspired Think's love of making pastries. When his sister was decorating, Think would help out. Since the age of six, he was right by her side, churning butter and learning all he could. Even after the family moved to Denmark, his sister kept baking. She would bake for the local Vietnamese community in and around Fyn, and her loyal assistant would be right by her side, taking notes.

After finishing ninth grade, Think became an apprentice at a bakery. He studied hard until his childhood dream of becoming a professional pastry chef finally became a reality. After finishing his training, Think started working at some of the most well-known and beloved bakeries in Odense at the time, such as From and Bæk, where he baked goods for the whole city.

In 2014, Think felt he needed a change and moved back to Vietnam. Here he opened a café and bakery in downtown Hanoi, Hakyó Fusion Bakery, just a couple of blocks from the tourist hotspots of Hanoi Train Street and the Old Quarter.

Think remembers that when he arrived back in Vietnam, there was no established culture for pastries. Baking in Vietnam was, to a large extent, limited to bread. Think decided he wanted to change that.

At Hakyó, Think combines classic Danish recipes he has worked with for years with Vietnamese flavors and ingredients that come from his roots.

"Vietnam has a lot to offer. There are many flavors I can use and mix in. It's also good to use local fruits and ingredients."

On the shelves of Hakyó, one can find Danish classics like rye bread snacks and frøsnapper, alongside yuzu and durian-flavored pastries.

To Think, it is important that his love and knowledge of baking benefit the Vietnamese people. When he decided to settle back in Vietnam all those years ago, Vietnam was still a very poor country. Think has helped out by recruiting young people from poorer families and neighborhoods and giving them a chance to become pastry chefs, gain skills, and make careers for themselves.

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*Vietnam has a place in my heart; I want to work; I want to help; I want to share my knowledge with the Vietnamese people. But Denmark is home.*

”



This approach has worked well. Think enjoys teaching, and he is proud to see his employees flourish with their new skills as pastry chefs.

"I love seeing them enjoy baking," Think says. "It's about giving them opportunities and helping them out in the best way I know how."

Think is doing well in Vietnam; Hakyó Fusion Bakery has been a success, and he is looking to expand by opening another Hakyó in his hometown of Ho Chi Minh City.

His whole family still lives in Odense. The sister who planted the seed of his love for baking has hung up her apron and has become a translator. Think is the last one left in the family to carry on their baking legacy from the other side of the world.

Despite his success in Vietnam, Denmark is still home to Think.

"Vietnam has a place in my heart; I want to work; I want to help; I want to share my knowledge with the Vietnamese people. But Denmark is home," Think says with a big smile.



# Finding a piece of home inside Legoland Malaysia

I am standing at the entrance to Legoland Malaysia on a bright Saturday morning in November, and even though I am thousands of kilometres from Denmark, the familiar colours, the Lego bricks, and the sound of families arriving make it feel strangely close to home.

*By Maria Xaver Dover*

It is remarkable how easily a place can pull you back in time, even when you are on the southern tip of Malaysia instead of on the quiet Danish roads that led my family to Legoland Billund every September. Back then, Legoland meant birthday traditions, wet jackets after sudden rain showers, and the steady comfort of something that happened the same way every year. Now, standing in Johor Bahru, some of that feeling returns — softer, but still very present.

## Returning to a childhood ritual — in a new setting

There is something oddly amusing about revisiting a childhood ritual alone. When I moved to Thailand earlier this year and discovered that Asia had its own Legoland — the first in the region, opened in 2012 and operated by



Merlin Entertainments, the same company behind Billund — I knew I had to go.

Walking through the gates today, I take a quick photo and send it to my parents: “I’m standing in Legoland on the other side of the world — and I feel grateful for every single one of our trips.” For a moment, it feels like being 10 years old again.

## Familiar rides, familiar reactions

My first stop is The Dragon. The castle looks almost exactly like the one in Billund, and the rumble of the roller coaster brings back the same mix of excitement and nerves I used to have as a child. Later, I pass the fire truck ride, where families race to put out a “burning” Lego building. It was always the ride I looked forward to the most.



Watching Malaysian families throw themselves into the challenge with the same enthusiasm my own family once had makes me smile. A mother cheers loudly as her two children pump the lever as fast as they can — a reaction that feels instantly recognisable, even from a different corner of the world.

## A Danish connection, far from Denmark

At a game stall, a man invites me to try winning a plush toy. I decline, and when he asks where I am from, I say “Denmark” without thinking. His reaction is instant. “Denmark? Wow. I’m proud to meet someone from Denmark,” he says.

Lego has a strong reputation in Asia — it stands for creativity, quality, and childhood memories. Hearing that kind of warmth toward my home country here, inside a park built on a Danish idea, feels quietly meaningful.

## A day with room for simple joys

I buy a burger and fries, drink soda and chocolate milk, and order ice cream simply because I can. I walk for hours, barely noticing the heavy Malaysian heat. Some things feel familiar — the steady Lego train circling the park, the bright colours of the buildings, the cheerful background music — while others are new, like the smell of spicy snacks from food stalls and the mix of languages around me. Legoland Malaysia has more than 40 rides and attractions, and the layout balances what I recognise with what belongs only to this place.

## Miniland, where Asia shrinks to brick size

Miniland still stands out. In Billund, the miniature Denmark always fascinated me. Here, the focus is Asia: the Taj Mahal,

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*Some places do not just stay in your memory. They follow you — even all the way to Malaysia.*

”

Angkor Wat, Wat Arun, and the Petronas Towers — all recreated in impressive detail, with the tallest model reaching almost nine metres. Around 30 million Lego bricks have been used in this area alone.

I stop for a long time at Angkor Wat, studying the tiny steps and towers, while children run past, pointing at miniature boats drifting across Lego rivers. It is an impressive way to see places you know — and places you do not — reduced to something playful and precise.

## Not alone in a place built for families

I am aware that I stand out a little — a blonde 26-year-old woman walking alone in Legoland Malaysia. A few curious glances come my way, but they never feel unfriendly. Staff members smile, and families seem more amused than surprised.

And honestly, it is difficult to feel lonely in a place shaped so strongly by excitement. Children tug their parents toward rides, calling out “again!” in different languages. That kind of energy travels easily.

## A Danish idea that finds a home everywhere

As the afternoon light softens, I think about how remarkable it is that a Danish invention from a small workshop in Billund in the 1930s has become part of childhoods around the world. Lego’s approach to creativity — simple, hands-on, imaginative — seems to work anywhere.

Walking toward the exit, I take one last picture of the castle and wonder whether I should celebrate my 27th birthday in Legoland next year, just as I did as a child. Maybe I will. Because today reminded me that some places do not just stay in your memory. They follow you — even all the way to Malaysia.

# Norway's Corvus Energy teams up with BYD to push marine battery systems

Norway-based Corvus Energy has signed a memorandum of understanding with Chinese BYD Energy Storage to develop battery solutions for ships. The companies said the partnership is aimed at speeding up product development and expanding access to marine energy storage globally.

Under the agreement, Corvus will handle system integration and route-to-market work, drawing on its experience with marine battery installations and its existing shipping customers. BYD will contribute lithium iron phosphate (LFP) battery technology and its large-scale supply chain.



The companies said they will also coordinate market activities to encourage wider adoption of marine energy storage systems. The stated goal is to support the ship-

ping industry's shift towards lower-emission operations.

Corvus recently launched Blue Whale NxtGen, a new marine battery system designed for applications that need high energy content and density. The system is modular and scalable, and includes battery management systems and analytics.

Corvus said Blue Whale NxtGen uses cobalt-free LFP cells with a projected lifespan of up to 15 years and supports a 1C charge and discharge rate. Initial deliveries are scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2026.

# Scania introduces Smart and Safe coach in Malaysia

Swedish manufacturer Scania has delivered Malaysia's first **Smart and Safe** coach to Gopi Travel Tours Sdn Bhd, expanding the company's connected-vehicle offering in Southeast Asia.

Datuk Gopinathan, Managing Director of Gopi Travel Tours, received the vehicle in Bukit Jelutong. "With the Scania Smart and Safe coach, we can achieve seamless integration of touchpoints within the Scania Digital Ecosystem," he said.

The model features a new computing platform and a 4G/5G-ready telematics unit that enable remote diagnostics and detailed vehicle data collection. According to Scania, this supports improved uptime and more efficient fleet management.



Nurulain Sulaiman, Sales Manager for Bus & Coach at Scania Southeast Asia, noted that fuel usage, vehicle performance and emissions can be monitored via the Fleet Management System Monitoring Package and the My Scania portal. "This information allows Gopi Travel Tours

to identify opportunities for vehicle usage improvements," she said.

Scania has operated in Malaysia since the 1970s and runs sales, service and digital support operations across the country, with regional parts supply managed from Singapore.

# Swedish and Norwegian arrivals to Thailand increase, says TAT

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) reports continued growth in travel from Sweden and Norway this year. According to TAT, Thailand welcomed 185,580 visitors from Sweden, up 9.52% year-on-year, while 104,618 travelers from Norway represented an increase of 13.06% from 1 January to 7 December.

TAT said demand from European markets has been supported by new long-haul routes, including recent services to Thailand operated by Norse Atlantic Airways, which



launched flights from Stockholm, Oslo and Manchester to Bangkok and Phuket.

Sweden and Norway remain

high-potential tourism markets for Thailand, with Bangkok, Phuket, Krabi, Surat Thani and Chiang Mai listed as the most popular destinations.

# Danish Halal and logistics for Indonesia



Indonesia's Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (BPJPH) and the Royal Embassy of Denmark say they are strengthening cooperation to improve standards and education around halal logistics and halal packaging materials. The initiative is aimed at supporting a more transparent and integrated halal supply chain as the halal industry grows.

BPJPH deputy Abd Syakur said halal logistics is becoming more critical as supply chains expand and become more complex. He added that Indonesia sees potential to play a larger global role in the halal economy, but that progress depends on building a strong logistics and packaging ecosystem that meets international expectations.

Danish Ambassador to Indone-

sia Sten Frimodt Nielsen welcomed Indonesia's work on halal product assurance and described Indonesia's halal certification system as structured. He also said halal processes should be seen as supporting efficient logistics, and that broad regulations require close cooperation between government and industry.

The partnership was highlighted by a two-day workshop in Jakarta on 9–10 December 2025 focused on halal logistics, supply chain management, and packaging materials. Attendees included representatives from Denmark's Agriculture and Food Council, Indonesia's National Standardization Agency, the Indonesian Logistics Association, and industry participants from both countries.

BPJPH said the workshop and wider collaboration are intended to strengthen standards and best practices, build industry capacity, and speed up implementation of halal logistics and packaging materials that can compete internationally.

# Hong Kong suspends poultry imports from Danish municipality after H5N1 outbreak

Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety has suspended imports of poultry meat, products and eggs from Mariagerfjord Municipality in Denmark, the department states in a press release. The move follows a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in the area.

The suspension took effect immediately on December 10, 2025, as a precaution to protect public health in Hong Kong. It covers all



poultry meat and products from the affected municipality.

According to Hong Kong trade statistics, the city imported about 230 tonnes of frozen poultry meat and around 180,000 poultry eggs from Denmark in the first nine months of this year.

The Centre for Food Safety has contacted the Danish authorities and says it will closely monitor updates from international and Danish bodies. Further action will be taken depending on how the avian influenza situation develops.

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# Nokia helps Bangladesh submarine cable plan on Singapore–Cox's Bazar route



Bangladesh Private Cable System (BPCS) Consortium has signed an agreement with Nokia to supply Submarine Line Terminal Equipment (SLTE) for a new private submarine cable project. The

signing took place at a ceremony in Dhaka, *The Business Standard*.

The consortium said the project is planned on a Singapore–Cox's Bazar route, with three cable pairs. It said the system is intended to re-

duce reliance on bandwidth sourced through India via terrestrial connections.

Consortium representatives from Metacore Subcom Limited, Summit Communications Limited, and CdnNet Communications Limited signed the agreement. Nokia was represented by Prashant Malkani and Suman Prasad, with Nokia Bangladesh officials also attending.

Foreign diplomats attending included EU Ambassador Michael Miller and Finnish diplomat to India Antti Herlevi. The consortium said it has invested about €42 million so far, and plans a further €84–€91 million, with three cable pairs planned after June 2026.

# Sweden pushes clean energy cooperation with Taiwan to support net-zero goals

Sweden is calling for deeper cooperation with Taiwan on clean energy and sustainability to reach shared net-zero targets.

Speaking in Taipei on 4 December, Sweden's top envoy in Taiwan, Helena Reitberger, urged broader, long-term energy collaboration. She highlighted Sweden's experience with public-private partnerships as a model for Taiwan's energy transition.

Energy resilience was a key theme at the roundtable hosted by the Swedish Trade and Invest Council. Reitberger stressed that reliable, clean power is essential for overall

societal resilience.

Swedish firm Baseload Capital pointed to Taiwan's strong geothermal potential as a 24/7 baseload option for tech companies and data centres. Geothermal power, they said, can complement intermittent renewables like solar and wind.

The discussion also showcased Sweden-Taiwan cooperation on marine energy through the Minesto initiative. Swedish marine power devices are being tested with Taiwanese partners to harness low-flow tides and ocean currents off eastern Taiwan.



# Finnish Kuva Space partners with WWF-Indonesia on blue carbon monitoring

Finland's Kuva Space has partnered with WWF-Indonesia to monitor and quantify Indonesia's blue carbon assets using satellite-based climate data. The collaboration, announced earlier this month, aims to support coastal conservation efforts through hyperspectral imaging and AI-driven analysis.

The project focuses on mapping seagrass and mangrove habitats in East Nusa Tenggara and East Kalimantan, regions where WWF-Indonesia has long been active. The data collected is intended to strengthen scientific approaches to coastal restoration and support future blue



carbon accounting and sustainable finance initiatives.

Kuva Space's technology uses hyperspectral imaging to detect subtle biochemical signatures that reveal ecosystem composition and health. Combined with AI analytics,

it can provide insights into species distribution, biomass, water quality, and carbon sequestration.

"Monitoring blue carbon ecosystems has traditionally relied on labor-intensive fieldwork that can take years and cover only a fraction of the area," said Jarkko Antila, CEO of Kuva Space. "With spaceborne and AI tools like ours, we can detect and monitor blue ecosystems with greater accuracy and scale."

He added that the partnership highlights how global and local collaboration can support more transparent environmental finance mechanisms.

# Danish products in Singapore – are there more?

As Denmark and Singapore mark 60 years of diplomatic relations in 2025, the Danish Embassy in Singapore is using the occasion to highlight the growing presence of Danish brands on the city-state's retail and lifestyle scene.

Danish products have become part of everyday life for many residents, according to the embassy. From design and furniture to fashion, watches and food, Danish brands can now be found across the island — from Orchard Road to Ann Siang



Road. Together, they form what the embassy describes as a kind of “Danish shopping street” in Singapore, inspired by Copenhagen's famous Strøget.

To mark the anniversary, the embassy has compiled an online overview of Danish brands available in Singapore and is inviting the public to help expand the list.

Readers who know of Danish brands currently available in Singapore are encouraged to share their suggestions with the embassy.

# Denmark to recruit Filipino health workers from 2027 under new agreement

Denmark has sealed a new recruitment agreement with the Philippines for health and social care staff from 2027. The deal will initially allow Danish municipalities to hire up to 100 Filipino professionals each year.

The plan targets growing labour shortages in elderly care across Denmark. Government projections show a potential shortfall of 24,000 social and health care assistants by 2035.

Filipino recruits will be trained as health carers and health and social care assistants in Danish municipalities. The programme includes Danish language courses and support organised through regional authorities and the municipal association KL.

Minister for the Elderly Mette Kierkgaard called the agreement

an ambitious project to strengthen staffing over time. It is the first of two planned Asian recruitment agreements, with a similar deal with India expected in January.

Talks with the Philippines and

India on health staff recruitment have been underway since early 2024. From 2027, Filipino professionals could gain new job opportunities in Denmark while helping stabilise local elder care services.



# Finland opens 800 job opportunities for Filipino workers

Finland is offering around 800 job openings for Filipino workers as part of a new labour co-operation push. The announcement came during the launch of Philippine–Finland Friendship Week at the Department of Migrant Workers in Mandaluyong City.

Available positions include welders, CNC machinists, factory workers, restaurant staff and cleaners. The initiative supports Finland's need for skilled foreign labour as the country faces an ageing population and a projected requirement for 1.37 million new employees by 2040.



According to Migrant Workers Undersecretary Dominique Rubia-Tutay, Manila and Helsinki are finalising a bilateral labour agreement. The deal will focus on ethical recruit-

ment, equal pay and full labour rights for Filipino workers in Finland.

The planned framework aims to support Finland's healthcare, IT, service and retail sectors while expanding opportunities for overseas Filipino workers. More than 16,000 Filipinos are already in Finland, including about 11,500 deployed in 2024.

Finnish Ambassador to the Philippines Saija Nurminen said Filipino workers are valued in Finland for their adaptability, resilience and strong work ethic.

# Swedish space company SSC Space unifies global brand including operations in Thailand



Swedish Space Corporation will change its name to SSC Space at the beginning of 2026. The move follows a two-year strategy to integrate its activities under one global brand.

The rebranding brings together SSC and subsidiaries such as LSE Space and Aurora in a single structure. The company aims to act as a vertically integrated defence and launch provider for Europe.

SSC Space operates internationally with premises on every continent, including sites in Sweden and Thailand. The unified brand will cover all these locations as the company supports space missions worldwide.

"We operate on a truly international stage, supporting missions and customers across the globe," says Carina Aspenberg, SVP and Head of Communications. She says the new brand will strengthen SSC Space's identity and internal cohesion.

"SSC Space will continue to build on decades of recognition and trust," says President and CEO Charlotta Sund. She adds that the company keeps the same mission, values and expertise, focused on helping Earth benefit from space.

# Danish Carl Dreyer film festival held in Guangzhou



A Danish film festival dedicated to legendary director Carl Th. Dreyer was held in Guangzhou earlier this month, marking both a cultural milestone and the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Denmark and China.

The Carl Dreyer Film Festival was organised by the Royal Danish Consulate General in Guangzhou in collaboration with the Danish Cultural Centre and took place at the Pearl River International Cinema in early December.

The programme featured three of Dreyer's most influential works: *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, *The Master of the House*, and *Vampyr*, offering Chinese audiences a rare opportunity to experience classic Danish cinema on the big screen.

At the opening ceremony, Danish Consul General Søren Bindsbøll highlighted the role of film in strengthening cultural ties between the two countries.

"Film is a universal language and an important bridge between cultures," said Bindsbøll. "Through Carl Dreyer's films, we hope to give Chinese audiences a deeper understanding of Danish culture and history."

The festival also coincided with the 135th anniversary of Carl Th. Dreyer's birth and formed part of a broader programme celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations between Denmark and China.

According to the organisers, the screenings aimed to highlight Dreyer's artistic legacy while strengthening cultural exchange between Denmark and South China.

# Finland and Sweden join EU higher education fair in Manila

The European Higher Education Fair (EHEF) 2025 concluded its two-day onsite event at Robinsons Manila and an online edition, drawing more than 3,800 attendees. Organisers said participants included students, university officials, faculty members, and education professionals.

The fair featured 99 onsite and online booths representing 15 EU member states. Participating countries included Finland and Sweden, alongside Germany, France, Italy, Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, and others.

European Union Ambassador Massimo Santoro said the fair provided a platform for Filipino students to explore education opportunities in the EU and strengthen links between the Philippines and the

EU. Attendees joined information sessions, one-on-one discussions, and consultations with university representatives.

The fair was supported by the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education and several regional hub universities across Metro Manila,

Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

Local university partners included the University of Santo Tomas, De La Salle University, Far Eastern University, the University of the Philippines Manila, and several institutions in Mindanao and the Visayas, according to organisers.





## Danish Christmas Bazaar brings festive spirit to Bangkok



The Danish Christmas Bazaar returned to Gaysorn Urban Resort on Saturday 6 December 2025, once again drawing the Danish community and friends for a day of Christmas traditions, charity, and delicious food and drinks.

Organised by the Danish Women's Network and the Danish Church in Thailand, the bazaar transformed the 19th floor of Gaysorn into a lively holiday market with Danish hotdogs, waffles, gløgg, handmade ornaments, and a wide selection of gifts from local vendors. Proceeds from the event support

charitable initiatives in Thailand, including Children of the Forest.

Visitors were welcomed by the Danish Pastor Nicolaj Stubbe Hørlyck who asked for a moment of silence in memory of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit The Queen Mother who recently passed away. He was followed by Chairwoman of Danish Women's Network Kit Daniel and finally Danish Ambassador Danny Annan, highlighting the importance of the annual bazaar. This year, the Ambassador attended the event accompanied by his wife and their two children.

A steady flow of guests throughout the day kept the shops and food stalls busy. It still remains to be counted, what the proceeds will be this year.

A highlight for families was the Kids' Room, where children created Christmas decorations. A new, crazy attraction this year drew plenty of laughter — a chocolate bun-throwing machine that launched "floe-deboller" like a catapult whenever someone hit the target with a tennis ball.

The traditional Lucia procession once again captivated the crowd, adding a touch of Scandinavian winter light to the tropical setting. Later in the afternoon, Santa Claus made his much-awaited appearance, greeting children and posing for photos.

Since its inception in 2018, the Danish Christmas Bazaar has become a beloved seasonal gathering point for Danes in Thailand. This year's edition continued that tradition, offering a warm and festive atmosphere while raising funds for the Danish Church and the Children of the Forest.

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