

JUL-AUG 2026

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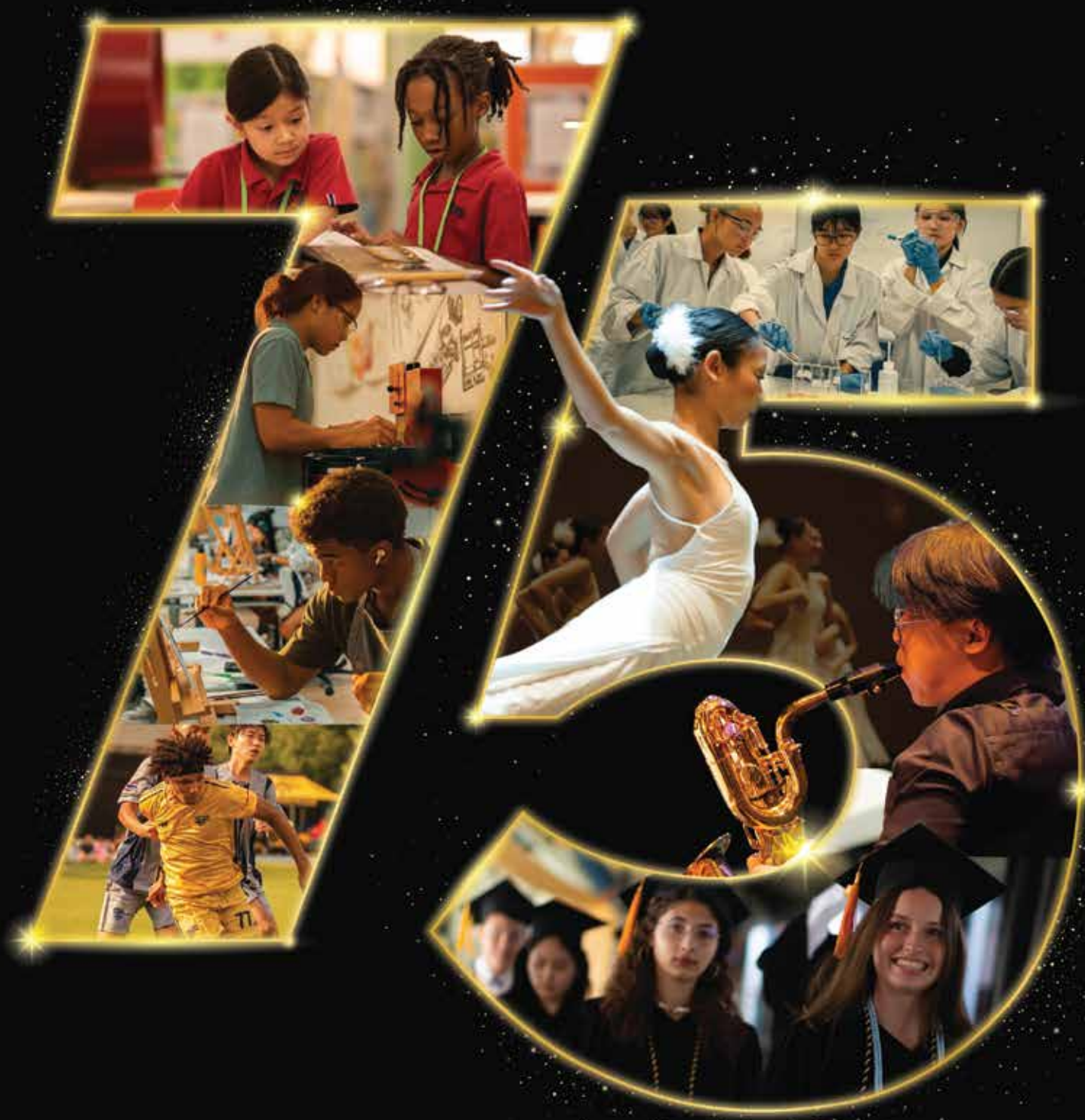
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Two countries - one common principle

Many Scandinavians living in Thailand have, over the past few years, felt that the country has become less welcoming to foreigners. Visa requirements have become stricter, immigration checks more frequent, and the authorities more active in enforcing rules that were previously accepted as so-called grey area. Some regard this as unfair and bureaucratic. Others see it as a natural consequence of Thailand wanting to ensure that foreign residents respect the law and make a positive contribution to society.

At the same time, Sweden has been undergoing its own shift. After decades of relatively liberal immigration policies, the political debate has increasingly focused on integration, public safety, and the responsibilities that accompany the right to live in the country. Recent legislation reflects that change by making it easier, in certain circumstances, to revoke residence permits for foreign nationals who seriously fail to meet those expectations.

The two countries have very different legal systems, political traditions, and immigration policies. Thailand's enforcement has largely focused on visa compliance, immigration status, nominee structures, and preventing illegal work. Sweden's new measures reach further into questions of conduct and integration after a residence permit has been granted.

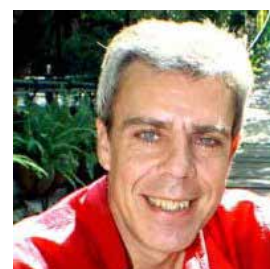
Yet beneath these differences lies a common principle: the right to live in another country is accompanied by responsibilities as well as rights.

It is easy to criticize stricter immigration enforcement when we are the foreigners affected by it. It is equally easy to support similar measures when they are introduced in our own country. The comparison between Thailand and Sweden reminds us that governments ev-

erywhere face the same challenge: how to remain open to foreign talent, investment, and visitors while maintaining public confidence that those who are welcomed will respect the laws and values of the society they have chosen to join.

Scandinavians living in Thailand have often argued that the authorities should appreciate the overwhelming majority of foreigners who contribute positively to Thai society and focus the law enforcement on the small minority who abuse the country's hospitality. Sweden's latest reforms suggest that the same conversation is now taking place back home.

People will undoubtedly hold different opinions about where the balance should be struck. But whatever one thinks of the specific policies adopted in either country, the underlying principle appears remarkably similar: The privilege of living in another country increasingly comes with an expectation that those who are welcomed will respect the laws, values and responsibilities of the society they wish to join.



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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Phu Tho courts Finnish investors and skilled workers



A Vietnamese province is looking to deepen ties with Finland in areas ranging from investment and skilled labour to tourism.

A delegation from Phu Tho province met officials from the Vietnamese Embassy in Finland during a European investment promotion tour that also includes Spain and Sweden.

During the meeting, provincial leaders highlighted opportunities for Finnish investment in high-tech manufacturing, green industry, logistics and digital transformation.

“Phu Tho is continuing to implement a range of measures to sustain strong growth momentum while improving the investment environment and expanding cooperation with international partners,”

said Bui Huy Vinh, Deputy Secretary of the Phu Tho Party Committee.

Labour cooperation was also discussed. Finland currently considers Vietnam one of four priority countries for attracting highly skilled workers.

“In 2025, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to facilitate the recruitment of Vietnamese experts, skilled workers and seasonal labourers,” said Nguyen Dieu Linh, acting head of the Vietnamese Embassy in Finland.

Tourism was another key topic. Phu Tho officials expressed interest in attracting more Finnish and Nordic visitors, as well as investment in eco-tourism, resorts and elderly-care facilities.

The Vietnamese Embassy in Finland said it would support efforts to promote the province to Finnish businesses and travellers through tourism and cultural events.

Flying between Scandinavia and Indonesia now gets easier with new airline deal

A new partnership between SAS and Garuda Indonesia will make it easier to travel between Scandinavia and Indonesia on a single ticket.

From the Winter 2026/2027 schedule, passengers flying with SAS will gain easier access to Indonesian destinations including Jakarta and Bali through Garuda Indonesia's network.

At the same time, Garuda passengers will get better connections to Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo through SAS.



The agreement means travellers can book journeys that combine flights from both airlines, with connections through hubs such as Amsterdam, Tokyo Haneda and Bangkok.

“Garuda Indonesia is a key partner for connecting Scandinavia with Indonesia and the wider region. Together, we are making travel simpler and more seamless for the many people, businesses and communities with ties between our countries,” said SAS President and CEO Anko van der Werff.

The partnership also allows members of SAS EuroBonus and GarudaMiles to earn and redeem points across both airlines.

Finnair and SAS plan new direct routes to Krabi

Krabi could soon welcome more Scandinavian visitors as both Finnair and Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) have proposed new direct flights to the southern Thai destination.

According to Thailand's Ministry of Transport, Finnair has requested slots for flights between Helsinki and Krabi, while SAS has proposed a direct route between Copenhagen and Krabi. Both airlines plan to operate two return flights per week during the 2026/27 winter season.

The proposed services were discussed following the 158th International Air Transport Association (IATA) Slot Conference, held in Bangkok. The Department of Airports (DoA) said growing airline interest reflects Krabi Airport's in-

creasing importance as an international gateway.

Deputy Transport Minister Phattrapong Phattraprasit said the new routes support the government's Airport for Regional Development policy, which aims to strengthen tourism and economic growth outside Bangkok.

The ministry expects the routes to attract more visitors from Nordic countries, including Finland, Denmark and Sweden. According to officials, Scandinavian travellers are particularly valuable to the local tourism industry because they tend to stay longer and spend more during their visits.

DoA Director-General Danai Ruangsorn said airlines have requested a total of 126 international



flights through Krabi Airport for the winter schedule running from 25 October 2026 to 27 March 2027.

The requests include 14 airlines, with 10 scheduled international carriers and four charter operators.

Thai authorities believe expanding international air links will help boost tourism, create new business opportunities and support long-term economic growth across southern Thailand.

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Indonesia and Norway explore new partnership for peace and human rights



A new proposed partnership between the University of Oslo's Norwegian Centre for Human Rights and Hasanudin University in Makassar aims to strengthen cooperation between Southeast Asia and the Nordic region on peacebuilding and human rights.

The initiative seeks to establish an ASEAN-Nordic platform focused

on research, education, and training in conflict resolution, at a time when global instability, polarization, and displacement are increasing.

The proposal is being promoted by Indonesian human rights expert Hafid Abbas and Indonesia's Ambassador to Norway, Teuku Faizasyah. Both see the initiative as an opportunity to deepen cooperation between Indonesia and Norway while sharing experiences in conflict resolution and democratic development.

It brings together Norway's experience in human rights and international mediation with Indonesia's practical history of conflict resolution and democratic transition.

Key Indonesian examples include the Helsinki peace agreement

in Aceh in 2005, which ended decades of armed conflict, as well as the Malino agreements that helped resolve communal violence in Poso and Ambon in the early 2000s.

Norway's role in global peace facilitation and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights' academic work form the other pillar of the partnership.

The collaboration would include joint research, student and faculty exchanges, and training programs for officials, including a planned executive course on peacebuilding and human rights.

Supporters say the goal is to strengthen regional capacity for conflict prevention and position Indonesia as a hub for peace and human rights education in ASEAN.

Finland and Sweden join major Asia-Pacific military exercise

Finland and Sweden will take part in Exercise Pitch Black 2026, one of the largest multinational air force exercises in the Asia-Pacific region.

Hosted by Australia from July 20 to August 7, the exercise will bring together more than 100 aircraft and personnel from 19 countries across Europe and Asia.

Alongside the two Nordic nations, participating countries include Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand.



According to the Royal Australian Air Force, the exercise is designed to improve cooperation between allied and partner nations through complex combat-training scenarios.

"Exercise Pitch Black 26 is vital

for the preparedness and collective security of both Australia and the region," Exercise Commander Air Commodore Matt McCormack said.

The exercise comes as security cooperation between European and Indo-Pacific countries continues to expand amid growing geopolitical tensions and shared concerns over regional stability.

Exercise Pitch Black has been held regularly since 1981 and is regarded as one of the Asia-Pacific region's most important military aviation exercises.

Bataan explores electric 'flying' ferries with Swedish firm

A stretch of coastline in Bataan could soon become a testing ground for a new kind of sea travel that quite literally lifts above the water.

In a recent meeting, local officials and Swedish marine technology company Candela explored how electric hydrofoiling vessels might reshape coastal transport in the province.

Abet Garcia met with representatives of Swedish maritime innovator Candela to discuss the possible introduction of next-generation ferries and water transport systems.

Garcia said the discussions centered on electric hydrofoiling boats designed to travel faster, quieter, and



with lower environmental impact than conventional vessels.

"In our meeting with representatives of Candela, a Swedish company known for its hydrofoiling electric boats and ferries, we discussed innovative maritime transportation

technologies and the possibility of adopting them in our province," Garcia said.

The technology uses underwater wings to lift the vessel above the surface while in motion. This reduces drag, allowing for higher efficiency, lower energy use, and smoother travel even in challenging waters.

For a coastal province like Bataan, where shipping routes, tourism, and inter-island connectivity play a growing role, the potential applications were a key focus of the discussion.

Officials suggested that such systems could support more sustainable transport links while also boosting economic and tourism activity along the province's shoreline.

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AI and the Future-Ready Student

By Brian Taylor, Bangkok Patana School

When pocket calculators entered homes in the 1970s, schools largely banned them. A familiar fear took hold: if students could rely on machines, would they stop thinking for themselves? However, later research found that calculators, used alongside teaching, improved paper-and-pencil skills and problem-solving. The lesson was clear: Teach foundations first, then use the tool to extend learning.

This pattern, alarm > adaptation > integration, is familiar. Socrates feared writing would weaken memory. Radio, television, and the internet were all said to erode attention and thought. Each time, the anxiety captured something real,

but the worst predictions proved too simple. Education adapted, and the tools were eventually woven into learning. History never repeats itself, but it does rhyme.

The evidence is usually more nuanced than the headlines suggest. The consistent finding is that how a technology is integrated matters most.

Now artificial intelligence is taking its turn. Recent commentary has warned that reliance on AI chatbots may erode critical thinking and memory, and that convenience can slide into intellectual passivity. The key question is whether AI is different enough to demand a different response.



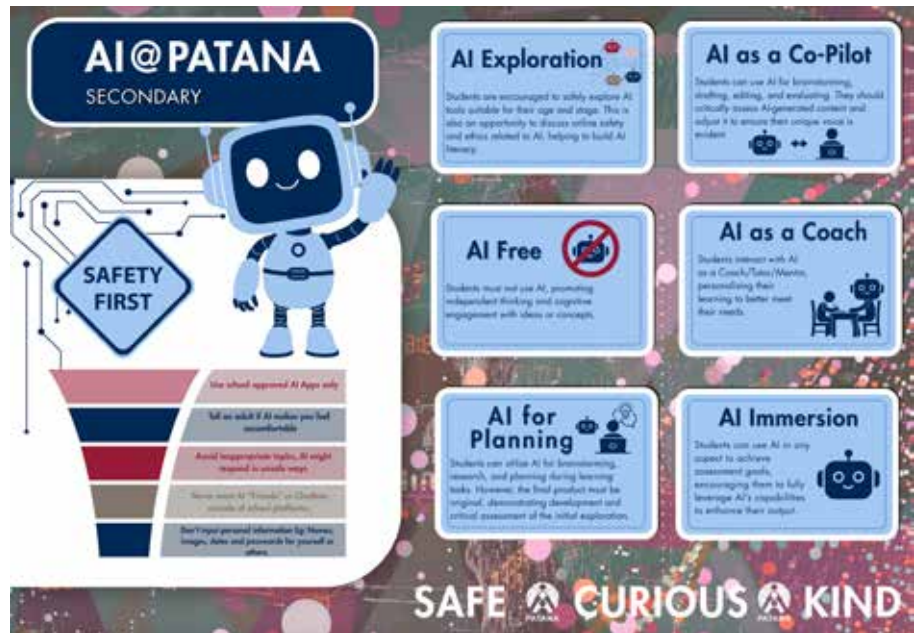
What Makes AI Different

In important ways, it is. Earlier technologies offloaded narrow tasks. Calculators handled arithmetic. Search engines supported recall. Generative AI can draft essays, write code, plan projects, and produce analysis across domains. Earlier tools reproduced knowledge. Generative AI can produce new content, and its adoption has been exceptionally fast.

Yet the underlying mechanism, cognitive offloading, is not new. What changes with AI is the breadth of what can be offloaded.

Rethinking Readiness

These questions are no longer theoretical. At a recent Bangkok panel on AI-driven university pathways, one point was unmistakable: AI is changing what readiness means. If knowledge can be summoned on demand, the premium shifts to what AI cannot easily replicate: **judgement, dispositions** such as curiosity and fortitude, and the capacity to reason ethically. At Bangkok Patana, our mission to develop global citizens through **independence, empathy, creativity, and critical thinking** speaks directly to this moment. These qualities are becoming central, not optional. They sit at the heart of future readiness.



Parental Concerns

Some of the loudest assumptions deserve a closer look.

"AI will eliminate whole careers."

Student survey evidence suggests a more nuanced picture. New technologies usually reshape tasks more often than they erase whole professions. The more pressing question is how young people will learn to work well alongside them.

"Technical skills in AI matter most."

The evidence suggests other-

wise. Students need not only technical fluency, but guidance, ethical framing, and the judgement to use AI well. Real preparation combines digital capability with disciplinary understanding, adaptability, communication, and interpersonal strengths AI cannot easily replicate.

Thailand

For families in Thailand, the question is not whether to avoid professional pathways, but whether universities develop **adaptability, industry connection, and human competencies** alongside subject expertise. In an AI-rich world, that balance may matter more than ever.

Looking Ahead

History offers a clear lesson. Outcomes depend on how educators and communities integrate a technology, not on the technology alone. AI demands the same deliberate approach, only faster and across a wider range of cognitive work.

A future-ready student is a self-directed, adaptable learner who combines critical discernment, ethical judgement, creativity, and emotional intelligence with fluent, responsible use of AI. At Bangkok Patana, that is the kind of global citizen we are proud to nurture.





Designing Spaces that Inspire: How Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi's Campus Architecture Elevates Learning

Vision

Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi was founded with a bold architectural vision: to create a campus that operates not just as a place of learning, but as a “third teacher”; an active, inspiring participant in the educational journey of every pupil. Guided by the world-renowned educational ethos of Brighton College UK, our new campus in the heart of Bangkok has been meticulously crafted to promote intellectual curiosity, pupil agency, creativity, and wellbeing.

This vision is deeply aligned with the Brighton College Success Model. At its core lies a belief that every child has unique potential. Our goal is to unlock and nurture that individuality through personalised education and future-ready environments.



From the ground up, Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi was designed as a contemporary learning village. Every square metre of the school is planned with purpose,

marrying function and beauty to support best practices in 21st-century education. Flexible, light-filled classrooms, open-plan learning hubs, and biophilic elements invite exploration and collaboration. The architecture reinforces our core educational values: kindness, confidence, and curiosity.

Design Features Supporting the Brighton Vision

- **Performing Arts Theatre:** A professional-grade theatre with full lighting, sound, and stage facilities.
- **Music and Performing Arts Studios:** Separate rooms for Thai and Western Music, a state-of-the-art Recording Studio, soundproof Individual Music Practice Rooms, a

Black Box theatre space, and dedicated Drama and Dance Studios.

- **Sports Facilities:** Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi boasts a full-size gymnasium that can host simultaneous tournaments and physical education classes. The school is complemented by a competition-grade football pitch, running track, and rooftop swimming pool
- **Science Laboratories:** Purpose-built labs for Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, as well as other science-related subjects.
- **Design & Technology Studios:** Modern, high-spec spaces for product design and engineering.
- **Fitness Centre:** Equipped with strength training and cardio machines tailored for student use.
- **Health Centre for Life Skills:** A multi-purpose space used to teach nutrition, wellbeing, and cooking.
- **Libraries for All Ages:** The school features two dedicated libraries; a Prep Library for younger pupils and a Senior Library that supports research, independent learning, and exam preparation for IGCSE and A Level pupils.
- **Innovation Hub:** A central makerspace focused on STEAM subjects
- **Sixth Form Centre:** A signature space designed to reflect university-style learning, with a balance of collaborative and individual study areas.
- **Early Years Zone:** This area serves as a joyful first step into formal education. Designed to feel like a magical indoor forest, it features tree-like pillars, whimsical rainbow elements, and nature-inspired learning corners.
- **Play-based Learning Gardens:** Especially for younger pupils, these zones support sensory play, motor development, and social interaction.
- **Community Spaces:** Designed to welcome families and local

partners, reinforcing our view that education flourishes through strong home-school collaboration.

- **Sustainable Energy Use:** Solar cells have been installed across campus buildings to reduce environmental impact and lower long-term energy consumption, supporting our commitment to sustainability and global citizenship.

What Makes Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi an Award-Winning School

Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi stands apart as a model of climate-responsive, child-centred school design in Southeast Asia. It proves that the Brighton College model, originally successful in the UK, can be adapted to a tropical urban context



without compromising its academic or philosophical rigor.

Supported by Brighton UK through direct oversight of curriculum, leadership, and teacher quality, our campus enables the replication of proven outcomes:

- High academic achievement by Thai pupils.
- University placements at global top-tier institutions.
- Teachers who inspire and engage.
- A strong focus on self-driven curiosity and lifelong learning.

Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi's design realises these goals through space. Our facilities don't merely accommodate education, they **enhance** it. From the confidence built on the stage, to the curiosity sparked in science labs, to the

kindness cultivated in our shared spaces, the architecture supports the full development of every child.

Impact on Student Learning

The learning environment at Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi has had profound, measurable outcomes:

- **Engagement & Achievement:** Pupils are more engaged, particularly in creative, technological, and STEAM disciplines.
- **Wellbeing:** Open, zoned spaces reduce stress and help pupils feel safe, seen, and valued.
- **Independent Learning:** Libraries and open hubs nurture research skills, inquiry, and reflective learning.
- **Community Confidence:** Families see the school as an extension of their values,



participating more actively in school life.

- **Lifelong Skills:** Children leave with Brighton College's signature attributes: curiosity, confidence, and kindness.

Brighton College Bangkok Vibhavadi is not just a campus; it is a catalyst for success. A school where architecture meets aspiration, and where Thai and international families can trust that their children will thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Through thoughtfully designed learning environments, Brighton's proven educational model comes to life in every corridor, classroom, and courtyard.



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What Happens When a Metal Manufacturer Moves Beyond Material Handling

Fine Scandinavia operates as a trusted, versatile provider for industrial metal solutions (including warehouse trolleys, roll containers, and industrial workstations etc.) alongside quality mixed-material residential furniture. Vietnam-based, this Swedish-founded manufacturer is on a continuous journey of business development and long-term growth that has soon reached twenty years.

From Material Handling to Multi-Material Manufacturing

It all began with a modest range of material handling products to a few Scandinavian customers. Gradually, the business has since then grown from small-scale manufacturing with a limited spectrum of processes into a large-scale modern provider. Fine Scandinavia now uses a wide range of materials and manufacturing processes and it has a highly skilled engineering department to assist its customers in product development. "Our main differentiation is that we work on a fairly broad variety of materials and processes in-house; for example, steel, stainless steel and aluminium. We work in many different

segments; from heavy duty material handling to medical, health care and outdoor furniture. That's what makes us unique," says Swedish founder and CEO Johan Sundberg.

Now a multi-material specialist, this manufacturer has gained vast experience in managing complex, mixed-material supply chains: "Within the segments that we cater to we have developed quite a few close suppliers in various materials and processes, enabling us to provide products that we otherwise would not have been able to. With this capability we have become a quite broad supplier." On offer: end-to-end manufacturing and OEM capabilities, combining precision engineering, advanced production technology, and deep technical expertise to deliver uncompromised quality.

Where Customers Set the Standard

The main markets the clients come from are Europe, North America and Australia - where Fine Scandinavia's partners enjoy getting the same quality as any European factory but with lower cost.

The steel used is supplied with an MTC (Mill Test Certificate) for traceability and to verify quality. Wood purchases are made exclusively from timber with EUTR certificates, and the manufacturing plant holds ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 14001:2015 certifications.

"Additionally, we perform product testing upon request to meet each customer's specific requirements and applicable standards."

The company name reflects two core reference points rooted in Scandina-



via: it honours the company's very first customers, while mirroring its foundational origin, values and identity.

"Scandinavia has been very important. Our first customers were Scandinavian, whom we've been working closely with since the start. We learned a lot along the way on how to serve our customers in the best possible way and to make it easy for them to work with us even though being far apart geographically. And our long-term Scandinavian customers have also been very good references for our other customers around the world," Johan emphasises.

"I think the most important points have been that we've always tried to keep developing, widening our materials and processes to stay on top, e.g. not being afraid to try new ways, but also not promising things that we are not sure we can handle. Trust is a main key in a good partnership."

When Capability Found a New Market

A pivotal milestone in their growth has been the successful expansion from industrial products into furniture manufacturing: *"It started around 2015 when we were getting more and more enquiries to manufacture mixed material indoor furniture. It evolved quite fast and I realised that in order to take this opportunity to the next level we needed an in-house furniture development department with the right experience. So, in 2017 we established that, and today furniture stands for roughly 30% of our turnover,"* he added.

The CEO also notes that the foundational capabilities developed in industrial manufacturing proved invaluable during this transition: *"We've been very process-focused in making the industrial manufacturing as efficient and quality-consistent as possible, so that we could penetrate into the medium-high furniture segment in a relatively short time."*

Building for the Next Twenty Years

The company was born out of the Swede's desire to build an enterprise

he truly believed in and could stand behind, a vision shaped by several years of gaining invaluable local experience working in Vietnam.

Reflecting on nearly 20 years in business, Johan has navigated numerous market shifts while successfully introducing Scandinavian leadership ideas and work culture to the operation: *"In the beginning I realised it was more important to micro-manage. But then again, the company was new and I pretty much had a hand in all areas. As the years went by, I tried to create an environment with responsibility and ownership in all areas. Today we operate with a management team that drives all the day-to-day sides of the business."*

This commitment to a flat organisational structure is highly visible across the factory floor: *"We all need to work well together to develop and manufacture good products. Then it's always important to keep the cooperation well between different departments like admin, engineering and production. All departments are equally important."*

Fine Scandinavia takes immense pride in its high retention rates, with

numerous staff members celebrating over a decade of service with the company.

"Our management team and I have always aimed to have an equal and fair working environment where we listen to ideas and thoughts and you can grow within the company. This gives people a chance to develop both personally and professionally. We have strived to have as equal numbers of men and women in many areas as possible. This creates a better working environment, even though it's not always easily achievable in our type of industry."

With the brand-new purpose-built 11,000 m² manufacturing plant, and with two large automated powder coating lines, Fine Scandinavia has doubled its previous footprint. It is fully equipped to scale operations and onboard new partners.

"The new facility is more than a milestone in Fine Scandinavia's growth; it is an opportunity to reintroduce the company not as a furniture manufacturer or an industrial manufacturer, but as a trusted manufacturing partner for both," ends Johan.



Johan Sundberg with 10 of the 11 employees who have been with Fine Scandinavia since the company was founded in 2007.

Good manufacturing starts with the right partner.

Fine Scandinavia works with some of the top furniture brands and material handling companies in Europe, the US, and Australia. Over time, they've learned that successful manufacturing partnerships are built on one thing above all else: doing what you say you'll do.

If the fit is right, let's talk.

Explore more: finescandinavia.net

Contact

Johan Sundberg

johan@finescandinavia.net

Finnish court jails former berry company CEO over trafficking of Thai workers

A Finnish court has sentenced a former berry company executive to two and a half years in prison for trafficking Thai seasonal workers in what has been described as Finland's largest human trafficking case.

The Lapland District Court found former Polarica CEO Jukka Kristo guilty on 78 counts of human trafficking. His Thai business associate, Kalyakorn Phongphit, was also convicted and received a nine-month prison sentence.

According to the court, the pair recruited Thai workers to pick wild berries in Finland in 2022 but misled them about working conditions and potential earnings. Many



workers arrived heavily indebted due to travel and living costs and earned little despite working long hours without days off.

The court found that accommodation provided to some work-

ers was overcrowded and of poor quality, while the workers had few realistic options other than continuing to work to repay their debts. The court concluded that the berry picking had become forced labour.

Kristo was also banned from business activities for five years and ordered to forfeit his military rank. The two defendants and the company were ordered to pay around €500,000 in compensation to the victims and a further €400,000 in legal costs.

Both defendants have denied the charges and plan to appeal the verdict. Prosecutors have also announced plans to appeal, seeking a harsher sentence.

Danish and Myanmar Red Cross run emergency sanitation training in Nay Pyi Taw



In Myanmar's capital, emergency responders gathered for a week of intensive training aimed at strengthening life-saving skills in future crises.

From 10 to 16 June, the Myan-

mar Red Cross Society and the Danish Red Cross jointly conducted a national Emergency WASH training at the society's headquarters in Nay Pyi Taw.

The programme focused

on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in emergency settings. Participants were trained in hygiene standards, environmental health practices, and practical response skills through simulations and hands-on exercises.

A total of 38 volunteers and staff from the Myanmar Red Cross Society took part in the course, which is designed to improve rapid response capacity during disasters across the country.

At the opening ceremony, senior representatives from the Myanmar Red Cross Society and the Danish Red Cross delivered remarks online, stressing the need for better preparedness in emergency health response systems.

Sweden adopts 'good behaviour' law that could affect Southeast Asian immigrants



east Asia living in Sweden, the law means that administrative violations could potentially carry immigration consequences. Workers who fail to declare income correctly, accumulate significant debts or breach employment regulations may face increased scrutiny.

Migration Minister Johan Forsell said the measure is intended to ensure that people who do not follow Swedish rules cannot assume they will be allowed to stay in the country.

The law has drawn criticism from rights groups, including Civil Rights Defenders, which argues that the legislation creates uncertainty because it does not clearly define all forms of behaviour that could trigger a permit review.

Sweden has passed a new law allowing authorities to revoke residence permits from immigrants for conduct that does not necessarily constitute a criminal offence.

The legislation, approved by parliament on 16 June, allows the

Swedish Migration Agency to review permits based on factors such as unpaid debts, tax issues, undeclared work, criminality or links to extremist organisations. The rules also apply to permits that have already been granted.

For immigrants from South-

Norway helps Indonesia fight climate change with big support deal

A climate partnership worth millions is tightening the bond between Norway and Indonesia as both countries push toward major emission cuts.

During a visit to Voice of Indonesia in Jakarta, the Norwegian Ambassador to Indonesia, Rut Krüger Giverin, praised Indonesia for its climate ambition and ownership of its net-zero roadmap.

"This is a goal that we are very happy to support. For us, it's also very important that this is Indonesia's own plan. So it's not something we're imposing from the outside," said Rut Krüger Giverin.

She highlighted that coopera-



tion between Norway and Indonesia has expanded beyond funding into broader climate cooperation, especially in carbon markets.

"I think in addition to just the transactions or the payments that we do in support of Indonesia's work, we also have a very good strategic collaboration on related issues in the forest and land-use sector, such as the carbon markets," she said.

The partnership supports Indonesia's FOLU Net Sink 2030 program, which aims to reduce emissions through forest and land-use reforms. The cooperation has been in place since 2022 under a Memorandum of Understanding worth around 216 million dollars.



NPA staff with the family's father and two young children. The boy peeks out from behind his father. Photo: Freja Nanna Mogensen

Yanika and her family live with the danger of unexploded bombs beneath their home

More than 50 years after the bombing of Laos, unexploded ordnance still claims lives, causes injuries and forces families to live in fear. In May, ScandAsia visited Yanika's village in southern Laos, where Norwegian People's Aid is clearing land still contaminated by unexploded ordnance.

By Freja Nanna Mogensen



“
*If it were possible,
 I wish we had never
 found out there were
 bombs here.
 We just want to live
 a normal life.*
 ”

“**A**ttention everyone. Please leave the area immediately. We are about to detonate unexploded ordnance. Please stay outside the safety zone until the operation is complete.”

The announcement echoed through a megaphone as the workday was coming to an end for the Norwegian People's Aid's clearance team.

It was around 2 p.m., and since sunrise the clearance team had been searching the area for unexploded ordnance (UXO).

Now, only one task remained: the controlled detonation.

Yanika, her husband, their three children and her father quietly stepped out of their small wooden house in Paksong District, southern Laos.

They didn't look shocked or alarmed. Having to leave their home before each controlled detonation had become part of their routine.

It is all for their own safety. And the 31-year-old mother, Yanika, knows exactly why:

“We've seen on the news what happens when UXO explodes. You can lose your arms or your legs.”





Meena Biphachanh, Operations Coordinator at Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). Photo: Freja Nanna Mogensen



Yanika's coffee plantation is the family's main source of income. Photo: Freja Nanna Mogensen

Even a small mistake can be fatal

The concern is well-founded. Every controlled detonation involves strict safety procedures, and everyone in the area must keep a safe distance.

"If you don't follow the rules or procedures, even a small mistake can be fatal," says Meena Biphachanh, Operations Coordinator at Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

The consequences of UXO extend far beyond controlled demolitions.

"UXO contamination has killed many people in Laos. If not killed, they are often left with injuries or disabilities," she added.

The danger from unexploded ordnance dates back to the Indochina War between 1964 and 1973, when the United States carried out an extensive bombing campaign over Laos in an effort to disrupt North Vietnamese supply routes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

More than half a century after the war ended, UXO remains a major humanitarian and socio-economic challenge in Laos, causing injuries and deaths, limiting access to productive land, and adding significant costs to the country's development.

It's all over our farm

For Yanika and her family the war only became real last year in 2025.

Until then, they had no idea that their coffee plantation was contaminated with unexploded ordnance.



Only a few metres from where the family sleeps, UXO has been found and destroyed. Photo: Freja Nanna Mogensen

"At first, I didn't know my farm was contaminated with UXO. I only found out when the NPA team came and started clearing the area," Yanika said.

Since then, everyday life has changed.

"Before, we dug the soil as deep as we wanted and we weren't afraid, but now we have to be very careful when planting coffee or vegetables."

The family had planned to expand their coffee plantation, but those plans had been put on hold until the land had been cleared.

At one point, they even considered leaving everything behind.

"I thought we might have to move somewhere else. At first, I thought the contamination was only up in the mountains. But no, it's all over my farm as well."

The family's coffee plantation is their livelihood. Their land, their income and their future are all here. Simply moving somewhere else is not an option.

Childhood has changed

Since the NPA team began working on the family's land, the conversations at home changed as well.

"We've taught the children: If you see anything suspicious, just come back and let us know. You do not touch anything randomly."

As NPA cleared the family's farm, the children were no longer allowed to wander off on their own. If they wanted to go anywhere, they had to be accompanied by an adult.

"If my father isn't with them, then either my husband or I have to stay with the children. If we don't go with them, they have to stay here and play close to the house where we can see them."



The warnings do not come only from their parents.

After watching videos of UXO accidents on social media, the children began talking to their mother about their own fears.

"They told me they were afraid that the same thing would happen to them. They don't want to end up like the people they saw in the videos."

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The people in Laos are still affected by UXO contamination, especially in rural areas where it restricts the safe use of land.

”

Bombs every eight minutes

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) has been working to clear unexploded ordnance in Laos since 1997. After supporting the national operator, UXO Lao, for its first ten years in the country, NPA launched its own clearance operations in 2009.

Today, NPA is one of the country's largest mine action organisations, employing more than 1,000 Lao staff. Its current mine action activities are funded by the U.S. Government.

The organisation operates eight survey teams, 40 clearance teams and four risk education teams across the southern provinces of Champasak, Saravane, Sekong and Attapeu.

The need for the work remains enormous.

Between 1964 and 1973, more than two million tonnes of bombs were dropped over Laos. According to Norwegian People's Aid, that equals one plane dropping bombs every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years.

Many of those bombs never exploded and remain buried beneath farmland, forests and villages across the country. Today, 14 of Laos' 18 provinces are still contaminated with unexploded ordnance, affecting up to one in four villages.

According to UXO Lao, more than 22,000 people have been killed or injured by unexploded ordnance since the war, and almost half of them died.

Meena Biphachanh, Operations Coordinator at NPA, says the consequences are felt most in rural communities.

"The people in Laos are still affected by UXO contamination, especially in the rural areas where UXO restricts the safe use of land and the expansion of agriculture."

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They told me they were afraid that the same thing would happen to them. They don't want to end up like the people they saw.

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UXO marked with sandbags and a "Danger" sign. Photo: Freja Nanna Mogensen



NPA clearance teams start work early in the morning. NPA staff pack their vehicles before setting off for another day of UXO clearance in southern Laos. Photo: Freja Nanna Mogensen



Beyond farming, unexploded ordnance continues to slow development across the country. Before schools, hospitals or roads can be built, the land must first be surveyed and cleared – a process that takes both time and money.

Despite the scale of the challenge, Meena says significant progress has been made in recent years. Since the start of its programme, NPA has destroyed more than 170,000 items of UXO and secured safe access to land for more than 590,000 people.

Preparing for the detonation

Not far from the family's house – only a few hundred metres away – two items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) found the previous day were waiting to be destroyed.

The two explosives were marked with sandbags filled with soil and a red warning sign stuck into the

ground.

Before the detonation, the team gathered for a final briefing.

Around 10 NPA staff members took part in the operation. They spread out across the surrounding area with megaphones, warning everyone nearby – including Yanika's family – to leave the area before the detonation began.

Only after the team had confirmed that the area was clear did they return to the demolition site.

Then the countdown began.

"One, two, three... Fire!"

The explosion echoed across the coffee plantation. And then again.

"One, two, three... Fire!"

This time, the blast was even louder.



What if another UXO is still there?

Although NPA is close to finishing the clearance of the family's land, the 31-year-old mother still worries the danger may not be over.

"I worry that one day there will be heavy rain or a landslide, and that another UXO buried deeper underground will come to the surface."

NPA clears land according to the national standards set by Laos' National Regulatory Authority (NRA), using metal detectors to search the ground to the required clearance depth.

Once an area meets those standards, it can officially be declared cleared and returned to the community.

However, no clearance operation can guarantee that every explosive item buried deeper underground has been found. Yanika therefore still fears that heavy rain or landslides could expose UXO buried below the clearance depth.

For now, her greatest wish is simply to stop living in fear.

"If it were possible, I wish we had never found out there were bombs here. We just want to live a normal life without worrying about decades-old UXO."

The fear has not completely disappeared.

"I'm afraid there is still UXO underneath the house and the farm, but I hope there is no more UXO in our land."

The family considered moving their wooden house so NPA could search the ground beneath it.



Team Leader Somchith Keochanphan uses a GPS device to record the coordinates of unexploded cluster munitions during an NPA clearance operation.

Photo: Norwegian People's Aid

Only once the land beneath their home has also been cleared do they hope they can finally put the war behind them.

Yanika stands on the site where the family planned to move their wooden house so NPA could clear the ground beneath their home.



Amelié Jakobsson new ED at SWECHAM in Bangkok

Not long ago, I had the pleasure of meeting the newly appointed Executive Director of the Thai-Swedish Chamber of Commerce, Amelié Jakobsson – a warm, charming, and beautiful Thai-Swedish woman.

By Agneta de Bekassy

Amelié was born in the city of Växjö, in the county of Småland in Sweden. Växjö is also where she grew up and attended school.

She graduated from the IB programme at Kat-dralskolan. After completing the IB, she continued to Jönköping International Business School (JIBS), where she studied International Management. This was also when she became an exchange student at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok and lived in Thailand on her own for the first time.

After this, she returned to Sweden for a brief stay before setting her sights on London and its world of theatre and musicals.

In London, she worked her way up from usher to production assistant for companies such as Mackintosh Ltd and Sonia Friedman Productions, both highly respected names in the musical theatre industry. She also had the pleasure of working for producers such as Andrew Lloyd Webber, Cameron Mackintosh, and Sonia Friedman, the creators behind many of the world's most beloved plays and musicals.

This is a world where Amelié is like a fish in water. She went on to spend five years in London, and during



those years she also worked on *The Book of Mormon*, a rather provocative musical that stirred strong emotions among audiences.

During our, so far, brief conversation, I came to realise that Amelié is a young woman who knows what she wants, and her motto seems very fitting: "Where there's a will, there's a way."

When Covid came, she was fortunate enough to get on one of the last flights back to Sweden. Once home, she decided to return to her studies. It felt like a very uncertain time, so she took the opportunity to start a bachelor's degree in Language and Political Science. Much of it was completed through online studies from her home in Växjö, but also through studies on campus at Linnaeus University.

At this point, I began to wonder what had led Amelié to apply for the position of Executive Director of SWECHAM. I asked her if she had any previous experience of this kind of work and learned that she had joined the Thai-Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok as an intern for one semester in 2023. This internship formed part of the bachelor's degree she was pursuing at

the time. After graduating, she went on to earn a master's degree in International Relations.

It was during her master's studies that she spent one year in Seoul, South Korea, where her main interest focused on Asian security issues. During her first semester, she attended the Global Studies graduate programme at Yonsei University. She then spent another semester as a trainee at the Embassy of Sweden in Seoul, working with the Department for Promotion and Trade as well as the Department for Science and Innovation.

She spoke warmly about the successful visit of Crown Princess Victoria and Prince Daniel to the Republic of Korea in October 2025, and she remained in South Korea until January 2026.

The reason she applied for the position of Executive Director at the Thai-Swedish Chamber of Commerce was her strong desire to pursue this line of work and to return to Bangkok and Thailand. Amelié revealed that she has always felt drawn to Bangkok. She is also a highly social person, which makes her particularly well suited for this role.

Currently, the Chamber has around 120 corporate members, quite a significant increase compared with previous years. Amelié also emphasised the importance of retaining members and explained that one of her future goals is to bridge the cultural divide between Swedish and Thai business culture, ensuring that both Swedish and Thai companies feel equally important and welcome. This is something she greatly values and hopes to bring to the Chamber's members.

In fact, this follows advice she received from the country manager of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Seoul.

What lies ahead on the agenda?

Amelié mentioned the Sustainability Business Forum (SBF), a collaboration between the Swedish, Swiss, Dutch, and French chambers that takes place annually. She also spoke about the popular Midsummer Luncheon, which this year took place on 6 June, Sweden's National Day, at the Westin Grande Sukhumvit. She warmly encouraged Swedes in Bangkok who may be missing home to join the celebration.

Naturally, I also had to ask what Amelié enjoys doing in her spare time, if she will have any in the near future.

She did not hesitate long before answering: listening to music, attending concerts and, naturally, musicals, as well as taking long walks.

Travelling is another great passion of hers.

Recently, she made a short visit to Seoul, where she met up with friends and indulged in a bit of shopping. Amelié also recently received her Thai citizenship. By the way, she is fluent in both Swedish and Thai.

Meaning that nothing now seems to stand in her way. "It is full speed ahead," she says with a bright smile.

And one cannot help but believe her.

In the end, all that remained for me was to wish her the very best of luck and warmly welcome her to Bangkok.

Strengthening the 'Nordic Voice' the highest priority for NordCham Vietnam and its new Executive Director



Meet Danish-born David Tuan Anh Nguyen, NordCham Vietnam's new Executive Director (ED), and get an update on the chamber's focus and activities. Vietnam today offers plenty of opportunities for established Nordic companies, as well as those looking to enter new international markets. At the same time, it is a highly competitive environment, making a strong Nordic voice more important than ever.

Appointed to the role in December 2025, it soon becomes clear that David had his eyes on the chamber ever since moving to Vietnam in 2018.

David enjoyed a very Danish upbringing, speaking mainly Danish. "Nowadays I speak Vietnamese because my wife is local," begins David. "Before moving to Vietnam, I had the opportunity to do an internship at EuroCham Vietnam. That sparked my interest in working within this type of organisation, but also in Vietnam as a country. At that time there was already a lot of development, though not at the level we are seeing today. Even then, Vietnam was attracting increasing attention."

"I was fortunate to land my first job in Vietnam in 2018 with a Danish company called Orana Vietnam. After that, I spent five years working with the Danish-founded marketing agency Spring CC. They mainly work with clients in the Nordics and Europe, providing outsourced graphic, digital and 3D production."

David later moved to the Vietnamese media company Vietcetera, managing the Vietnam Innovators Digest, with a focus on business podcasts, events and other content showcasing the country.

*Text: Joakim Persson
Photos: NordCham Vietnam*

“Media plays an important role in Vietnam and has a lot of influence when it comes to putting the spotlight on business. For me, it was a great opportunity to develop further and learn much more about Vietnamese business culture.”

David says he viewed these positions as part of a career path:

“They were part of the development and growth I needed, making it easier to transition into a leadership role where I now work with both Vietnamese and Nordic partners.”

The experience, combined with a Nordic mindset developed while living in Vietnam, made him a strong fit for a role with NordCham. Personally, he is particularly interested in sustainable growth, responsible business practices and people-centric leadership.

Once on board, he set out to amplify a clear and constructive Nordic voice in Vietnam as part of the chamber's strategy.

“A strong Nordic voice essentially means that many Nordics are quite humble by nature; they're not overly vocal. But in markets like Vietnam, where there is so much competition and growth, you need to be seen and heard. We build programmes and advocacy activities where we can promote our members and give them not only speaking opportunities but also visibility in settings where they would not normally nominate themselves,” explains the ED.

“Many mid-sized companies have invested significantly and built amazing businesses here, including within green investments that support the Vietnamese government's 2025 goals. But again, they're not too vocal. As a non-profit organisation, one of our responsibilities is to create platforms that help spotlight our members.”

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As a non-profit organisation, one of our responsibilities is to create platforms that help spotlight our members.

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The website is another pillar and has been significantly modernised, both in appearance and functionality.

“To speak more about the Nordics in Vietnam, we're creating a lot of editorial content around Nordic businesses and their values and traditions, so people can find information about member companies in one place.”

Under this new chapter, the content series Nordic Stories highlights the Nordics from three different angles: Nordic Living, featuring stories about culture, values and lifestyle; Nordic Field Notes, sharing reflections and

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insights from company visits and interviews; and Nordic Spotlight, consisting of long-form articles produced together with members.

“So whenever anybody, including the Vietnamese government, wants to learn about the Nordics, there is this hub through NordCham Vietnam.”

Members can also use this storytelling in their own PR and marketing. Coming from a marketing background himself, David encourages aligning such efforts with each organisation’s vision for innovation and success.

Undeniably, it also helps that the Nordic countries are united under one chamber in Vietnam and affiliated with EuroCham.

“We do Nordic advocacy in areas where we know we are specialists and where our members are particularly strong. For broader advocacy, we work directly with EuroCham. Within logistics, HR, legal and other sectors, they can bring issues directly to the government’s attention.”

As for Nordic Living, local employees in Nordic companies can learn more about the cultures of the region.

“We’ve also tried to identify common Nordic characteristics and, to some extent, connect those with Vietnamese traditions and values. We showcase that there are many similarities between Vietnam and the Nordics that people simply do not know about. This is where we hope to be especially helpful, enabling employees to better understand their companies’ values.”

The chamber has recently gained more members and now has around 160, of which approximately 75

percent are Nordic companies. The remainder includes non-Nordic and Vietnamese organisations.

“We also need local partners in this large Vietnamese ecosystem, including venture partners and others. I do see growth happening particularly among non-Nordic members,” says David, while emphasising that the majority of members should remain Nordic.

NordCham Vietnam’s activities programme is highly member-focused and generates strong engagement. Among its initiatives are the quarterly Nordic Business Briefings, where the chamber develops curated programmes together with members.

“We try to act as quickly as possible when new challenges or opportunities arise and include those in our briefings, or share them as published information and guidance,” says the ED.

“Any company operating in Vietnam will face challenges with regulations; it is a highly regulated market. We try to be proactive from NordCham’s side and obtain insider information that may enable us to influence new decrees.”

Aside from being a major knowledge hub, NordCham also engages with official Vietnam, most recently with Ho Chi Minh City’s Department of Industry and Trade (DOIT), to strengthen strategic cooperation.

“This is intended to open doors for members and embassies to participate in bidding opportunities and secure assignments, while also helping the Vietnamese government understand that Nordic investment is not only substantial, but also very green,” explains David.

“They were pleased to hear about companies they



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For us, it is an ecosystem rather than one-off investments. We are helping build the future of Vietnam.
 ”

did not realise were Nordic. We highlighted several business cases and companies that have done impressive work and invested heavily in Vietnam, especially in the Ho Chi Minh City area. The Nordics are also very much aligned with the city's sustainable development ambitions.”

“Now we're jointly developing an action plan. We can bring leaders from Nordic companies together so they can receive crucial information directly from the city. This happens through both smaller meeting formats and larger events. This type of engagement also creates an incentive for businesses to become members and helps us advance the advocacy agenda.”

“We constitute a community that people can turn to. We bring that community together through our programmes. We have, for instance, Work the Nordic Way, where we advocate for Nordic approaches to work and leadership. Through this platform, and with such a young talent pool in Vietnam, we have an opportunity to influence the next generation. We know we cannot impose it, but we can certainly help shape workplace culture.”

The programme is organised as an annual employer-branding conference, where employers can promote their own companies, including internship and management trainee programmes.

The Green Industries Summit is another key activity.

“It's important for us to keep advocating for a sustainable Vietnam, especially within manufacturing, infrastructure and logistics, where we are strongest and where many of our members operate.”

With Nordic companies concentrated in future-oriented sectors such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, and digital and industrial technology, they are well aligned with Vietnam's green transition and growing need for energy and infrastructure investment. Combined with the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement, the outlook for Nordic business in Vietnam remains highly positive.

“It's positive because people's mindsets here are also starting to change. Sweden is a very good example of taking the lead. But I know that from the Nordics, Vietnam can sometimes seem very far away. Among those already present here, however, I see more and more executives spending time in Vietnam. If you don't have boots on the ground, not only teams but also executive leadership, you could miss out on opportunities.”

“And I think it is smart for Nordic governments and companies to engage through long-term investments. For us, it is an ecosystem rather than one-off investments. We are hopefully helping build the future of Vietnam with as many Nordic projects, technologies and talented people as possible. We see tremendous potential, and I believe the global shift is increasingly moving towards Asia.”

Overall, David Nguyen expects to spend significant time in 2026 talking to members.

“I always try to understand the challenges and opportunities they are seeing right now, identify common themes among members, and use that knowledge to develop programme content that remains relevant to them.”

Animal rights, not elephant rides: Tiina's guide to travel



White sandy beaches at sunset. Tiny tropical islands surrounded by azure blue waters. Jungle trekking adventures with elephants. Over 12 million tourists visited Phuket in 2025, enjoying the Thai dream vacation. Their wallets fund the island. But the tourism industry takes its toll, often borne by nature and animals.

Finnish expat and long-term Phuket resident Tiina Tiitinen works every day to make Phuket tourism more ethical and sustainable.

A past as a tourist

When Tiina first arrived in Thailand back in 2002, she was just one among thousands of Nordic tourists eager to enjoy a nice vacation. She went to the beach, she ate Thai food, and like most tourists at the time, she wanted to see animals.

"We rode elephants," Tiina remembers. "It was what everybody did back then. It was part of the Thailand experience. I loved animals, and I thought it was a good way to see them. At that time we didn't know anything was wrong with it."

Elephant riding, tiger cafés and crocodile shows are popular attractions for tourists visiting Thailand.

In 2021, it was estimated that somewhere between possibly 4,000 elephants were living in captivity in Thailand. Many of them work in the tourism industry and are used for elephant riding, a practice highly criticized by multiple NGOs and animal rights organisations.

Return to Thailand

In 2007, Tiina returned to Thailand to work as a tour guide and diving master in Phuket, mainly for Finnish tourists, and she has remained there ever since.

"I love Thailand. I love the people. I love the culture. I love being a guide here. I get to help people make their vacation dreams come true," Tiina says

Over the years, Tiina has gained much experience in the Thai tourism industry, but her passion lies with animals.

"I have always loved animals. Growing up in the Finnish countryside, I always had pets growing up. I was technically allergic, but I used to lie to my parents so they would let me get more," Tiina smiles.

From her years of experience working in Phuket, Tiina has become a strong advocate for ethical tourism.

"Ethical tourism just means that your holiday activities should not hurt anybody. It is so simple, but so important," Tiina says.

Today, she organises travel tours through her connections in Thailand and India, where ethical tourism is at the forefront.

"On the tour, we spend time volunteering for different causes, making a difference, and supporting local people and NGOs. It's a balance of enjoying your time while also giving back to the people and places you visit," Tiina says.

Elephant riding

Elephant riding is a no-go for ethical tourism. And to Tiina, it is personal.

"I am ashamed I ever took part in it. Today, every



time I see signs for riding camps, I feel a stab in my heart. It is just not right," Tiina says.

Since Tiina moved to Phuket in the mid-2000s, a lot has changed. Ethical tourism has become more prominent. This is a change Tiina is happy to see, although she doesn't think it is going far enough.

"Some riding camps have stopped offering riding tours and instead offer elephant bathing, which is still not ethical because it includes the same brutal training methods that riding does. The only truly ethical way to experience elephants is just observing them in the wild or in sanctuaries," Tiina explains. "There has been a lot of change over the years, but it is slow. Sometimes I feel hopeless, but I pray that one day elephant riding will be no more."

Being a guide

Over her almost 20 years in Phuket, Tiina has helped thousands of tourists achieve their dream vacations, and that is something she is proud of.

"I feel very good that I can share my knowledge and my experience to help other people have the best possible experience. At the same time, I can guide people and explain to them how to have the best time while still remaining ethical," she says.

Research is key, Tiina explains. Looking through all providers, reading reviews, and asking questions are essential steps, but it can be challenging.

"Many providers will lie," Tiina says. "They will say something is ethical when it is really not. It is hard to navigate. But I am very grateful I have the chance to help and guide people while ensuring we are being sustainable and ethical. I am always happy to help."



Tired of the hamster wheel: Two Swedes opened a hostel in the Philippines

By Helene Sadjadi-Munk



It started with a Facebook listing in Moalboal. Johan Blixt came across a post about Backyard Inn, a small hostel in the area that was up for discussion. He contacted the owner, which opened a conversation about taking over and developing the place.

At that point, he and Andreas Westpahl already knew each other from years of working in the diving industry. The idea of running the hostel together developed naturally from there.

And then one day Johan texts Andreas: "It's ours!"

The property became a shared project alongside their work as diving instructors in Moalboal.

Rat race and hamster wheel

Both Andreas and Johan come across as calm and easy-going.

It is a trait that seems to match the life they have chosen – far from the pace of their previous lives in Sweden, and closer to a quieter rhythm built around diving, seasons and a small coastal community.

Before the hostel, both had left Sweden after years in different trades.

Johan Blixt worked as a carpenter before moving into diving.

"I was tired of the rat race," he says.

He had already spent time diving in Sweden, and eventually trained as a diving instructor.

He first came to the Philippines around 2007. He had also travelled in Thailand, but describes Moalboal as a place where the connection felt different.

He stayed, and built his life around diving.

Today he works as an instructor and freelance trainer, while also running the hostel business he now shares with Andreas.

His wife is Filipino and works in the same operation. They met when she was a nanny at his first dive centre, and they now have children together.

Andreas Westpahl came from construction work in Sweden, where he worked with concrete floors.

"I was a bit tired of the hamster wheel in Sweden as well," he says.

He travelled to Thailand around 14 years ago, and later to the Philippines. His first stay in Moalboal lasted around two weeks, but over time, he kept coming back until it became permanent.

He met his wife in Moalboal about ten years ago. They now have four children.

A growing base in Moalboal

The hostel has become a key part of their work alongside diving. Business is going well, with steady demand during the high season.

"We have a lot of guests during the busy season," they say.

They are now expanding the property, with renovations underway that include a swimming pool and 12 new rooms, along with wider improvements to the hostel.

Before moving into hospitality together, both describe a path that unfolded slowly over time – through repeated returns, longer stays, and a gradual sense of belonging in Moalboal.



Agneta's
World

Agneta de Bekassy



Summer in the City!



May seemed to fly by, and June came and went in no time. Perhaps it's because I have reached a more respectable age and everything seems to move faster while I move slower.

May also brought the first real monsoon downpours, and I found myself longing for a proper pair of rubber boots, as you never quite know what might be hiding in all that water.

At the end of May, I finally managed, for the first time in quite a while, to make my way to Mahidol University to attend a concert at Prince Mahidol Hall with a friend, featuring compositions by Mozart and Schubert. If Mahidol University were not located so far from the city centre, I would be a regular concertgoer. The concert hall is world class, and so are the performances. This time, the clarinet was in focus, with a quintet performing.

The concert ended with a standing ovation and repeated curtain calls.

June also brought the Swedish Chamber of Commerce, SWECHAM's traditional Midsummer luncheon. This year, two occasions were combined, as 6 June is also Sweden's National Day.

As in previous years, a few of us volunteers took it upon ourselves to visit the flower market and fill several large IKEA bags with suitable greenery and flowers for wreath-making. It has become a much-appreciated tradition to make flower wreaths to wear during the luncheon, and many of the Thai guests, in particular, find it a fun and original feature of the celebration.

The luncheon took place, as in recent years, at the Westin Grande Hotel Asoke, and the dining area was, as usual, beautifully prepared.

Traditional Swedish Midsummer food was served, along with the obligatory schnapps, beer, and wine, as tradition calls for.

The atmosphere was cheerful and became merrier with every round of schnapps.

No real Midsummer celebration would be complete without a maypole and the rather amusing little frog dance, which, incidentally, the adults seem to find even more entertaining than the children do.

But, as they say, all good things must come to an end. Cheerful and slightly merry, the satisfied guests strolled out into the warm late afternoon, some perhaps ready for further adventures in town, while others were no doubt heading straight for the sofa and some well-earned rest.

In June, a new restaurant opened on Sukhumvit Soi 12 as SWISS PEAK welcomed its first guests. Here, visitors can enjoy a wide variety of Swiss delicacies. The menu features popular cheese fondues, raclette, and Switzerland's beloved potato speciality, rösti, along with much more. Swiss wines such as Dôle, a light red wine,

are available alongside classic wines from France, Australia, Germany, and beyond.

Step through the door and imagine yourself surrounded by Alpine peaks and the gentle sound of cows wearing traditional bells. Guests can enjoy authentic cuisine and fine drinks in a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

As far as I know, this has become Bangkok's second Swiss restaurant, following the legendary Chesa, which is still going strong and continues to deliver quality dining. The two restaurants are unlikely to compete directly, instead offering different atmospheres and price ranges.

Stay tuned for more upcoming news. There is always something going on in and around Bangkok, never a dull moment.

Many of us Scandinavians are now spending part of the summer in Scandinavia, but as much as we love summer in the Nordic countries, we are just as happy to return to Thailand when the Scandinavian summer draws to a close!



Swedish Plastics Producer Polykemi Establishes First Factory in Thailand



Swedish plastics manufacturer Polykemi has taken a major step into Southeast Asia by securing land for its first production facility in Thailand.

The company signed a land purchase agreement with Amata City Rayong at the Amata City Rayong Industrial Estate, located in Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC).

The agreement was signed by Polykemi Global CEO Oscar Hugoson and Asia CEO Magnus Lindahl together with Amata City Rayong Managing Director Satha Vanalabhatana.

Founded in Ystad, Sweden, Polykemi is one of Europe's largest independent producers of customised plastic compounds. The company currently operates production

facilities in Sweden, China and the United States, alongside a network of sales offices across Europe.

The new Thai facility will place Polykemi closer to major automotive manufacturers and suppliers operating in the EEC, a key production hub for Japanese carmakers and parts suppliers. The company said the location will allow it to provide faster and more localised service to customers across Southeast Asia.

Polykemi specialises in both virgin and recycled plastic materials and has focused heavily on sustainable plastics solutions during its more than 50 years in the industry.

According to the company, the investment forms part of its global expansion strategy and reflects growing demand for sustainable materials within international automotive supply chains.

Finnish biotech company granted Singapore patent in fight against blindness

The Finnish biotech company developing a new treatment for blindness, StemSight, has secured patent in Singapore, the company announced in a press release.

StemSight, based in Tampere, is working on a stem cell therapy that could help people suffering from a severe eye condition that can lead to blindness.

The Singapore patent protects the company's technology, which uses stem cells to create replace-



ment cells for damaged tissue in the eye.

StemSight hopes its treatment can offer a new option for patients

who currently have few or no effective treatments available.

"These newly granted patents represent a major milestone for StemSight," CEO and co-founder Laura Koivusalo said.

The company is preparing for its next funding round and plans to begin human clinical trials in 2028.

The company has also received positive patent decisions in Canada and Japan, giving it protection in several major markets.

Haaland becomes global face of WALOVI

Norwegian football star Erling Haaland has been named global brand ambassador for WALOVI, the international version of the Chinese herbal tea drink Wang Lao Ji.

The Manchester City striker features in a new global advertising campaign built around the slogan "WALOVI, WE LOVE IT!".

The campaign promotes WALOVI as a caffeine-free herbal drink and includes a series of humorous advertisements featuring



Haaland. In one of the videos, the Norwegian forward appears to breathe fire, while a specially created theme song accompanies the campaign.

WALOVI is based on Wang Lao Ji, a herbal tea brand whose recipe dates back to 1828. The drink is marketed internationally as a beverage made from natural ingredients.

The partnership adds another major endorsement deal to Haaland's growing commercial portfolio, further strengthening his position as one of football's most recognisable athletes and a sought-after figure for global brands.

Novo Nordisk moves to launch Wegovy tablet in China

A race over obesity treatments is heating up in China, as global pharmaceutical giants compete to dominate the fast-growing market for weight-loss drugs.

Danish pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk says it will soon apply for Chinese approval of an oral version of its blockbuster Wegovy, shifting from injections to pills in a bid to reach more patients.

"We will be submitting oral Wegovy...for regulatory approval very soon...I would say a few months," said Novo Nordisk CEO Mike Doustdar during a visit to Beijing.

The move comes as competition intensifies with US rival Eli Lilly, which is also developing a once-daily oral weight-loss drug and has already filed for regulatory approval in China.



Both companies are targeting the booming demand for GLP-1 medicines, a class of drugs that has transformed obesity treatment worldwide.

Novo Nordisk believes its manufacturing scale could give it an advantage in the crowded market.

"One barrier to entry for the (weight-loss) tablet will also be the scaling of this, in the way that we're

able to do. And I would think not many of our competitors will be able to that level, have the capabilities," Mike Doustdar said.

The race is further complicated by growing competition from local Chinese drugmakers and the approaching end of patent protection for key ingredients, opening the door to generics.

Danish Red Cross supports new child-friendly spaces for displaced children in Myanmar



Children in displacement camps in Myanmar are receiving new support through child-friendly spaces opened by the Myanmar Red Cross Society in Rakhine State.

The spaces were established in

May 2026 for children living in camps for internally displaced persons in Sittway Township. The initiative aims to provide psychosocial support and help children learn more about health and well-being.

The programme is being imple-

mented by the Myanmar Red Cross Society with support from the Danish Red Cross and the Faroe Islands Red Cross.

According to the Myanmar Red Cross Society, the child-friendly spaces offer a safe environment where children can take part in activities designed to support their mental and emotional well-being.

Similar initiatives have been established elsewhere in Myanmar for children affected by conflict and natural disasters. In April, a child-friendly space was also opened in Sagaing Township to support children experiencing psychological distress following the recent earthquake.

Norwegian to Acquire Nordic Travel Giant with Hotels in Thailand

Norwegian Air has agreed to acquire Nordic Leisure Travel Group (NLTG) in a deal worth approximately SEK 7.94 billion (USD 843 million), creating one of the largest travel groups in the Nordic region.

The acquisition brings together Norwegian and regional airline Widerøe with some of the Nordics' best-known travel brands, including Ving, Spies, Tjäreborg and Sunclass Airlines. The combined group is expected to serve around 30 million customers annually.

The deal also gives Norwegian ownership of NLTG's hotel operations in Thailand.

NLTG operates its own concept hotel brands, including Sunwing, Sunprime and Ocean Beach Club, with properties across major



holiday destinations. The company said its portfolio includes hotels in Thailand as well as Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye.

Norwegian CEO Geir Karlsen described the acquisition as "a milestone in Nordic travel history" and said it would allow the group to offer customers everything from flights to complete holiday packages

under one ownership structure.

The company said NLTG's hotels would benefit from access to Norwegian's wider route network and customer base. Norwegian also plans to expand hotel and holiday sales across its existing passenger network and sees potential to grow the number of concept hotels in the future.

With help from Norway, trees are now part of the power grid in the Philippines

High in the mountains of northern Luzon, something unusual is happening. Energy companies are planting forests to keep the lights on.

A renewable energy partnership between Filipino utility SN Aboitiz Power Group and Norway's Scatec is linking trees directly to electricity production.

The reason is simple. Hydro-power needs steady water flow, and water flow depends on forests.

If trees disappear, rainwater rushes away too fast, rivers become unstable and power generation becomes unreliable.

So the solution is surprisingly



basic: plant more trees and protect the land.

The company is doing large reforestation projects in northern Philippines. They are planting trees, fixing damaged land, and helping prevent forest fires.

Local communities are also involved. People help maintain forests,

manage land, and protect watersheds that feed the rivers.

Thousands of hectares have already been restored. Millions of trees have been planted over the years, with most of them surviving and growing.

Even small environmental changes in the mountains can affect electricity for entire regions.

As climate change brings more extreme weather, the question is becoming bigger: can forests and water systems be protected enough to keep energy systems running?

For now, this project is betting on one clear idea: no forests – no power.

Swedish company explores net-zero luxury resort project in Vietnam



A Swedish sustainable tourism company is exploring plans for a net-zero luxury eco-resort and wellness retreat in central Vietnam.

Representatives from Stockholm-based Peak Education met with the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism (VNAT) on 11 June to discuss a proposed resort project in

Kon Plong commune, Quang Ngai province.

Led by CEO Sikander Khan, Peak Education focuses on sustainable tourism, carbon reduction, renewable energy, and net-zero initiatives.

The proposed development would combine luxury accommodation with wellness and healthcare

facilities while operating entirely on renewable energy. The project would also incorporate circular economy principles, sustainable waste management, and designs intended to blend with local culture and natural surroundings.

VNAT Deputy Director General Nguyen Thi Hoa Mai said the project aligns with Vietnam's efforts to promote green tourism, ecotourism, wellness tourism, and sustainable development. She added that detailed plans and documentation would be required before authorities could assess the project's viability.

Peak Education hopes the development could serve as a model for future net-zero luxury resorts in Vietnam.

Finnish conductor Hannu Lintu to lead Singapore Symphony Orchestra



Singapore's leading orchestra is entering a decisive turning point, and it comes with a new name at the podium.

From the 2026-27 season, Finnish conductor Hannu Lintu will take over as Music Director of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), as the ensemble moves toward its 50th anniversary in 2029.

The appointment marks a new phase for an orchestra that has rapidly built international standing through acclaimed recordings, global broadcasts, and a distinctive sound shaped in the Esplanade Concert Hall.

Former Music Directors Lan Shui and Hans Graf helped trans-

form the SSO from a regional ensemble into a globally recognised orchestra with a wide repertoire ranging from Russian symphonic works to Mahler, Strauss and contemporary music.

Lintu brings a strong profile from Finland, where he has led both the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Finnish National Opera, and is especially known for his work in modern and Nordic repertoire.

His first season will include major symphonic works such as Mahler, alongside touring plans and a broad repertoire spanning classical and contemporary music.

ABBA are still attracting customers to a Singapore tailor shop

A tailor shop in Singapore's Chinatown has been carrying a Scandinavian connection for nearly half a century.

ABBA's Department Store, a 47-year-old tailor shop, was named after the Swedish pop sensation ABBA and still displays a welcome sign originally intended to attract Scandinavian sailors.

Outside the shop hangs a blue sign reading: "Velkommen Til Singapore Og Til ABBA's Dept. Store".

Owner Parkash Naraindas Budhrani told the media he put up the sign when the shop was located near Singapore's harbour, where Nordic seafarers regularly passed by.

"I thought this sign would draw them in," Budhrani said to the media.

The shop, which specialises in custom-made suits and traditional



garments, has since become a fixture in Chinatown. It was recently highlighted as part of a heritage initiative celebrating long-standing local businesses in Singapore.

Today, tourists account for most of the shop's customers, but the store's Scandinavian roots remain visible nearly 50 years after it first opened.

Hong Kong suspends poultry imports from Swedish municipality after bird flu outbreak

Hong Kong has suspended imports of poultry meat, poultry products and eggs from the Municipality of Helsingborg in southern Sweden following an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza.

The ban was announced on 16 June by Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety (CFS), which said the measure was introduced after receiving a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

According to the CFS, the import suspension took effect immediately and is intended to protect public health in Hong Kong.



A spokesman for the food safety authority noted that Hong Kong did not import any poultry meat or eggs from Sweden during the first three months of 2026, based on figures from the Census and Statistics Department.

The CFS said it has contacted Swedish authorities regarding the outbreak and will continue monitoring information from WOAH and relevant agencies.

"Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

The H5N1 virus has led to a number of trade restrictions worldwide in recent years as authorities seek to prevent the spread of avian influenza through poultry products.

No information has been released on when the import suspension may be lifted.

Danish artist returns to Shanghai with new exhibition

Danish artist and designer Victor Miklos Andersen recently returned to Shanghai with an exhibition exploring the relationship between ritual, healing and contemporary art.

The exhibition, held at 768 Gallery in Shanghai, formed part of Andersen's residency at NONAME STUDIO.

Built around the concept of a fictional clinic, the exhibition examined how rituals and healing practices can be interpreted through contemporary art.

It followed Andersen's previous Shanghai exhibition, which was held last autumn.

To mark the artist's return, Danish Consul General Jens Alsbirk and his wife, Hanne Alsbirk, hosted a dinner at their residence.



The gathering brought together members of Shanghai's art and cultural community, giving guests an opportunity to meet the artist and exchange views on art and culture.

Andersen's latest exhibition adds to the growing presence of Danish artists and designers in China's contemporary art scene.

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