

FEB 25/26

ScandAsia



BUSINESS:

TGS opens new centre
in Kuala Lumpur

INTERNATIONAL:

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COMMUNITY:

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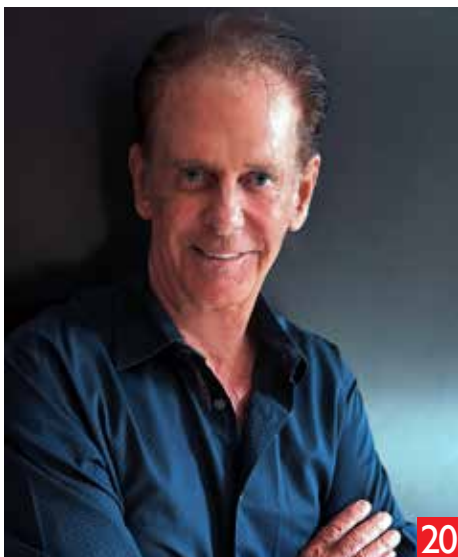
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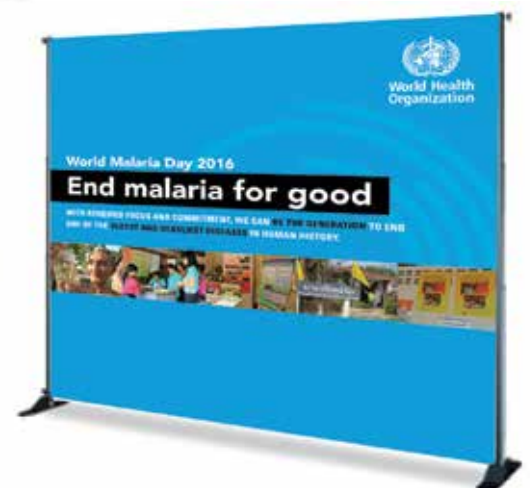
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Dear Reader,

Much of the diplomatic, trade and institutional activity between the Nordic countries, the EU and parts of Asia during the past tumultuous year has been business as usual. But given the increasingly confusing ruptures in geopolitical alliances, I think the thinking of the diplomatic staff and business leaders involved in these activities has changed.

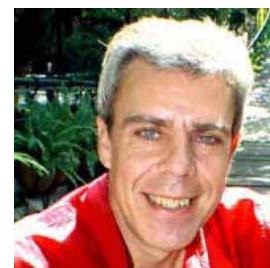
I don't think recent tensions in the transatlantic relationship have triggered any dramatic European pivot. But they do appear to have accelerated a quieter process that was already under way: broadening partnerships, re-distributing diplomatic attention, and making sure Europe has options.

As far as I can see, this has not happened through big speeches or formal strategy documents. Instead, it shows up in practical decisions: embassies being reorganised, trade missions being prioritised, coordinated EU visits taking place, and cooperation deepening in very specific sectors. Many of these developments are stories that ScandAsia has reported on over the past few months.

Looking back at ScandAsia's recent coverage of international relations, it is noticeable that Denmark has decided to strengthen its presence in Vietnam while closing its embassy in Myanmar. It is also notable that when Finland's prime minister recently travelled to China, he was accompanied by a sizeable business delegation. And beyond the EU countries of Denmark, Sweden and Finland, Norway's ambassador to ASEAN has recently held talks with ASEAN's secretary-general on strengthening partnership frameworks.

I also think it matters how this is being done. Rather than individual countries freelancing or striking out on their own, the EU increasingly seems to be used as the vehicle. It may be too early to draw firm conclusions, but to me this looks less like hesitation and more like a sensible way of proceeding - widening Europe's engagement without framing it as a break with existing alliances.

Taken individually, none of these stories signal anything dramatic. But I think it is on many people's minds during these activities that fast-fluctuating tariff threats and political uncertainty add a new urgency to strengthening relations elsewhere. I think we will see more of this — and, frankly, it is hard to see it as anything but a prudent response to a more uncertain international environment.



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

ScandAsia

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

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Swedish Defence University study examines Cyclone Mocha relief and conflict risks in Myanmar

New research from the Swedish Defence University examines disaster response after Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar's Rakhine state on 14 May 2023. The study says the Arakan Army became a central actor in relief.

The research, by Kyungmee Kim at the Department of Political Science, describes how the group organised large-scale operations. It says the military junta did little evacuation and restricted humanitarian access.

The study says the relief efforts



strengthened the Arakan Army's local legitimacy. It also notes fighting later escalated, including coordinated attacks in Rakhine in November 2023.

The research highlights severe impacts on Rohingya communities, including limited evacuation and reduced access to aid. It cites movement restrictions and fear shaped by past abuses.

The study says its findings can inform future disaster planning in conflict areas, including Myanmar's cyclone-prone regions. It points to the need for context-specific engagement, trusted local intermediaries, and clearer strategies when aid access is restricted.

China urges European states to deny visas to Taiwan politicians

China has approached several European countries, including Norway and Finland, urg-

ing them to deny entry to Taiwanese politicians and warning against crossing what Beijing calls its "red

lines". The messages were delivered through Chinese embassies in both Beijing and European capitals following a series of high-profile visits to Europe by senior Taiwanese figures.

According to diplomats, China argued that such visits could harm European countries' relations with Beijing and cited EU rules, including the Schengen Borders Code, in support of its position. The Chinese side also called on governments to reject Taiwanese "diplomatic passports" and limit official contacts.

Finland and Norway have confirmed receiving the communication, while stressing that visa policy is handled through established Schengen procedures. Taiwan, meanwhile, has rejected the pressure, saying its officials' visits are not directed at China and describing Beijing's moves as interference.



Thailand to introduce 300-baht tourist entry fee in 2026

Thailand will introduce a new tourist entry fee for foreign visitors from February 2026.

The fee will be set at 300 baht and will apply to foreign travellers arriving by air, land, or sea, according to Thai authorities. The levy is known locally as Kha Yeap Pan Din.

Of the total amount, 70 baht will cover medical or accident insurance from the moment a traveller enters Thailand. The remaining amount will be used to improve tourism infrastructure, public amenities, and safety systems.

The government has said that airlines and border checkpoints will collect the fee. Possible exemptions for certain categories of travellers have been mentioned, but no further details have been provided.



The introduction of the entry fee comes as several countries plan to introduce or raise tourist taxes and visitor fees in 2026.

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Hidden Gems: Scandinavia's Top Business Schools

By Kim Ekstrom, Bangkok Patana School Careers
and Universities Counsellor

In November, I had the opportunity to visit three business schools across Scandinavia, and returned genuinely impressed. These hidden gems deserve attention, and I'm excited to share what I discovered with our Bangkok Patana community.

When students talk about studying business overseas, the spotlight usually swings toward the US, UK, or Australia. Yet quietly, very quietly, in that efficient, Nordic way, Denmark, Sweden and Norway are running three of the most interesting business schools on the planet: Copenhagen Business School (CBS), Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), and the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH).

Each offers world-class teach-

ing, international student communities, and strong career outcomes. But they couldn't feel more different. CBS is huge and urban. SSE is small and elite. NHH is friendly and residential.

COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL (CBS)

Big. International. Urban.

Walk through Frederiksberg in Copenhagen and CBS feels like part of the city, students cycling in, grabbing pastries, jumping between modern buildings and speaking every language imaginable.

But what makes CBS special is its combination of size and internationality. With over 20,000 stu-

dents, it's one of the largest business schools in Europe, yet it manages to stay academically rigorous and globally competitive.

CBS offers wide degree choices, a modern campus, and a strong reputation for innovation and sustainability. Students who like choice, flexibility, and the buzz of a big campus will find a natural home here.

STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS (SSE)

Small. Elite. Intense.

SSE sits in the heart of Stockholm, but you won't blend in here, you'll be known. With only about 2,000 students total, SSE feels more like a selective college than a university. Classes are tight, professors know students by name, and expectations are high.

This is Sweden's most prestigious business school, famous for producing CEOs, economists, and leaders across Scandinavia. The environment is academically demanding but deeply supportive. Students often say they feel they "grew up professionally" at SSE.

And the perks?

A tight community, small cohorts, strong industry recruiting, and a campus where you could bump into alumni running Sweden's major companies. SSE alumni often talk about the "SSE network effect." You join once, and it follows you everywhere.

NORWEGIAN SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS (NHH)

Cozy. Community-based. Norway-nice.

If CBS is the metropolis and SSE the elite institute, NHH is the village, in the best possible way. Located in the beautiful, leafy outskirts of Bergen, NHH is known for its community spirit, collaborative culture, and warm environment.

Students study hard, hike harder, and somehow still find time for a full student-run nightclub, the second biggest in Berge, in the basement of the main building.

NHH is Norway's leading busi-

ness school and extremely strong in economics, finance, and accounting. With a mid-sized student population and a compact campus, students build close friendships and strong support networks.

WHAT MAKES EACH SCHOOL DISTINCT?

Uniqueness

CBS – Breadth and scale: massive program choice, highly international, urban vibe.

SSE – Prestige and selectivity: tiny cohorts, elite network, academic intensity.

NHH – Community and culture: collaborative environment, cohesive campus life.

Size

CBS: 20,000 students

SSE: 2,000 students

NHH: 3,400 students

Curriculum

CBS – Wide variety: business + language tracks, interdisciplinary degrees.

SSE – Focused: Economics, Finance, Business & Management; strong quantitative core.

NHH – Structured: solid economic foundation with space for specialization later.

Location

CBS: Copenhagen, modern, bicycle-friendly, global.

SSE: Stockholm, innovative, financial hub, design capital.

NHH: Bergen, nature, fjords, tight-knit campus.

Cost

CBS: Free for EU/EEA; Non-EU/EEA/Swiss students: 100,000 DKK per year

SSE: Free for EU/EEA; Non-EU/EEA/Swiss students: SEK 120,000 per year for

NHH: Free for EU/EEA; Non-EU/EEA/Swiss students: 136,000 NOK / year

Admissions Expectations

- Strong mathematics for all three.
- Higher-level mathematics strongly recommended for SSE and NHH.
- CBS tolerant of multiple pathways into business programmes.

WHO THRIVES WHERE?

Choose CBS if you want:

- Big bustling environment
- International classmates
- More degree choice
- Life in a major European capital

Choose SSE if you want:

- Small, selective cohorts
- Very strong economics or finance
- Direct career pipelines into elite firms
- A high-intensity academic environment

Choose NHH if you want:

- Community-oriented campus life
- A balanced academic + social environment
- A safe, nature-filled setting
- Strong economics and business foundations



FINAL WORD: THREE SCHOOLS, THREE PERSONALITIES

CBS is the cosmopolitan giant.

SSE is the elite boutique.

NHH is the friendly, fjord-side community.

Together, they represent the best of Nordic business education: high quality, low tuition and incredibly strong outcomes, all wrapped in environments that feel safe, modern and student-centered.

If you're considering a future in business, economics, or finance, these three schools are well worth a serious look, whether you want the energy of Copenhagen, the prestige of Stockholm, or the closeness of Bergen.

Bangkok Patana School is Thailand's original British international school, supporting 65+ nationalities of students to complete their schooling and progress to post secondary universities around the world. For more information, email admissions@patana.ac.th or careers@patana.ac.th.



Vietnam and Norway step up green cooperation ahead of 55-year anniversary



Vietnam and Norway are set to strengthen cooperation in green transition, circular economy and climate change response as the two countries prepare to mark 55 years of diplomatic relations in 2026.

Vietnam's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Le Thi Thu Hang met Norwegian Ambassador to Vietnam

Hilde Solbakken in Hanoi on January 8 to discuss measures to deepen bilateral ties ahead of the anniversary.

Hang reaffirmed that Vietnam places importance on developing its long-standing friendship and multi-faceted cooperation with Norway, noting that relations have progressed across several fields since diplomatic ties were established in 1971.

She highlighted opportunities to expand cooperation, particularly within green transition, circular economy initiatives and climate change response, and encouraged closer political and diplomatic exchanges between the two countries.

Hang also called on Norway, in its role within the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), to support efforts to advance negotiations on an EFTA–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement. She further encouraged Norwegian investment in Vietnam, including support for the country's Just Energy Transition Partnership.

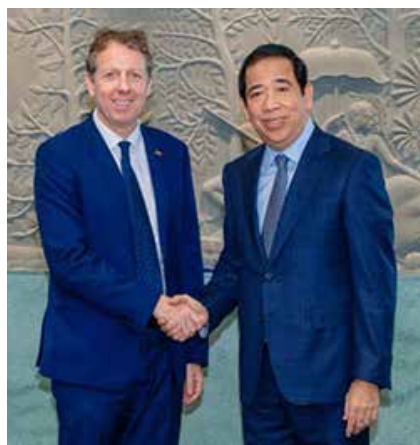
Solbakken welcomed the proposals and said Norway aims to further strengthen cooperation with Vietnam. She expressed hope that the two sides will soon hold political consultations and make progress on initiatives to facilitate official exchanges ahead of the anniversary year.

Finland joins EU project to modernise Cambodia's tax system

Cambodia's General Department of Taxation (GDT) and the EU have launched talks on a project to modernise tax administration.

GDT Director-General Kong Vibol and EU Ambassador Igor Driesmans co-chaired a meeting in Phnom Penh on the Cambodia–EU Taxation Twinning Project.

The project supports Cambodia's Public Financial Management Reform Program, Phase IV, through



technical cooperation and institutional capacity building.

GDT said the work will use peer-to-peer exchanges with EU administrations, including France's public finance directorate and Finland's Institute of Public Management.

Vibol said GDT is streamlining tax management through digital upgrades and staff development to improve accountability and service quality.

Sweden and Indonesia mark 75 years of ties with sustainability partnership visit

Sweden and Indonesia marked 75 years of diplomatic relations with an official visit to a factory in Karawang, West Java.

The Swedish Embassy and the Sweden–Indonesia Sustainability Partnership (SISP) delegation visited TVS Motor Company Indonesia on 7 January 2026.

Sweden's ambassador to Indonesia and ASEAN, Daniel Blockert, said the visit highlighted cooperation on sustainable industry and green mobility.

The embassy said Sweden and Indonesia work together across renewable energy, healthcare, transport, mining, industry, and digital transformation.

TVS Motor said its site uses



solar panels, electric motorcycle development, and other sustainability and biodiversity programmes.

China Southern to launch Beijing Daxing–Helsinki nonstop route

China Southern Airlines has announced a new nonstop service between Beijing Daxing Airport and Helsinki. The route is described as Daxing's first direct link to Europe. Most flights from Europe land in Beijing International Airport.

The new flight strengthens connections between Finland and China via Helsinki. Helsinki is a major hub for onward travel between Europe and Asia.

Finnair has reduced its mainland China network since suspending flights in March 2020. It now operates two weekly winter flights



to Shanghai.

China Southern is the anchor carrier at Beijing Daxing Airport.

The new service makes Helsinki Daxing's only nonstop route to Northern Europe.

Novo Nordisk says China court upholds its semaglutide patent

Novo Nordisk said China's Supreme People's Court has upheld the validity of its semaglutide compound patent, according to a company statement issued on Saturday.

China's Supreme People's

Court thereby confirmed an earlier ruling by the Beijing Intellectual Property Court.

According to the statement from Novo Nordisk, the decision affirms Novo Nordisk's intellectual property rights related to sema-

glutide, the active ingredient in its obesity and diabetes treatments Wegovy, Ozempic and Rybelsus.

Novo Nordisk said the ruling strengthens confidence for foreign pharmaceutical companies operating in China and reflects official support for protecting medical innovation.

The Danish drugmaker added that the decision does not change its previous guidance that patent expiries for semaglutide in certain markets could have a low single-digit impact on global sales growth in 2026.

China is a key market for Novo Nordisk, which employs about 78,500 people globally and sells its medicines in around 170 countries.



Swedish BioArctic takes step towards at-home Alzheimer's treatment in China

Swedish biopharma company BioArctic said its partner Eisai has filed a subcutaneous version of Leqembi in China. The application was accepted by China's National Medical Products Administration.

BioArctic said the submission covers an autoinjector for lecanemab to treat early Alzheimer's disease. If approved, it could allow once-weekly at-home injections from the start of treatment.

The company said the autoinjector dose is 500 mg weekly as an alternative to hospital IV dosing every two weeks. It said each 250

mg injection takes about 15 seconds.

Leqembi, also known as lecanemab, is a monoclonal antibody treatment designed to target amyloid-beta in the brain. BioArctic and Eisai said it is intended for people with early Alzheimer's disease, including mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia due to Alzheimer's.

BioArctic said similar submissions for subcutaneous initiation dosing were recently made in the United States and Japan. In the United States, Leqembi Iqlik is already approved for maintenance dosing by autoinjector.

Eisai estimates China had about



17 million people with mild cognitive impairment or mild dementia due to Alzheimer's in 2024. BioArctic said it holds Nordic commercialisation rights and is preparing joint launch plans with Eisai.

Norway's TGS opens new centre in Kuala Lumpur

TGS said in a press release that it has opened a new Imaging Center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 12 January 2026.

The Oslo-headquartered energy data and intelligence company said the centre will strengthen its ability to serve local customers. It will also support TGS Multi-Client projects across the Asia-Pacific region.

TGS said the new Kuala Lumpur site is built based on the company's experience from its other site in Petrobras in Brazil. The company said the model combines local geoscientists with support from global

experts.

Wadii El Karkouri, TGS Executive Vice President of Imaging & Technology, said the expansion is aimed at delivering imaging services closer to customers in the Eastern Hemisphere. He said the company expects more complex imaging work across Asia-Pacific.

TGS said the centre will be backed by established imaging teams during its first year to support knowledge transfer and operational alignment. It will use cloud-based infrastructure hosted in Malaysia for secure and compliant data processing.



Volvo opens pre-sales for ES90 electric sedan in Malaysia

Volvo Car Malaysia has opened pre-sales for its new fully electric ES90 sedan, ahead of local assembly scheduled to begin in the first quarter of 2026.

Customers are invited to register their interest through the com-

pany's official website. The ES90 was recently launched in Thailand and will be officially introduced in Malaysia later this year.

The ES90 is based on Volvo's SPA2 platform and features an 800-volt electrical architecture designed

to deliver improved efficiency and performance. Globally, the model is offered with battery options of 88 kWh and 102 kWh, supporting single- and dual-motor configurations.

According to Volvo, the ES90 supports ultra-fast DC charging of up to 350 kW. The single-motor variant has a claimed driving range of up to 755 kilometres on a single charge.

Volvo Car Malaysia said in a statement: "The ES90 marks a new chapter for Volvo Car Malaysia as the brand's first fully electric sedan to be locally assembled, bringing together cutting-edge technology, long-range capability, and everyday practicality tailored for Malaysian drivers."

The local assembly of the ES90 adds to Volvo's growing electric vehicle presence in Southeast Asia, following recent launches in other regional markets.





Football For All in Vietnam with Norwegian help

Nguyen Hoang Phuong grew up playing football with his friends. Growing up in a rural part of Vietnam, he and his friends didn't have access to fancy equipment, so they had to get creative: unripe grapefruits, air-stuffed pig bladders or rolled-up banana leaves would serve as a ball. For Phuong, resources mattered less than simply being able to play.

By Alexander Vittrup

“Football is simple. All you need is something to kick and friends to play with. To us it was more about teamwork, socialising and the fun of playing,” he says.

Today Phuong works as Director of Football For All In Vietnam (FFAV). FFAV is an initiative by the Football Association of Norway (NFF) in cooperation with the Vietnam Football Federation. With Norwegian government support, FFAV works to bring football to marginalised, rural and impoverished communities.

FFAV was initiated in 1997 and the first pilot project launched in 2001 in Hanoi. The goal was to empower children through football, with funding from the Norwegian government and the Football Association of Norway (NFF). That funding continued until 2018, when—due to a multitude of reasons, such as Vietnam's growing economy—the Norwegian government decided to phase out support and let Vietnamese officials take over. NFF has continued funding the FFAV.

Nguyen Hoang Phuong has worked for FFAV since the beginning, collaborating closely with Norwegian officials over the years.



“

*Football is simple.
All you need is
something to kick and
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To us it was more
about teamwork,
socialising and the
fun of playing.*

”

Scoping out the playing field

FFAV focuses its efforts on empowering local communities. The initiative works with local schools, mainly in rural communities and is currently supporting football clubs in five provinces.

Not every local community is suitable for FFAV's projects. The programme does not pay and relies on volunteers from the local schools and community to run activities. Sometimes the enthusiasm is not there, or officials expect to be paid, and then Phuong and his team must move on.

“We meet with schools and representatives from the community, and we explain to them about FFAV, and we gauge whether they seem excited about it. Most times they are very enthusiastic, but a few times some people have not been willing to engage, and that's okay, then we move on,” Phuong says.

FFAV sets up football clubs, train teachers, provide football equipment and annual financial incentive for the local football events—what Phuong calls “Fun Football Festivals”—for children, designed to highlight different issues and teach life skills. The Fun Football Festivals are non-competitive and focus on having fun and learning rather than winning.

“We go into a community and see what issues they deal with, then we help set up football clubs and football activities with life skill education, and putting on a Fun Football Festival is one of the ways to highlight those issues,” Phuong explains.

“If a community is dealing with gender inequality, that could be integrated into the festival. Mixed-gender teams would play, and every time they scored a goal, they would have to answer questions related to gender equality correctly for the goal to count.”

The topics of the Fun Football Festivals vary depending on community needs and the life skill education components. Kids living in a city environment might benefit from a festival focused on traffic safety. In central Vietnam, where landmines left over from the Vietnam-American War are still a danger to rural communities, a festival could focus on mine safety. In southern Vietnam, where storms and rising water levels pose a threat to rice farmers, a festival could focus on climate change and preventive measures.

The goal is to educate local people on solutions to the issues they face through football and movement games, and it is up to the community to decide how to implement the lessons and the festivals.

“It's all in the community's hands,” Phuong says.

Boots on the ground

FFAV does not pay schools to establish football clubs. The initiative funds the festivals and equipment for clubs; the rest is run by people on the ground. FFAV trains coaches who run the clubs it helps set up. The coaches are typically teachers at the school—always one man and one woman to ensure gender balance.





“

*The power of football
is already here.
We can harness
it to better the
community and
connect people.*

”

The teachers receive training not only in coaching football but also in addressing social issues and supporting children and families in difficult situations.

Getting parents on board has sometimes required extra convincing. For many parents in rural and impoverished communities, priorities for the children lies elsewhere than school, like in the home or with a job. Some may see the football clubs as a distraction. However, FFAV projects and clubs at schools have been linked to lower dropout rates.

“It has been reported to us that when kids become invested in the football club, they are more likely to come to school and stay longer,” Phuong says. “So while the football club is what keeps them around the school, at the same time they are also going to class.”

Phuong has seen many parents who were initially sceptical about the projects become involved with the clubs and volunteer at the festivals.

For Phuong and FFAV, it is about breaking with traditional ways of teaching—using football and active learning to teach life skills and giving children the confidence to stay in school.

FFAV has been operating for a while, and throughout the years, Phuong has seen kids who grew up in FFAV football clubs return as adults and volunteer for FFAV, passing the joy of football on to new generations.

Norwegian teamwork

FFAV’s network of coaches originated with Norwegian coaches sent by NFF to teach the first group of football



coaches for FFAV. Despite the Norwegian government phasing out funding starting in 2018, NFF decided to continue providing support for FFAV. This is a decision the Head of the International Social Responsibility Department at NFF, Anders Hasselgård, is happy with:

“We are very proud of our long-standing partnership with FFAV. Their work has been instrumental in spreading accessible, inclusive football opportunities to both girls and boys throughout Vietnam,” he explains.

“We have signed an agreement with the Vietnam Football Federation through 2026, and our plan is to extend it to 2030. This will allow us to continue supporting Vietnamese football through FFAV’s outstanding efforts.”

Over the years, Phuong and FFAV have worked determinedly and tirelessly to improve their model of community engagement to the point where the initiative is now able to stand on its own. The hard work that Phuong and volunteers at local football clubs have put in has inspired NFF.

“This commitment and impact have motivated us to continue supporting the development of grassroots football in Vietnam,” Anders Hasselgård says.

The score

FFAV’s model of community engagement through football has proved a success and has earned international recognition. The initiative received the Ministry of Education and Training Award in 2009, Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Dream Asia Award in 2014 and 2017, Asia Sports Industry Awards for Best Sports Youth Program 2015, Award from Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports

and Tourism in 2022, and AFC Special Grassroots Awards – Best Grassroots Project in 2024.

Phuong was also awarded AFC Special Grassroots Awards as Best Grassroots Leader by the AFC. FFAV has been recognised and adopted by both UNICEF, UNFPA and UNESCO for their work on gender-based violence, gender inequality and child protection.

In 2015, the FFAV model was selected by VFF and the Ministry of Education and Training for replication all over Vietnam as part of the “Vietnam Football Development Strategy to 2020, with vision to 2030”. Since then, the FFAV model has been replicated to more than 15 provinces all over Vietnam.

In collaboration with The Norwegian Church Aid, FFAV projects have also been established across the border in Savannakhet Province in Laos PDR. Likewise, FFAV projects have taken place in camps for Burmese refugees in Mae Hong Son in Thailand.

Currently, FFAV operates in five provinces in Vietnam, with plans to expand to other provinces in 2026 – 2030.

Phuong is excited to see the progress and impact FFAV has had on children’s lives across Vietnam, and he hopes to see even more success in football and education.

“The power of football is already here. We can harness it to better the community and connect people,” he says. “I want everyone to play, even those who have never touched a football before. It will give everybody the opportunity to have fun and become involved.”

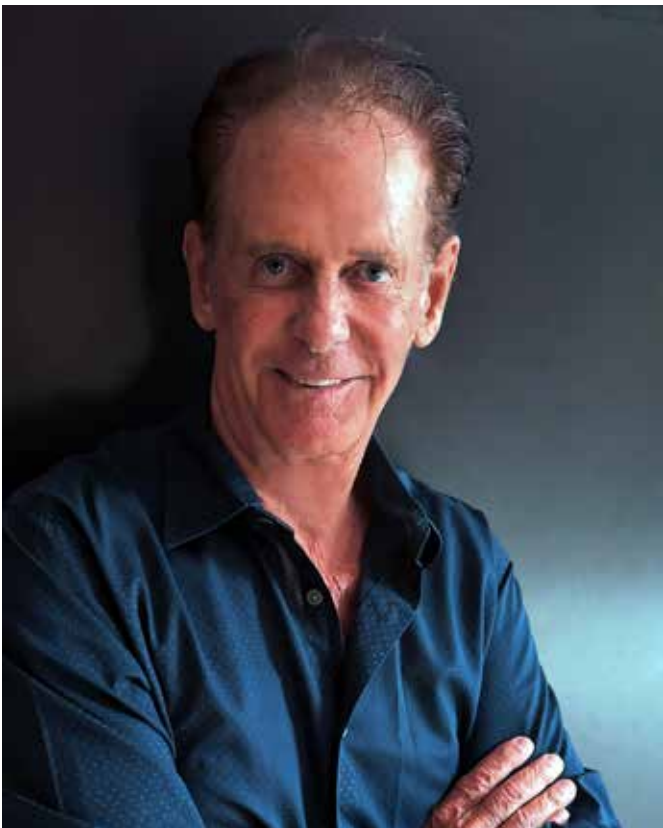


Agneta's
World

Agneta de Bekassy

Voyage Mode – An interview with the vision behind the lens

Photographer Daniel Herron, an occasional contributor to ScandAsia and a longtime creative partner of Agneta de Bekassy, has published VOYAGE MODE, a luxury travel and fashion photography book shot entirely on an iPhone. In this edition of Agneta's World, Agneta de Bekassy talks to Herron about the turning point that led to the book, his creative reinvention, and what comes next.



Remarkable things can happen when creative energy meets reinvention. This is exactly what happened to my longtime friend Daniel.

After more than a decade dedicated to producing a world-class cycling event in Bangkok — featuring some of the top riders from the Tour de France — Daniel suddenly found himself at a crossroads. Just five days before the event's final presentation, the main investor decided to step back.

Instead of becoming stressed or disappointed, Daniel chose to return to artistry — seeing Asia and its fashion not through a big, exclusive camera, but through his iPhone.

In a remarkably short time, his first book, VOYAGE MODE, came to life: a luxury travel and fashion photography book filled with striking images. With my background as a former fashion model, I took the opportunity to sit down with Daniel to talk about the story behind the lens, his journey of reinvention, and what comes next.

The concept of VOYAGE MODE is fascinating. How did the idea of making a book come about?

“It began after the cycling event I'd worked on for ten



THE WHITE LOTUS - FOUR SEASONS, KOH SAMUI, THAILAND



PHUKET, PHANG NGA BAY, THAILAND



THE WHITE LOTUS - FOUR SEASONS, KOH SAMUI, THAILAND



BANTEAY SREI TEMPLE, ANGOR, CAMBODIA, THAILAND

years collapsed just before the final presentation. That project had become my entire world. All the elements were in place — riders from the prestigious Tour de France, media connections, sponsors, and logistics.

When it ended, I suddenly found myself without a goal, without direction, and without a defining mission.

Rather than sinking, I decided to swim. I fell back on what had always centred me: photography. Almost immediately, VOYAGE MODE – Asia Collections became my lifeboat.

One idea after another started coming to me, and before long I was travelling within Thailand, and on to Vietnam and Cambodia. I started shooting what would later become VOYAGE MODE. At first, I didn't know where it would lead, but once all the images were complete, I realised they deserved to become a book."

I understand that you shot all the images on your iPhone?

"Yes, entirely on an iPhone. It was a challenge, but I wanted to show that artistry isn't about exclusive equipment — it's about the eye, emotion, and composition.

Using my iPhone made the process intimate, fast, and authentic. It allowed spontaneity and a kind of free-

dom you simply don't have with a large camera setup. Even I was surprised by the results — the high resolution, the rich tones, and the immediacy gave the collection its distinct character.

It became a great marriage between art and technology."

How did you select the locations for your shoots?

"I wanted outstanding locations in Asia — places that felt cinematic, iconic, and timeless. Many of them have been used for major feature films. Angkor Wat in Cambodia was the backdrop for Tomb Raider. Phang Nga Bay and Phuket were featured in Jurassic World: Rebirth, and the Four Seasons Resort on Koh Samui was where HBO filmed The White Lotus.

In Vietnam, I was shooting on the stunning Golden Bridge when I accidentally discovered the French Village, complete with its own Louvre replica and castle-like architecture. It felt surreal — like stepping into another era.

Each location became part of the book's narrative, blending culture, architecture, and natural beauty into a seamless visual journey."



“

I wanted to show that artistry isn't about exclusive equipment — it's about the eye, emotion, and composition.

”

How did you first get into photography?

“It all started with the classic film *Blow-Up*, starring David Hemmings. The movie captivated me — it's eccentric, hypnotic, and strangely modern, even today.

The portrayal of a photographer's world, the intrigue and artistry, was incredible. Within a week of seeing the film, I bought a camera.

At first, I just shot for fun — anything that caught my attention. Then it evolved into working with models, and soon I opened my own studio. Eventually, I received a call from MGM to shoot celebrities for media promotions.”

That's an extraordinary progression. What followed?

“After working in Los Angeles, I eventually moved to Thailand and was fortunate to make some meaningful connections. One of them was Tommy Tang — a producer and restaurateur who played a key role in introducing Thai cuisine to America. His restaurants in New York and Hollywood were frequented by stars, and that opened a new creative circle for me.

Before I knew it, I found myself shooting on international film sets. Two notable projects were *Kickboxer: Retaliation* with Jean-Claude van Damme and *Jiu Jitsu* with Nicolas Cage. Each experience taught me how to capture personality and energy — lessons that later shaped the visual tone and intimacy of *VOYAGE MODE*.”



An action scene from *Kickboxer Retaliation*. Daniel Herron worked as the set photographer during the film's production



Daniel Heron on the set of Jiu Jitsu with cast members, including Juju Chan and Tony Jaa, during the film's production.

Wasn't it a big jump into feature film photography? How did it affect you?

"It was unbelievable to be offered the job, and of course I saw it as a crowning moment in my career. Reality hit when I arrived on set and saw the scale — around 300 people involved.

As a set photographer, your responsibility is to capture the key images that will promote the film long before its release. The shoot lasted six weeks, six days a week, often ten to fourteen hours a day, including nights. Add Thailand's humidity and high-action scenes, and you have to be fully present at all times.

I survived the long hours, the humidity, and the intensity of the shoot. After that, I went on to shoot stills for *Jiu Jitsu*, filmed in Cyprus. Both films are now available on Netflix."

Has anyone else in your family been involved in photography?

"Yes, my aunt Nancy Thomson worked as a photographer for Columbia Pictures. She was close to major Hollywood icons such as Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Christopher Plummer, and Rex Harrison. So perhaps it runs in the family."

After this stunning book, what are you working on now?

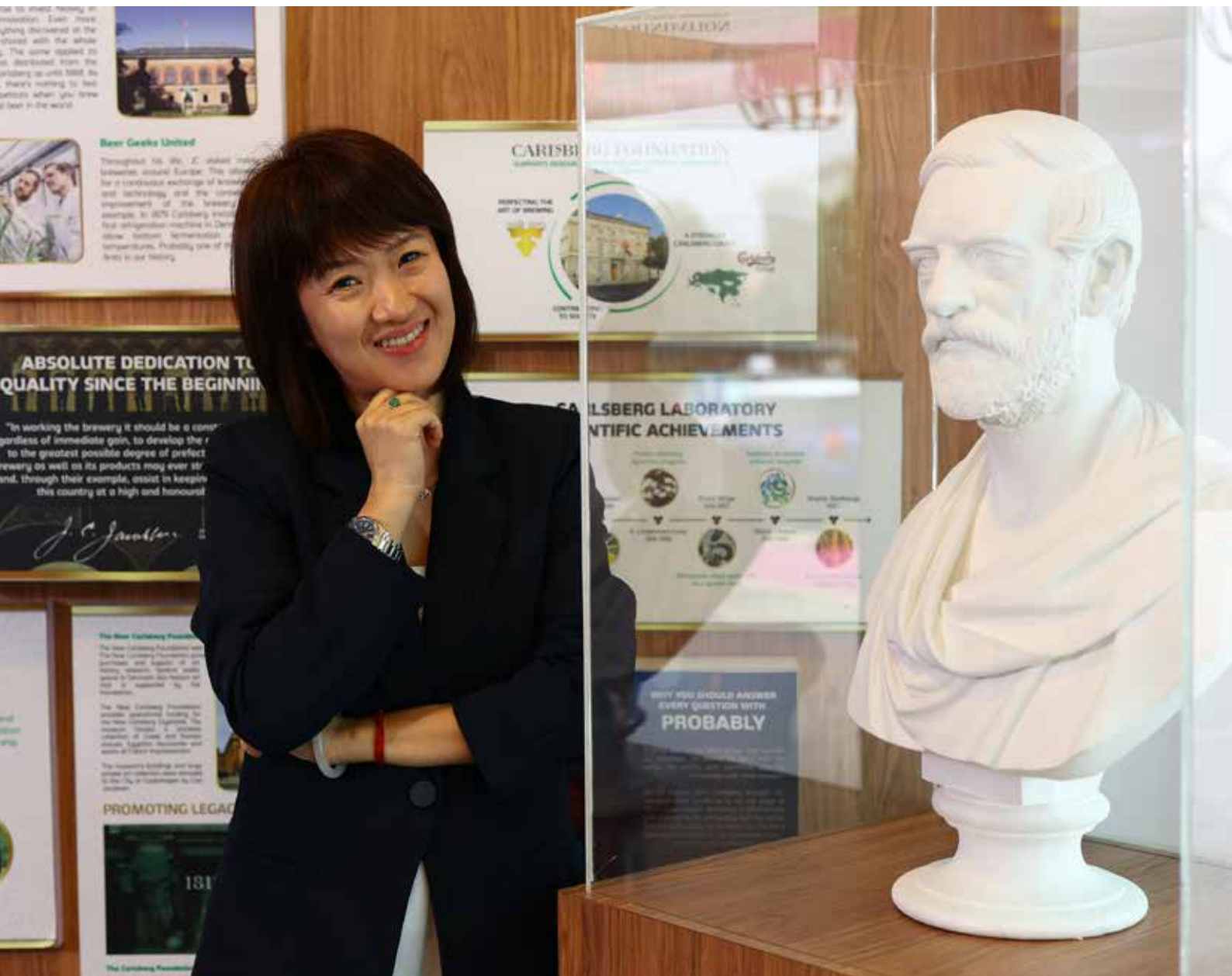
"I'm planning a second collection — this time possibly in Polynesia. It will mix a different culture, nature, and high fashion. Another VOYAGE MODE, but with some twists in shooting style.

For me, it's all about creating without pause, always evolving. That's how I am.

I really like Thailand — the people, the culture, the food, and what I call the 'seven smiles'. I feel safe here, and most foreigners I've met feel the same way. I've also found Vietnam and Cambodia to be charming and welcoming."

Daniel Herron's journey reminds us that reinvention, resilience, and creativity are essential in today's hectic and often glorified world.

VOYAGE MODE is not just a photography book — it is proof that artistry can emerge from disruption, and that vision and courage matter more than circumstance.



20 years as communications expert with Carlsberg Malaysia, and new Dancham Chairperson: Pearl Lai

'Zero' as concept is very much on the agenda for Corporate Affairs & Sustainability Director Pearl Lai and the entire nine-man strong corporate and sustainability communications team within Carlsberg Malaysia. ZERO carbon footprint, ZERO water waste, ZERO packaging waste, ZERO accident culture, and also ZERO Irresponsible Drinking – are all embedded within the operations covering Malaysia and Singapore markets. In 2024, Pearl, who also became the new Chairperson of Dancham (the Danish Chamber of Commerce Malaysia), had clocked twenty years of employment for the Danish brewery. She reflects on this time and looks ahead to the future - connecting to recent, large investments by the employer and the thirty+ years Carlsberg legacy in the country.

By Joakim Persson

“Carlsberg Malaysia is described as my 'second home'; more than just a workplace, it's a place where I find genuine camaraderie and fulfilment,” Pearl Lai begins. “My journey has been about learning, unlearning, and relearning, with a strong sense of pride in personal and collective growth.”

And not only has this been challenging but rewarding - “not because it's been easy, but

because it's been worth every learning that lead to growth. The people – mentors, teammates, and supportive leaders – have been a key reason to where I am today,” the Malaysian reflects.

Joining Carlsberg Malaysia in 2005 as Manager, Corporate Communications & CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) she was hired as a graduate with a Communication Studies degree at UniMas, Sarawak, without any formal education or specific skills directly related to the beverage industry.

Carlsberg Brewery Malaysia was established in 1969, part of the Danish business Carlsberg Group.

“Like many young graduates, I wanted to join a globally recognised FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) that offered stability and learning opportunities. And what better way than to join a Main Board public listed company like Carlsberg Malaysia! I admired its purpose of **'Brewing for a Better Today and Tomorrow'** and saw opportunities for both personal and professional growth in such a purpose-driven organisation.”

Eventually, it was about the 4Ps – People (fostering talent, teamwork, a growth culture, and a positive workplace environment), Product (Committing to high-quality beverages and brand excellence) and Planet (in addition to Purpose) – the latter with integration of sustainability and responsible environmental practices – that convinced her.

“My growth in beverage sector knowledge has come largely from hands-on experience and continuous learning on the job,” thinks Pearl. “And of course, I brought my 'gung-ho spirit' and a 'bring-it-on' attitude to every challenge,” she adds.

“Full of curiosity and commitment with a focus on reputation profiling and stakeholder engagement, I have honed my skills and adapted to the evolving needs of the industry - especially since sustainability and regulatory affairs became key business priorities.”

From a two-man band the corporate communications team she is part of now has grown to nine staff members, also working in collaboration with leaders from the Carlsberg Singapore subsidiary. Twenty years on, Pearl's role is now as Corporate Affairs & Sustainability Director.

This team safeguards the corporate reputation and license to operate, as well as navigate regulatory landscapes, building the ESG framework, and engaging stakeholders with purpose.

“My role evolved to include sustainability and regulatory affairs, aligning closely with business and climate-related operational sustainability. I function as the Chief Sustainability Officer,” explains Pearl and continues: “While CSR is an important element of our efforts, sustainability takes a broader view - integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) values throughout our business.”

Her focus is on weaving those principles into their strategy and daily operations, helping to create lasting positive impact for both the company and the communities they serve. And as a public listed company on Bursa Malaysia, Carlsberg Malaysia is subject to ESG disclosure requirements.





Carlsberg Malaysia is described as my ‘second home’; more than just a workplace, it’s a place where I find genuine camaraderie and fulfilment.



“In fact, our annual Integrated Annual Report is aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards, Bursa’s Sustainability Reporting Guide and various international frameworks which include IFRS S1 & S2, UN Global Compact Index and SASB reporting frameworks.”

This is based on Carlsberg’s global ESG programme ‘Together Towards ZERO and Beyond,’ with the a fore-mentioned focus areas, including to improve water efficiency and recycling, and eliminating packaging waste through circular solutions. In 2024, the production plant identified and implemented multiple water-saving opportunities, and the second major investment was to replace the 30-year-old canning line with a high-speed and efficient system.

Aspiring to deliver ZERO Packaging Waste, Carlsberg Malaysia expanded its returnable bottle scheme across Peninsular Malaysia to include ‘1664’ (the French premium brand) bottles, building on its existing Carlsberg bottle collection system via distributor incentives to increase bottle collection rates. 95% collection and recycling rate was reached of returnable bottles in Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore thanks to a robust Deposit

Return Scheme. The brewery also supports Singapore’s upcoming Beverage Container Return Scheme expected to commence in 2026.

“At the brewery, we are also committed to Zero Waste to Landfill, with production waste reused or recycled to futureproof our operations,” adds Pearl.

Carlsberg Malaysia is also involved in community engagement through education, environmental conservation, and disaster relief initiatives (i.e. Top Ten Charity Campaign, Carlsberg Huazong Education Fund): “ESG is not just philanthropy - it’s integrated into our business strategy to create long-term value for stakeholders. And it’s our priority to embed circularity into every aspect of our operations,” comments Pearl.

As for ZERO Irresponsible Drinking, Carlsberg Malaysia promotes responsible consumption as well as meets the consumer demands also for zero alcohol alternatives; through Somersby Apple 0.0 introduced in 2022, and the limited-edition ‘Somersby Mandarin Orange 0.0’ launched during beginning of 2024.

Here, the communications efforts also “tie in” with the marketing through a close collaboration; “Both functions work hand-in-hand to strengthen brand reputation and consumer trust. Corporate Communications amplifies marketing campaigns through PR, storytelling, and stakeholder engagement, while ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements, especially operating in a high regulated semi-dark industry where alcohol brands are subject to strict advertising limitations,” Pearl explains.

Meanwhile competition on the consumer market is fierce, including from a growing cocktail bar scene.

“Competition is more dynamic than ever, driven by evolving consumer preferences

and new beverage occasions. We’ve embraced these trends by introducing Alcohol-Free Brews (AFB) into our portfolio since 2022, catering to health-conscious and lifestyle-driven consumers,

while offering inclusive choices for all preferences and occasions.”



Riding with the innovation trends, she also explains that Carlsberg Malaysia's brand activations feature cocktails infused with its products, creating new occasions and elevating brand experiences.

For instance, the portfolio includes the Danish cider 'Somersby' - a distinct brand with its own identity and marketing strategy.

"Each brand under Carlsberg Malaysia is tailored to different consumer segments and occasions, ensuring relevance and choice. This multi-brand approach allows us to capture diverse trends - from cider lovers to beer and stout enthusiasts as well as zero-alcohol consumers. While separate in branding, all share the same commitment to quality and sustainability."

And on this note, one can still see lots of large Carlsberg signs at F&B outlet entrances throughout especially Malaysia – pointing to strong recognition and market share.

"Carlsberg Malaysia is a household brand in Malaysia, and probably **the** most well-known beer brand among beer consumers. Over the years, the brand has solidified its relevance through innovative, locally inspired campaigns that authentically reflect the tastes and values of

Malaysian beer consumers. Our commitment to quality, heritage, and responsible enjoyment continues to define Carlsberg Malaysia's reputation in the local market. Visible presence in F&B outlets across the country is a testament to the brand's strong legacy and trusted standing," responds Pearl.

Looking ahead she says that their priority is the commitment to futureproofing the operations in Selangor, where 'smart factory' and automation play their parts. The brewery has undergone a major transformation, after 30 years. Investments in low-carbon technologies, renewable energy

and responsible waste management practices aim to ensure operations are resilient, adaptable, and positioned for long-term leadership in the region.

"Automation and AI aside, quality is never com-

promised - and technology helps our experts fine-tune processes to ensure efficiency. We are committed to delivering shareholder value, and hence, our 'Accelerate SAIL' strategy focuses on investing in core priorities – brands, people, and equipment – to drive excellence."

Among her personal milestones from the past twenty years, Pearl mentions to have represented Carlsberg Malaysia on the Council of CMBB (Confederation of Malaysian Brewers Berhad), Board of EUROCHAM Malaysia, and as Chairperson of the Danish Chamber of Commerce Malaysia.

"I'm honoured to serve as Chairperson of DanCham. The role focuses on advocacy, partnerships, and networking to build a stronger Danish-Malaysian business community. DanCham acts as a platform for knowledge sharing, sustainability dialogues, and government engagement, benefiting both Danish and Malaysian businesses. And with the reopening of the Danish Embassy in Malaysia, we aim to strengthen bilateral ties and create more opportunities for collaboration."

Pearl says that the Chamber is seeing a positive momentum in membership growth, as more Danish companies are coming to Malaysia: "With the Board and team's support, we are actively recruiting more Danish businesses operating in Malaysia. Also, in 2025 we revised the membership fee structure to make it more attractive and accessible. I'm proud to share that we now have approximately 33 active members, reflecting inclusive, progressive and strong engagement."

DanCham is also of importance to Carlsberg Malaysia: "We actively leverage the Danish Embassy and DanCham's initiatives like the Green Transition Alliance (GTA). This alliance is a collaborative platform driving sustainability and green innovation among Danish businesses in Malaysia and Carlsberg Malaysia, is one of the co-founders of the GTA. Through these entities we engage policymakers, share best practices, and advocate for sustainable business frameworks."



The Danish butcher bringing smørrebrød to Kuala Lumpur

By Maria Xaver Dover

Where small restaurants and bars glow under strings of warm lights in Kuala Lumpur, you find DenHygge — a cozy spot known for classic Danish dishes made entirely from scratch. Inside, the atmosphere is warm and unpretentious, and the menu reads like a roll call of Danish comfort food, including traditional *smørrebrød* — open-faced sandwiches layered with meats, seafood and homemade toppings.

Behind it all is 57-year-old Niels Jensen, a trained butcher and long-time expat. DenHygge is the passion project he runs with his wife, Olga Minchenkova — the result of years spent abroad, major life decisions and a global pandemic that reshaped everything.

A life shaped by countries and chances

Niels has lived and worked in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Malaysia. Looking back, he sees it as a privilege to



have experienced life in so many places and to have taken chances that continuously pulled him into new cultures and new challenges.

During one of his postings in Russia, he met Olga. As their relationship grew, they decided to move to Denmark together. But the family reunification process proved far more complicated than expected. After 18 months of waiting without a clear answer, they began doubting how long they could remain in limbo.

At the same time, Niels was offered a new position that required him to spend some time in both China and Malaysia before choosing where to be based. After visiting both locations, he quickly felt that Malaysia was the right fit — a place with space for a new start.

“

The idea of this restaurant is to tell the story from Denmark. Everything has to be homemade.

”



Choosing Malaysia — just as the world shut down

With no progress on the Danish paperwork and no certainty in sight, the couple agreed it made more sense to pursue the new opportunity abroad. Niels accepted the job.

He flew out on 1 February 2020 — just weeks before borders began closing due to Covid-19.

When the world shut down, everything froze. Flights were cancelled, borders sealed, and Niels ended up stuck in Denmark for more than half a year, waiting for travel restrictions to ease. It was a period defined by uncertainty, constant changes and long stretches of waiting.



“

When you need to produce a lot, the loving touch is still important. That's what makes the difference.

”



In September 2020, the family finally flew to Malaysia together. After hotel quarantine, their daughter managed nine days of school before it closed again for the next 14 months.

And after some time in Malaysia, things shifted again.

“There were cutbacks because of COVID, and they had to let me go,” Niels says.

The family suddenly had to decide whether to return to Denmark, stay in Malaysia or start over somewhere entirely new. In the middle of that uncertainty, an idea they had discussed many times before began to feel more urgent: opening something of their own.

In August 2022, they decided to act on it.

Fourteen months of paperwork, renovations and uncertainty

From the day they made the decision until DenHygge finally opened, 14 months passed. They needed new visas, work permits and a full renovation of the place they had found.

They also chose a calmer area on purpose.

“It was the first time we were opening a restaurant, and we didn’t have a lot of experience. We didn’t want to be overwhelmed by customers and make a bad first impression,” Niels explains.

The first eight months were extremely busy. Then, during the summer of 2024, guest numbers became more unpredictable.

“It’s hard to understand,” he says. “The previous Wednesday, people were queueing out the door, and the next Wednesday it was completely quiet.”

It is a pattern he still finds difficult to explain.

A pure Danish kitchen — with no fusion

DenHygge’s concept is clear: traditional Danish food without shortcuts. No fusion, no microwaves, no semi-finished products.

“The idea of this restaurant is to tell the story from Denmark,” Niels says. “Everything has to be homemade.”

He brings ten years of butcher experience from Irma, SuperBrugsen and other Danish supermarkets — skills that define the heart of the kitchen.

“I love making sausages, meatballs and liver pâté in the kitchen,” he says. “I love the feeling of making a piece of smørrebrød and looking at it and thinking ‘wow, this is beautiful!’”

The menu features smørrebrød and three weekly hot dishes, often classics such as medister sausage, hot-dogs or breaded pork patties. The rotation keeps it interesting for both regular guests and Niels himself.

Freshness is non-negotiable. Anything not sold is discarded.

A gathering place for Danes, Swedes — and locals

About 20 percent of DenHygge’s turnover comes from Danes and Swedes. On some evenings, a group of ten Swedish friends arrives, filling the room with beer, snaps and the cheerful volume of people who feel at home.

Many guests are regulars — including a Danish man living in Hong Kong, who often visits Kuala Lumpur with his wife. When they walk through the door, Niels greets them with a smile and a familiar “Nice to see you again,” before they sit down and flip through the menu, discussing which of their favourite dishes they should have this time. Later, he usually leaves with ten packs of rullepølse, roast beef or other cold cuts to bring home.

Danish companies also use DenHygge for events, and both DanCham and SwedCham have placed large Christmas orders this year.



“November and December are the busiest months,” Niels says. “Many people associate Danish smørrebrød with Nordic Christmas traditions.”

But it is the growing number of Malaysian guests that has surprised him most — and makes him genuinely proud.

“Some come because they are travelling to Denmark soon, and others are just curious to try something new,” he says. “It makes me really happy.”

Long hours, big sacrifices — and love for the craft

During the busiest periods, Niels works 90–100 hours a week.

“It’s not just a job, it’s our own little company,” he says. He thrives on being in the kitchen and has no aspirations for Michelin stars or a chain of restaurants.

“I don’t dream of a Michelin star. I want to keep it down-to-earth,” he says. “People should just be able to come in, have good food and drink a beer.”

But the passion comes with sacrifices. To finance the restaurant, he and Olga had to sell their summer house in Denmark — a place deeply tied to family memories and his connection to home.

What he misses most about Denmark are the

changing seasons and his two adult children from a previous marriage, Nicklas and Cecilie, whom he thinks about often despite the distance.

Still, Niels enjoys life in Malaysia, especially with the Scandinavian network he has built through padel, golf and long walks. But the long working hours come with a cost. Social gatherings often take place during weekends, when he needs to keep the restaurant open — and their daughter feels that absence too, as her parents spend most evenings and weekends at work.

A small piece of Denmark in Kuala Lumpur

Today, DenHygge is the result of experience, courage and countless hours in the kitchen. Above all, it reflects Niels’ pride in his craft.

“When you need to produce a lot, the loving touch is still important,” he says. “That’s what makes the difference.”

And perhaps that is why, under soft lights in a lively corner of Kuala Lumpur, you can find a small piece of Denmark — served with quiet dedication and an open-faced sandwich.



How MUMS is turning Swedish sweets into a Bangkok business

It is just before 1 pm at CentralWorld, one of Bangkok's most visited shopping malls, and the crowds are already flowing steadily past the new pink storefront. Inside, brightly coloured candy bins line the walls, and small cups of sour cherries and pink foam mushrooms are being handed out to curious passers-by.

By Maria Xaver Dover

Behind the counter stand Andreas Vural and Erik Bergqvist, the two Swedish founders of MUMS. After being awake all night preparing for the opening of their second Bangkok store, they now watch the shop come to life. Both seem quietly satisfied.

For a Scandinavian who, like me, has spent months in Asia, the sight alone is enough to trigger nostalgia. Pick-and-mix candy is deeply rooted in Nordic culture, tied to weekends, childhood memories and the simple ritual of choosing your own favourites. It is a tradition many Swedes, Danes and Norwegians miss when living abroad. MUMS aims to share that tradition while introducing it to a new audience.

"We're selling a lifestyle, a feeling, an emotion," Andreas explains.



A friendship that turned into a business partnership

Andreas and Erik first met in Hong Kong in 2018 and quickly got along, finding a natural ease in each other's company.

At the time, both were busy with their own careers. Erik worked in the financial sector, while Andreas was already an experienced entrepreneur, best known as the founder of Happy Plugs. Despite professional success, Andreas felt something was missing.

"Being alone with the big decisions and the responsibility eventually became heavy," he says. "I needed someone to spar with."

What Andreas missed most from Sweden was, somewhat unexpectedly, candy – or "godis", as it is simply called back home in Sweden. The idea of starting a Swedish candy brand began to take shape, but not as a purely nostalgic project. From the start, it was about creating a strong, recognisable brand rather than just importing sweets.

Although Andreas and Erik had mostly socialised before, they decided to take the leap together.

"We didn't really know each other professionally," Erik says. "We had met at dinners and social events. But we've learned that we complement each other very well. We see the same things, just from different angles."

Why Thailand?

Launching a retail business in Thailand as a foreigner is rarely straightforward. Both founders describe the administrative process as one of the biggest challenges they have faced so far.

"There's a lot of paperwork, and things simply take time," they say. "But that's just how it is."

Despite the hurdles, Thailand was an obvious choice. Climate, mindset and a sense of energy are key reasons why Asia feels like home now. They both have a strong connection to Bangkok, a city they describe as energetic, open and constantly evolving.

Andreas moved to Bangkok three years ago, while Erik relocated just three months ago, shortly before the opening of the first store.

"Bangkok is one of the coolest cities in the world," Andreas says. "The culture, the food, the willingness to try something new – that mindset fits very well with MUMS."

Before opening their first store, the founders organised a tasting session, inviting Thai friends and contacts to sample the different varieties. The goal was to understand local preferences before committing fully.

Licorice, unsurprisingly, remains a niche product. Sour candy, on the other hand, has been a clear success.

From One Bangkok to CentralWorld

The first MUMS store opened at One Bangkok on 27 October 2025. Less than three months later, the second location opened at CentralWorld. The choice of malls is deliberate.

"Malls are a huge part of life here," Erik explains. "We want to be where people already spend their time. It also gives us strong exposure."

So far, around 70 percent of customers are Thai. The rest are mainly tourists, particularly from China and South Korea, along with a smaller but enthusiastic group of Scandinavians who recognise their childhood favourites instantly.

All candy is imported directly from Sweden. The larger One Bangkok store carries around 80 different varieties, while the CentralWorld location offers a more compact selection of approximately 50.

The ambition does not stop here. The plan is to open a new store every three months, gradually expanding across Bangkok and, eventually, into other Asian markets.

"We want to be present in many countries and spread this concept across Asia," they say.

As customers continue to drift into the CentralWorld shop, tasting sour cherries and foam mushrooms, it becomes clear that MUMS is not only about candy. It is about transporting a small piece of Nordic everyday culture into a new setting – and discovering that it resonates far beyond Scandinavia.

Finnish ambassador says EU-Malaysia FTA talks could be “game changer”

Finland's ambassador to Malaysia, Anne Vasara, said EU-Malaysia FTA talks could be a “game changer” for bilateral ties.

She said the relaunched negotiations could open new trade opportunities and deepen EU-Malaysia cooperation.

Vasara said Finland and Malaysia could complement each other in high-tech cooperation. She pointed to Finnish strengths in ICT, connectivity and cybersecurity, and Malaysia's role in semiconductors and data centres.

She said Finnish companies increasingly see Malaysia as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Vasara also said a Finnish delegation will hold “Doing Business with Finland” seminars in Kuala Lumpur on 27 January and Johor on 29 January.

Vasara highlighted interest in the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, citing incentives and proximity to Singapore. She also pointed to circular economy cooperation, including using forestry and oil palm residues for new products.



FFAV mourns Norwegian director Anders K.A. Krystad

Football for All in Vietnam (FFAV), a grassroots programme founded by the Football Association of Norway and the Vietnam Football Federation, has announced the death of its former director Anders K.A. Krystad.

FFAV said Krystad passed away peacefully on 4 January 2026 at the age of 69 after a battle with cancer. The organisation described him as a key driving force behind its long-standing focus on non-competitive football and life skills education for children.

Under his leadership, the programme expanded its work with



schools and local partners, focusing on children aged 6 to 15, including disadvantaged and rural communities. FFAV has also placed strong emphasis on inclusion, including support for girls' football, children with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

“His efforts were remarkable. I will remember Anders as a generous, warm, and inclusive colleague, who also had the ability to challenge and be direct. My thoughts go to his wife Ngoc and the family,” said Svein Graff of Vålerenga Fotball Elite in a statement.

Norway and Philippines discuss mobile “round bale” waste solution for island communities

The Royal Norwegian Embassy, Innovation Norway and Norwegian firm Orkel held a “Waste Burden to Energy Resource” forum on 15 January.

The event took place at Seda Vertis North in Manila.

Philippine officials from DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources), DOE (Department of Energy), DA (Department of Agriculture) and local government units joined the dialogue.

They discussed waste logistics across the country’s 7,641 islands.

Orkel presented a mobile baling system that compresses loose waste into sealed “round bales.”

The bales can be used as refuse-derived fuel for industrial users, including energy plants and cement kilns.



Orkel said sealed bales can reduce odours and leakage, cut waste volume by about 70%, and simplify transport.

The Norwegian Embassy and Innovation Norway said the system is meant to follow sorting and recycling steps.

Swedes more annoyed by noisy hotel rooms than sunbed hogging

Poor soundproofing is the biggest irritation for Swedish travellers staying at hotels abroad, according to a new survey commissioned by TUI.

The survey, conducted by Kantar Media, shows that 39 percent of respondents are most bothered by noisy hotel rooms. Uncomfortable beds and pillows follow at 36 percent, while 33 percent cite loud or disruptive guests as their main frustration.

Tourists reserving sunbeds — a recurring topic in social media debates — rank further down the list,



mentioned by around a quarter of respondents.

Service also plays a key role. Almost three in ten Swedes say

inattentive or rude hotel staff negatively affect their stay, placing service ahead of issues such as nearby construction work.

TUI notes that destinations such as Thailand remain among the most popular for Nordic travellers, making expectations around sleep quality and service particularly relevant for hotels catering to Scandinavian guests.

The survey was carried out online in September 2025 among 1,071 respondents aged 18–79.

Hong Kong court starts Baltic Sea cable damage case against Newnew Polar Bear captain



A Hong Kong court is preparing to hear evidence in a case against Wan Wenguo, a Chinese captain of the Hong Kong-registered ship Newnew Polar Bear. He is accused of damaging the Balticconnector gas pipeline and telecom cables between Finland and Estonia on 8 October 2023.

Wan appeared in court on 20 January 2026, but the hearing was adjourned to 11 February. His lawyer said more time was needed to review documents before a plea is entered.

The defence said 18 witnesses

are expected in total. Ten would testify on the main criminal damage charge, including crew members, Hong Kong officials and maritime experts.

Wan also faces two additional charges linked to ship safety rules. These relate to a missing anchor and reporting requirements while operating under the Hong Kong flag.

Authorities from Finland and Estonia have investigated the incident with Hong Kong prosecutors. Gasgrid Finland has said repairing the pipeline cost 35 million euros.

Maersk explores more ethanol use as green fuel to reduce reliance on China

Danish shipping giant AP Moller–Maersk is exploring greater use of ethanol as a marine fuel as it looks to diversify its green energy supply and reduce dependence on China. The move comes as China currently dominates the supply of fuels such as green methanol, while the United States and Brazil remain the world's largest ethanol producers.

Maersk has warned that concentrating too much of the green fuel supply in a single market could create political and commercial friction, arguing that a more balanced global supply would help build broader support for shipping's decarbonisation.

The shipping industry faces high costs in cutting emissions, with companies needing to invest in retrofitted ships or new vessels designed for alternative fuels. Several

carriers, including Hapag-Lloyd, have already begun securing long-term access to low-emission fuels for the coming years.



Philippine regulator clears Ayala sale to AP Moller-linked buyer

The Philippine Competition Commission (PCC) has approved Ayala Corp.'s sale of a 40% stake in its logistics arm, AC Logistics.

The PCC said it cleared the transaction on 20 November 2025, according to a statement released on 7 January 2026.

Ayala Corp. is one of the Philippines' largest conglomerates, with businesses spanning property, banking, telecommunications, energy, and infrastructure.

Ayala is selling the stake to EMIF II SPV, an investment vehicle of the Danish AP Moller Capital P/S, which is affiliated with AP Moller Holding.

The PCC said its review found no competition concerns in domestic and international freight forwarding, contract logistics nationwide, and container liner shipping services used by sea freight forwarders.

"The PCC determined that the transaction is unlikely to result in a substantial lessening of competition



due to the presence of substantial competitive constraints on the parties," the commission said.

Thai authorities deny rumours limiting visa-free entry for foreigners



Thai authorities have rejected online claims that foreign nationals will be limited to entering Thailand visa-free only twice a year, calling the information false and misleading.

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society said the rumour, which circulated widely on social media and messaging platforms ear-

lier this year, was identified through monitoring by Thailand's Anti-Fake News Centre. The ministry said it coordinated with the Immigration Bureau, which confirmed that no such restriction exists.

According to the authorities, no announcement has been made to amend immigration law, and no legal framework is being introduced

to impose an annual limit on visa-free entries.

Immigration officials said existing measures remain in place, including closer screening of foreigners who frequently enter and leave Thailand in patterns resembling so-called "visa runs". However, these checks do not involve any fixed cap on the number of visa-free visits per year.

Earlier this year, the Anti-Fake News Centre reviewed more than 157,000 online messages, of which several thousand required verification. Several widely shared claims were found to be false or misleading, including rumours related to visas, health issues, elections, online scams and financial schemes.

The ministry urged the public to verify information through official sources before sharing it, warning that false news can cause confusion, financial losses and risks to personal data.

Finnish fund sees strong potential in Vietnam



Foreign investor interest in Vietnam is showing signs of recovery, with Finland-based PYN Elite Fund expressing growing confidence in the country's stock market outlook as 2026 begins.

The fund, which has invested in Vietnamese equities for more than a decade, has raised its target for the VN-Index to 3,200 points. It said the level could be reached within three years if listed companies maintain

average annual earnings growth of 18–20 per cent.

In a letter to investors, fund head Petri Deryng said Vietnam is becoming increasingly attractive compared with other regional markets, noting that the fund has revised its Vietnam target three times, compared with only one revision during 15 years of investing in Thailand.

Recent market data show foreign investors have returned as net buyers, helped by easing pressure on the Vietnamese dong, expectations of future market upgrades, and improving global risk sentiment. However, analysts warn that inflows may remain selective amid high global interest rates and currency volatility.

Norwegian envoy says China visa-free entry has boosted travel and business ties

Norway's ambassador to China, Vebjørn Dysvik, says travel between the two countries has surged since China introduced 30-day visa-free entry for Norwegian citizens.

In an interview with China Daily, Dysvik said the number of Norwegians travelling to China has more than doubled in a year. He also said more Chinese tourists are visiting Norway.

The ambassador linked the rise in travel to wider cooperation, including trade, maritime affairs, green development and innovation. He said China is an important partner for Norwegian companies working in China or with China.

China is now Norway's largest



trading partner in Asia, according to the article. It said bilateral trade reached 8.27 billion\$ in the first half of 2025, and that more than 160 Norwegian companies operate in China.

The article also highlighted cooperation on greener shipping and new energy, and noted growing cul-

tural exchanges. It said Norwegian artists, including Sigrid and Secret Garden, have recently completed tours in China, as travel connections increase across the region.

Likewise, new visa-rules for Danish and Swedish citizens also seem to have increased the number of travelers going to China in 2025.

IKEA closes seven stores in China as it shifts to smaller formats

IKEA has closed seven of its large stores in China as part of a plan to focus on smaller, more convenient locations. The affected stores were in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Tianjin.

Over the next two years, the Swedish retailer plans to open about a dozen smaller-format stores in Beijing and Shenzhen. Even after the closures, IKEA will continue to operate 34 physical stores across China, along with two flagship e-commerce sites and other digital channels.

The company said demand has slowed due to China's property downturn, which has reduced new home purchases, and tougher com-



petition from lower-priced online brands.

To make shopping easier, IKEA

is working with JD.com to offer instant delivery in seven Chinese cities.

Danish-Indonesian study highlights need for upgrade in Indonesia's solar energy

A Danish-Indonesian research group says Indonesia needs updated grid code standards to integrate higher shares of renewable energy and support its solar expansion, according to a report published 7 January 2026.

The study's lead author, Majid Ali, said outdated or weak grid codes are a major bottleneck for

renewable deployment. He added that wider changes are also needed, including grid investment, regulatory reform, financing, and stronger institutions.

Researchers assessed technical requirements for integrating large volumes of renewable generation at the distribution level. They compared Indonesia's planned grid code

with existing standards, including those used in Denmark and those developed by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).

The proposed framework includes reactive power compensation and harmonic analysis to assess grid hosting capacity and maintain system reliability. It also includes an information and communication technology framework for real-time monitoring, plus low-voltage and high-voltage ride-through requirements to keep renewable generation running during short disturbances.

Indonesia's National Energy Policy aims to reach up to 108.7 GW of solar capacity by 2060, the article said. It added that Indonesia's cumulative installed solar capacity surpassed 700 MW in August 2024.



Danish-Vietnamese study maps saola DNA and outlines rescue path

A Danish-Vietnamese KU supported research team has published a saola genome

study in the journal *Cell*. The saola is often called the “Asian unicorn” because it is rarely seen.

The saola was first described in 1992 and lives in the Annamite Mountains across Vietnam and Laos. Researchers said the habitat is remote and difficult to survey.

IUCN estimates of around 100 saola remaining, and notes no confirmed sightings since 2013. Scientists said the species' current status cannot be confirmed from field evidence alone.

Using genetic material from historical saola remains, the team identified two distinct populations. The researchers said combining individuals from both groups could improve survival odds.

The study suggested a breeding programme could work if at least a dozen saola are found. Researchers said the plan depends on locating living animals in the wild.



Finnish firm Metso to build new rubber products factory in China's Zhejiang

Metso, headquartered in Espoo, Finland, is investing in a new rubber products plant in Quzhou, Zhejiang Province. The company said the investment will meet growing demand and improve service in the region.

Metso said the factory will make rubber and Poly-Met mill linings and Trellex screening media. The products are used by mining and aggregates customers to improve performance and reliability.

Metso said screening media production is planned to start in the first quarter of 2026. Mill lining production is set to begin toward the end of the first half of 2026.

Metso said localized production and supply chains will shorten delivery times and improve response

speed. The company said the move supports its long-term commitment to the Greater China market.



Great catch: Norway's seafood exports hit record NOK 181.5bn in 2025

Norway exported 2.8 million tonnes of seafood worth NOK 181.5 billion in 2025. The Norwegian Seafood Council called it a record export value.

Undercurrent News reported that exports to China rose 31% last year. It said China became Norway's third-biggest seafood buyer.

China reportedly overtook Denmark, the Netherlands and France in the ranking. Undercurrent News also pointed to strong trade growth with the United States.

ScandAsia previously reported that Norway shipped over 61,300 tonnes of salmon alone to China in January–August 2025.



Hong Kong film festival launches in Copenhagen



A Hong Kong-focused film festival has been held in Copenhagen, bringing the city's cinema and creative scene to Danish audiences and highlighting Hong Kong's role in international cultural exchange.

The Copenhagen Hong Kong Focus Film Festival was organised by the Denmark Asian Cultural Association with support from the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office and marked its second consecutive year. The event opened with a

reception and a screening of the documentary *Four Trails*, attended by guests from Copenhagen's cultural and business communities.

Among those taking part were representatives from both Hong Kong and China, while the Director-General of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London, Fiona Chau, addressed the audience via video link. She said the festival reflects Hong Kong's ambition to strengthen its position as an East-meets-West hub for cultural exchange.

The programme focused on contemporary Hong Kong films, offering Nordic audiences a closer look at the city's film industry and creative talent.

Four Seasons Singapore launches Nordic Weekend Afternoon Tea



Four Seasons Hotel Singapore has introduced a Nordic Weekend Afternoon Tea at One-Ninety Bar. The set is available on Saturdays and Sundays from 2pm to 5pm.

The afternoon tea runs until 24 May 2026. It was created by Executive Pastry Chef Daniel Windelhed, who is Swedish.

The menu includes savoury items such as a Kalix löjrom tart and four Nordic-style toasts. The selection features roasted beef, blueber-

ry-cured salmon, Skagenröra, and herring.

Sweet items include a strawberry and rhubarb summer tart, a blackcurrant dessert, and a warm cinnamon bun. The set also includes a Swedish princess cake finished with marzipan, raspberry jam, and diplomat cream.

Danish author's novel released in Vietnamese

A Vietnamese edition of *Những Bóng Ma Trở Lại* (The Returning Ghosts) by Danish author Thomas Bo Pedersen has been published, placing him among a small group of Danish writers whose works have been translated into Vietnamese.

Pedersen has been connected to Vietnam for more than 40 years through journalism, diplomacy and business. His novel, presented as a detective story, focuses on the long-term consequences of war and how past conflicts continue to shape lives long after they have formally ended.

The Vietnamese edition was launched in Hanoi and reflects themes of memory, moral responsibility and the human aftermath of war rather than a traditional crime-driven narrative.

Nicolai Prytz, Denmark's ambassador to Vietnam, attended the book launch and pointed to Pedersen's long-standing engagement with the country across several fields,



including reporting on the post-war period as well as later involvement in diplomatic, commercial and humanitarian activities.

With the publication of *The Returning Ghosts* in Vietnamese, Pedersen becomes one of only five Danish authors whose books have

been translated into the language.

The release adds to a limited but growing body of Danish literature available to Vietnamese readers and reflects cultural links between Denmark and Vietnam shaped over decades by individual engagement as well as official relations.

Norway expels Malaysian and Chinese nationals in crackdown on illegal Northern Lights tours



operations pose serious safety risks and undermine legitimate tour operators. Last winter, tourists were left for hours in a cold vehicle after refusing to continue a trip in dangerous weather conditions.

Part of a wider enforcement effort

The crackdown is part of a coordinated effort involving police, tax and labour authorities to combat labour and tax violations linked to the rapid growth in winter tourism. When authorities inspected dozens of aurora tour operators last year, breaches were found at more than half of them.

Northern Norway has seen a sharp rise in international tourism, with foreign overnight stays during the Northern Lights season more than doubling since 2019. Asian visitors now make up a growing share of first-time tourists.

Malaysian voice in Scandinavia

Commenting on the deportations, Azira Aziz, a Malaysian living in Scandinavia, warned travellers against using unlicensed tour operators. She said tourists may be left without legal or insurance protection if something goes wrong, especially in winter conditions.

Norwegian police say enforcement efforts will continue as visitor numbers remain high throughout the Northern Lights season.

Norwegian authorities have expelled 12 foreign nationals from Malaysia and China in recent months as part of a broader crackdown on illegal Northern Lights tourism in northern Norway, according to public broadcaster NRK and Malaysian media reports.

The expulsions target unlicensed tour operators offering aurora safaris without valid work permits, insurance or proper safety arrangements. Those expelled are banned from entering Norway, the EU and the Schengen area for two years. The most recent cases involved seven Malaysians and five Chinese nationals stopped in areas including Tromsø, Lofoten and Nordland.

Norwegian police say illegal tours have become increasingly common as Northern Lights tourism continues to surge, particularly among visitors from Asia.

Large sums and safety risks

Police say the illegal tours are highly profitable. "Bookings for trips with accommodation, vehicles and guiding services are not free. Large sums of money were changing hands," said Gudjon Gudjonsson of the Nordland Police District. In several cases, authorities confiscated more than 100,000 Norwegian kroner per tour in illegal earnings.

According to NRK, all 12 individuals admitted to transporting and guiding tourists for payment without the required permits. Many operated using rented seven-seat vehicles or SUVs driven into Norway from neighbouring countries, while customers were recruited through private social media groups.

Kurt Kolvereid Jacobsen, head of the A-Krim Centre in Nordland, said such businesses are easy to set up. Authorities warn that these

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